

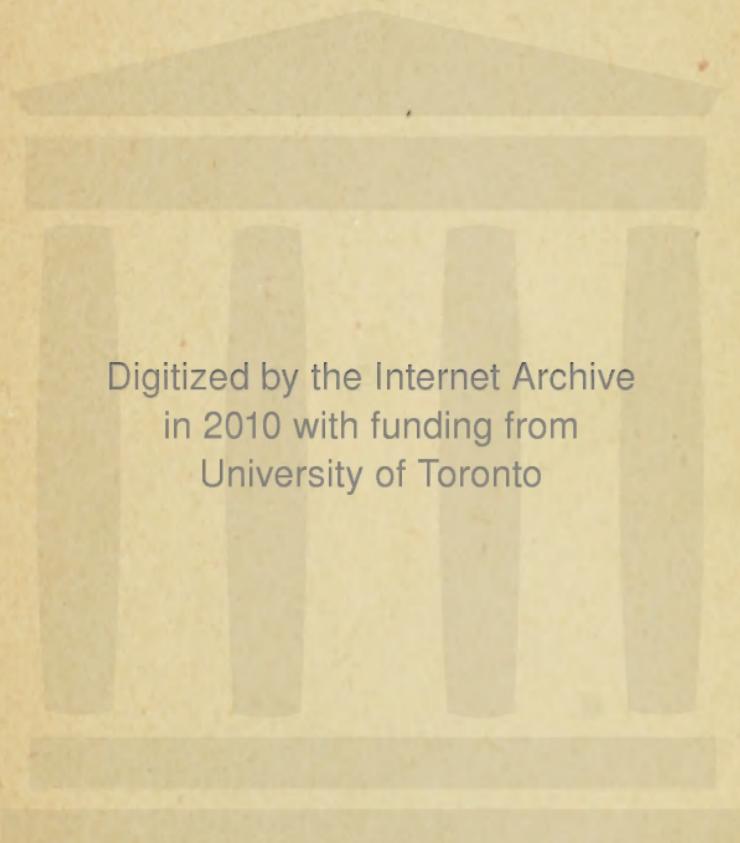


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# A Life's Oblation

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# A LIFE'S OBLIGATION

*The Biography of GENEVIEVE HENNET  
DE GOUTEL, by MARTHE ALAMBERT*  
With a Preface by the Rev. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.  
And an Introduction by the Abbé A. D. SERTILLANGES,  
Membre de l'Institut de France



Translated from the French by L. M. LEGGATT

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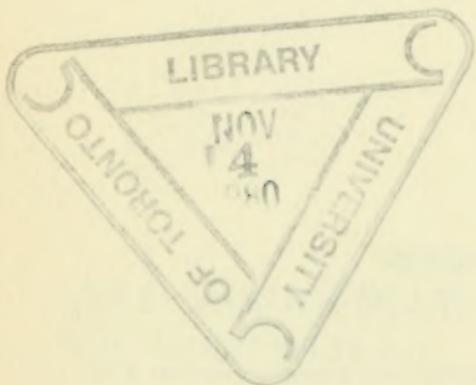
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"I am here to-day to honour this noble victim,  
the first of our hospital workers to fall on  
Roumanian soil. Our respect and homage is all  
the greater from the fact that in the battle  
against sickness, suffering, and death, she chose,  
to her eternal honour, the post of greatest peril  
and exposure—the nursing of infectious cases."

*Words spoken at the grave of Geneviève  
Hennet de Goutel at Jassy by the Comte  
de St. Aulaire, French Minister to  
Roumania, on March 22nd, 1917.*



brief  
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To my dear Friend, G. B.



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## Preface

THERE are some temperaments which lead those who are blessed, or cursed, with them to think that modern life is unfair to them, and that they must either be hermits or give up the struggle to think and live as Christians. Sometimes it is their brain which is battered by our literature, so largely pagan: sometimes it is their restless activity which seeks to pour itself out in external occupations and scarcely permits them to trouble about the purity of the source, nor to enquire by what spirit they are living. To others, art is enough; even amusement may be all they want, or think they want, to have. "A good time." And, "I can't see why I shouldn't have it. I *do no harm.*" Others are fidgeted by the exactions of the pious; even by the restrictions of dogma, especially when not properly understood. They may come to hate the very memory of their education. Others are just languid. To the languid I doubt if Geneviève Hennet de Goutel will appeal. She was never that.

But anything that a modern girl can ex-

perience in the way of attractions and influences, she experienced.

No emancipated maiden, with the run of Newnham, Girton, or Somerville, or Lady Margaret libraries, is at all likely to read more varied literature than this French girl read. An Englishwoman thinks she has gone fairly far afield when she has absorbed Nietzsche, Emerson, and Anatole France. Geneviève added St. Paul and Kant and a good deal more.

But a blue-stocking? Not a bit of it. She was a most electrical person, and detested the academic wherever she found it. The doleful Don was as irritating to her as was the dour *dévote*. And this was not only fractious nerves nor frivolous conceit: she really wanted truth, not formulas; and she detested what seemed to her harsh hypocrisy or just unintelligent correctness.

She experienced to the full, if not all the possible Bohemianism, at least the ecstatic romance of art; and she flung herself into the most active of all France's endeavours of democratic philanthropy. She must tell you herself of how she recovered her faith, and a far richer, humbler, wiser, more *alive* faith than that which had once been hers.

M. l'Abbé Sertillanges, in his Introduction, draws most of the morals that this violently oscillating life, which at last found equilibrium and growth, can suggest. I would want to say only this: there are no circumstances in which grace cannot triumph. There are no souls born to be defeated.

This is a book which is very badly wanted. The moment the original appeared, the *Inter-University Magazine* prayed that a translation might soon be made. After innumerable difficulties, here at last it is. Read it !

C. C. MARTINDALE.



## Introduction

**I**N a recent number of *La Revue des Jeunes*<sup>1</sup> I lifted a corner of the veil which shrouds so many of the lives which I call "lives of sacrifice": ardent, gifted natures, formed for fruitful activities and deep sympathies, and intended to bring happiness to others. Among such, assuredly the most pathetic (though not the saddest, for they still breathe of hope) are those of our young girls. The looker on, touched by such courage and vital energy, sadly tells himself such lives are doomed. How many of them start full of vigour and enthusiasm, open to every impression, able to cope with any task, asking great things of the world they understand so little, but ready to devote themselves to the noblest aims and to the uttermost limit of self-sacrifice !

Unfortunately, sacrifice, as they see it first of all, seldom implies love. There is the touchstone. People rarely venture on sacrifice without giving one grudging glance to their own value, or to a possible destiny which might have been theirs. A woman must have a special vocation and an exceptionally strong

<sup>1</sup> December 15th, 1919.

spirit of abnegation before she will forgo what is to her the supreme reason of existence. The spouses of our Lord consent to this that they may follow Him along the hard and stony paths where no orange-blossom can grow, but ordinary natures find it hard to create within themselves a longing for the cold air of lonely summits. Those who walk on lower levels are more prone to dream of sympathetic earthly ties and friendly human sympathies; such destinies seem so very probable at first sight, and so much less harsh to human nature than long, heart-breaking years of obscurity, which slowly tend to sap the energies of mind and soul. This is the usual course of things, and it is useless either to deny it or to be over-scornful on the subject. Nature has her rights, and we have no intention of condemning the spirit of race and home which stirs many hearts so strongly.

Nevertheless, other ways of spending life do suggest themselves to generous natures, and we can but praise and admire those paths of destiny which lie before the woman with no vocation for home life; the woman scarred in the battle of life, overlooked, so to speak, in the common lot, whom the cloister has not

received, nor even beckoned to rest beneath its peaceful shadow. Of such was Geneviève Hennet de Goutel.

Her biography, which it is my privilege to introduce to the public after being personally edified by it, shows that she threw herself whole-heartedly into work for the Christian cause, without waiting till some disappointment had detached her from the world. One form of suffering she had indeed learned to know, the anguish of doubt. This tortured her between the ages of eighteen and twenty; her faith was eclipsed, promiscuous reading unsettled her, and the mediocrity of some “practising” Catholics gave a shock to her logical mind. She wavered, lost heart, and racked her brains for a solution; but finding no answer in study, she took refuge in charity. And there is the first lesson her life teaches us. We all know that if we put true ideals into practice we shall come to the light: *Qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem.*

When Ozanam founded the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, he looked upon them more as a means of safeguarding and enlightening the young generation than even as a remedy against poverty. “Our only teachers

under God," wrote Geneviève, "are the poor and the suffering. It makes me smile to hear preachers declare that we set a great example to the poor by looking after them, and that they learn charity, etc., by contact with us . . . the smart hats approve of these sentiments, and bridle with pride, joy, and holiness . . . at such times I feel like a wolf in a poultry-yard."

*Le Sillon* attracted and retained this aspiring soul, and helped to set her feet firmly on the right path. It gave a background to her enthusiasms, utilized them, directed her energies, and by its flourishing examples of faith and valiant fidelity to the Church, counterbalanced the tepidity and hypocrisy which had so lately shocked her.

When *Le Sillon* was condemned she suffered, but submitted, and, like Marc Sangnier and Henry du Rourc, she tasted of the "fruits of peace" which reward love and obedience in the children of the Church.

From thenceforward she turned her energies in other directions. Art afforded her a means of self-expression, as well as practical helps to independence. She got together young work-girls and devoted herself to their training,

though without neglecting any means of cultivating in her own mind all that fosters the best and highest instincts we have.

Being anxious to help young children to the benefits of pure mountain air, she set herself to write little plays which amused them, and were sold for their benefit. With no literary pretensions and no aim beyond interesting and edifying her hearers, she nevertheless produced some really beautiful work, which *connoisseurs*, such as Mistral, admired. It was at her production of one of these plays that I first made the acquaintance of Geneviève Hennet de Goutel. I was deeply impressed by her energetic disposition and touched by her confidence. I was not able to see much of her after, but nothing I heard later of her life of abnegation surprised me. I had very soon seen that she was impetuous but determined, proud yet humble, ready to submit to truth, and spend herself in kindness and charity, but inflexible and even haughty in the face of unnecessary opposition.

The fateful year of 1914 called all her energies into play and launched her into the heart of war work. She had foreseen the storm (and her possible part in it) as early as

1913; with whole-hearted devotion and all the powers of her intelligence, she had trained for nursing, and to such good purpose that when the order for mobilization came and every active worker in France hurried to the post of honour, Geneviève had become a model nurse, ready to serve, and the hour of her country's need found her full of zeal and courage.

Disappointment was her lot at first; she was not set to the work she would have preferred, and was seriously handicapped in the beginning; but all this was soon remedied, and she rapidly became absorbed into the devouring machine of war work. She felt a deep and true joy in being near heroic examples of patience and almost superhuman endurance; the sad sights she witnessed roused and fostered the maternal instinct dormant in every woman's heart. The reader will follow with admiring interest the record of this development and expansion of Geneviève's character. Her confidences are most touching, laying bare, as they do, the progress of a soul's history, and giving every now and then a glimpse of depths of spiritual life, by a chance word or spontaneous action. "It is the most affectionate natures who always seem doomed to be deprived of love in

this life. . . . God does not wish to deprive us of love altogether; on the contrary, He wants us to pour it out as long as we have the breath of life, and give it with both hands to those who need it. . . . You will only develop your own personality in proportion as you give yourself to the service of others. . . . This generation has been singled out for the redemption of France, the men by the shedding of their blood, the women by their devotion. . . . We have all got to suffer and fix our hopes on the world to come. . . . We are nurses of the Wooden Cross. . . . God will not allow us to linger too long in the smiling plain below, when we have strength to climb up higher. . . .”

These words give us an insight into the writer's soul, and it is deeply moving to remember that her actions were a living commentary, on what even the words but feebly express. Kindred souls who read her *Life* will almost unconsciously take fire at the contact of such an intrepid leader; those who have less enthusiasm will rise to the level of their best selves, and perhaps for the future put fewer obstacles in the way of the working of the Spirit and the designs of Providence. The

close of this life, cut off in its prime like many others in these days of hecatombs, although so sublime, is but the logical outcome of its humble beginnings. The same inspiration runs through it all, and circumstances combine to give it a wide field and glorious aims. Roumania called urgently for help: help was provided. France rose to the occasion and called upon her chosen souls: they were ready. Such men and women always are ready to follow the call; their bare idea of duty is heroism. Geneviève calmly went to meet her death, and the image she leaves in our minds is like that of her country, beautiful in her tender devotion and generous in self-sacrifice to the last.

The record of her journey from Paris to Bucharest, via Boulogne, Folkestone, London, Newcastle, Bergen, Christiania, and Petrograd, is from the pen of an artist. Her picturesque description of a Church interior is full of feeling and psychology without being the least wearisome, and the view of the City of the Czars from the dome of St. Isaac is a really beautiful pen-picture. We recognize the hand of the child who talked of "the time when the stars come out" and sang hymns to the light,

of the girl who, listening to music which she had never heard before with her ears, wrote:

“ I was listening for these harmonies, and I have their echo in myself; nothing of real beauty is strange to us. . . .”

Solemn presentiments assail her towards her journey’s end. “ I know,” she writes, “ that we shall have to bear terrible things,” and then realizing that she would not have much time for writing, and that perhaps her silence might be misunderstood, she goes on to say: “ You must believe in your little ‘ Gen ’ as you do in the dead; we can’t see them, but you know they are there. . . .”

Roumania welcomed the travellers magnificently; at first their difficulties were smoothed in every way, but a gigantic task lay before them. Almost immediately events became very complicated; Bucharest was threatened, and they were removed to Jassy. Dr. Clunet established a hospital for infectious cases in the neighbourhood; and Geneviève, of course, offered herself as a nurse. Then began a time of exhausting work; privations almost reached starvation pitch; typhus raged; the sick were three in a bed, and death was busy

among them; the most lugubrious and repulsive offices had to be performed; cold and famine reacted on each other; and the situation became critical in the extreme. Yet when it was suggested to our heroine to return to France, her answer was: "I have not done enough work yet to go back. I put my trust in God; He knows I love my country above all things, and that I offer all sufferings for my beloved France. . . . Lift up your hearts," she goes on to say, "lift them high above all frontiers, and we shall meet at last." But it was in another world that they were to meet. The last struggle was drawing near, and the valiant creature prepared to meet it with complete abnegation and fervent faith.

"I have no hope other now but in eternal life," she said. "I expect it daily, and day by day I feel I am drawing nearer to its portals. . . . Life is very short. . . ."

So short was it for her that a few days later strong contagious fever declared itself, and was diagnosed as typhus. Although events had moved rapidly, and her constitution was that of a young person, the girl was so worn out that she did not respond to treatment at all.

'The daily private preparation for death had

now become a practical obligation; the Cross of Roumania was sent by Queen Marie to what was a death-bed, and the many touching proofs of respect from soldiers and civilians could only find expression by the grave-side.

In spite of her courage, the dying girl had one last struggle with Nature, when she seemed to refuse to drink the cup of suffering to the dregs. "Je veux revoir Maman," she cried out; then, suddenly appeased, "Thy Will be done," she said, and offered up her life.

It is this supreme and voluntary offering, made in diverse ways, which sets the seal on noble lives nobly spent. Geneviève Hennet de Goutel in life and in death points the way to many others. I believe I am right in saying, on the authority of her biographer, that many generous impulses towards good and solemn dedications have already been the fruit of her example. Her sacrifice, far from frightening others away, has encouraged them; and to more than one her beautiful farewell words, "I should not have liked to die without having accomplished something," have become almost a command.

The possibility of infusing new energies into those who are still sunk in spiritual sloth

gives its chief interest to a book such as the present.

“What if the dead are still living,” wrote Geneviève, “and it is the living who have not yet begun to exist!”

She herself was the proof of this, and her works follow her. But the greatest result of her life will be the generous impulses and resolves which, by the help of God and the skill of her biographer, these pages may suggest to those who “have not yet begun to exist.”

A. D. SERTILLANGES

(*Professor of the Catholic Institute of Paris*).

# Chapter I—*Impressions of Childhood*

FEAST OF ST. GENEVIÈVE,  
January 3rd, 1919.

**O**N the first page of a manuscript book severely bound in violet appear these words, dated July 29th, 1898:

“ MY DEAR LITTLE DIARY,

“ What a time since I wrote in you, and how glad I am to get to you again ! This year I shall be able to tell you of all the interesting reading I have done and the wonderful places I have seen. It will be great fun ! Some day, when I am an old lady with white hair and spectacles, I shall enjoy turning over your pages again ! If I have any grand-daughters they will see that I was rather a mischievous little imp ; but although I loved a joke, I loved beautiful things even more.”

These words in the firm handwriting of a girl of twelve, beginning a holiday in Savoy, are touching in their simplicity to those who knew Geneviève Hennet de Goutel. They call up the image of a tall, dark, well-built girl, whose deep yet happy-looking eyes gazed straight before her with an open, trustful smile. Although somewhat unmanageable and quite impervious to threats, her wilder fits of petulance would yield to a single serious word.

She had a heart of gold; a keen mind, bent on investigating everything; and a passionate zeal both for work and play.

When Geneviève was still quite a baby, she had a happy knack of putting pretty ideas into words. When a friend of her father asked her to come and spend a day in the country with his daughters, she answered: "Oh yes, I shall love to come. We shall have great fun. . . . But I may stay till the stars come out, mayn't I?"

One day when Geneviève was nearly five years old, and deeply absorbed in *The Wolf and the Lamb*, she suddenly threw down the book and ran away. When discovered, dishevelled and weeping, she exclaimed in an agony of tears: "The wolf was going to eat the lamb and I wanted to stop him!"

As quite a small child she had the tenderest and most loving impulses of pity. Geneviève could never see a beggar without going up to him; when she had no more pennies left, she would give away the chocolate provided for her lunch; and one day when she had emptied her purse, and dared not ask the nurse who was with her for more money, she rushed up to a beggar-boy and hugged him.

Her parents, seeing what generous, kindly instincts were growing with their child's growth, weighed them against the perpetual difficulties she was in, and took comfort.

Geneviève herself, after her fits of disobedience and temper, would console her family by saying it would be all right when she was fifteen. Meanwhile she gave them a good deal of trouble, but a great deal of happiness too. The little girl's diary shows peculiar sensibility and a great gift of perception. Here is her description of her favourite dog, written for herself, so that she may never forget her:

"*Zibelle* is just like a little fox with pretty brown fur and a white shirt-front. Grand-papa says her profile is like Auguste, but I don't quite agree. Her little eyes are like shot velvet, her ears long and quivering, her muzzle delicate and pointed, and her bushy tail full of expression. She is a very good dog, and obeys directly I speak to her. This is not at all like her mistress."

Geneviève's exuberant temperament was cramped in a Parisian flat. "What joy," she writes on arriving in Savoy, "to feel so free in this land of happiness!"

Her diary shows that even at the age of twelve she loved mountain scenery, and could appreciate vividly the charm of wide horizons and fine sky effects. She records her impressions after an excursion on the Lac de Bourget. "The lake is turquoise blue," she writes. "I should like a dress of that colour, but the lake has it as a special privilege, which is a pity. The mountains all around are stern and frown-

ing; they rise like impassable barriers, and seem shocked by the frivolities of the lake lying at their feet. The object of the excursion is to visit the *Abbey of Hautecombe*, which contains tombs of the ancient Dukes of Savoy. Here we find ourselves on the charming spot where the green-clothed peninsula juts out. Before us stretches the magnificent panorama of the Dauphinese Alps; the deep water is so transparent that one can even see the great round pebbles at the bottom; the air is warm; the boat glides slowly over the water like a dragon-fly; in the air the swallows circle round us with joyful notes."

The same year, after an expedition to *Les Grottes des Echelles*, and a pilgrimage to *Notre Dame de Myans*, Geneviève writes: "I don't know if it is only an idea of mine, but I fancy each place possesses a special odour of its own: museums have a venerable smell of antiquity; underground places smell of cold stone and damp earth, striking mysterious terror into us; and there is the particular smell of churches which inspires recollection and prayer. Perhaps people might say that these are only from varnish, mouldiness, or exhausted incense. Possibly, but nothing will alter my conviction."

At the end of the same summer Geneviève first writes down that "It is very boring to read tragedies instead of running through the

village once more, and playing one farewell game of croquet," and then becomes absorbed in the subject of her reading.

"We have been reading Corneille's *Horace*," she says. "As for the character, I still persist in my idea, which they asked us twice at school to give, and I prefer Horace to all the others. He is a true Roman who puts his country before everything, and that is a very noble sentiment, although some people think it rather exaggerated. I think a few more 'Horaces' in the French Army would not be a bad thing at present. Then there is Camille, whose character is the opposite of that of her brother Horace. A lot she cares for Rome, as long as she keeps her fiancé! Taty [Geneviève's aunt] holds forth to me in her most impressive style, on the subject of Camille putting her family before her country, but all her emphasis is wasted."

The matter of this is more French than the form, for the writer is only a child; but still one feels that she is already full of patriotism.

A few days later she writes in the same diary:

"Yesterday Taty and I read a beautiful bit of Victor Hugo, that I am very fond of. When we had finished I found myself wondering which was the greater—Victor Hugo, who wrote it, or Napoleon, who inspired it. I like poetry immensely. When I read really fine

verses I feel a little thrill of pleasure which, it appears, is enthusiasm. I am very fond of this:

*“ Non, l'avenir est à personne,  
Sire, l'avenir est à Dieu,  
A chaque fois que l'heure sonne,  
Sont ici-bas nous dit adieu :  
Gloire, fortune militaire,  
Couronne éclatante des rois,  
Victoire aux ailes embrasées,  
Ambitions réalisées  
Ne sont jamais sur nous posées  
Que comme l'oiseau sur les toits.”*

This Victory with ‘flaming wings’ reminds me of the beautiful Winged Victory in the Louvre, standing halfway up the great staircase, and spreading her great marble pinions as if to fly away into space.”

The reader may perhaps be surprised that Geneviève, reading Corneille between games of hide-and-seek in Savoy, should suddenly think of the statues in the Louvre, but her environment explains this. She was the grandchild of two artists who became friends in the studio of Ingres, and on the maternal side came of the Provençal family of Balze, whom the poet Mistral, re-echoing a legend of his country, declares to be descended from King Balthazar, one of the Magi. On her father’s side she was a Hennet de Goutel, a family originally from the North of France, from which sprang many artists of note. So Geneviève’s

childhood was exceptional. Her maternal grandfather, Raymond de Balze, the younger of two brothers who were favourite pupils of Ingres, had made his home with her father, who welcomed him hospitably to the family circle. The old gentleman was charming and a true artist. Louis Flandrin says of him: "Raymond Balze never lost his atmosphere of enthusiasm." In his latter years he only left his studio for the Louvre, or to turn over the pages of his correspondence with Ingres, whose memory he held in veneration. He recalled his amazed admiration in the Vatican when he copied Raphael's *Stanze*; he remembered the Villa Medici, where his master worked with him and treated him as a son: and, to the great joy of those about him, he would put his recollections into words. When Geneviève was quite a child she heard the names of Raphael, Poussin, and Ingres, as often as, if not more frequently than, those of her grandfather's living friends, Bonnat, Henner, and Flandrin.

Monsieur Balze would take her to the Louvre, where she grew deeply interested and quite serious. She would listen, ask questions, and, above all, gaze long at her grandfather's favourite *chef-d'œuvre*. At home Geneviève watched her father, who was a man of great taste and artistic proclivities, working at illumination, or *aqua-fortis*.

Her mother, a painter of talent, cultivated the child's sense of criticism, and taught her to grasp all the faults or beauties of a work of art, in detail or as a whole. In the midst of some rough game Geneviève would stop before a statuette or a drawing, to examine at length a wrought-iron balustrade or a mutilated statue, and insist on an explanation.

This artistic environment explains the child's precocious development. Geneviève's aunt supervised her education, taught her to read and love books, and encouraged her to discuss and write down the impressions produced by her reading. The task was undertaken in a most intelligent and broad-minded way, and both teacher and pupil united in trying to control the latter's somewhat unmanageable disposition without too much repression of youthful individuality. When in her repentant fits she had said, "You'll see, it will be all right when I'm fifteen," her relations shook their heads doubtfully, not counting on any sudden change of heart. Yet the first proof she gave of her extraordinary force of character was to put an abrupt end to all her escapades and naughtiness, just as she reached the age of fifteen. This was probably not effected without struggles, but no one was ever let into the secret of the inward conflict. Geneviève was always outwardly cheerful, and seemed a normal, happy child. In reality her mind was

too precocious for her to be content with merely enjoying all that came her way. From her earliest youth she was always disturbed by the idea of anyone suffering, or being in any kind of trouble or distress. Before she really understood the meaning of pain and sorrow, she tried to console others, and took herself severely to task when she did not come up to her own ideal.

"On Tuesday morning," she writes quite seriously to her friend Jeanne V—, "I discovered that I am horribly selfish, even more so than I thought." This discovery gives her "a terrible fit of bad temper." In the same delightfully frank and girlish letter she goes on to say: "Jeanne, you don't know how miserable I am! I seem to care for nothing, or, rather, I seek only self in everything. I am afraid that the world, my whole family, and my dearest friends are only a looking-glass, wherein I try, in spite of everything, to see my own miserable self. All, all is dry and worthless! I may perhaps have a certain warmth which passes for heart, and some amount of imagination which may develop into sympathy for others, and I have within me a faint glimmer of light, a passion for beauty, which makes me love poetry and music, and may later on, encouraged by you, lead me into other paths; but it is only an instinct. I feel I must satisfy it at any price, though it is worth-

less and only a form of enjoyment. Up to now I have had many day-dreams (all I am capable of, it would seem), many ideas of abnegation and infinite suffering, but these satisfy my mind; I dwell on things I have not done, and that is all. When I look into my heart, and try to see something beyond my perpetual egoism, there is only nothingness instead of the beauty for which I long. As you see, I have lost my way in a wretched labyrinth, and it is this little insignificant wisp of humanity, who aspires to become a saint, detached from all things, and renouncing all! How impossible! Before that, my 'ego' must have ceased to exist. . . ."

She does not always make her meaning clear, but we feel the soul is beginning to realize its power and aspire to good.

"I have never known," she says farther on, "what it was to love anything but myself, so why should my ideals be so great, and why is it such agony not to realize them? Why? Why? I don't want to put on Byronian airs, I would rather joke it off, for, after all, I am only a child still. . . ."

Truly only a child, in spite of the grave thoughts which pursue her and sometimes take her far indeed from play. While she is still enough of a baby to find untold joys in the possession of "a little cart harnessed to a pair of big bow-wows," she does not, it is true,

understand what real suffering is, but she can discern it in others, and knows her turn must come.

"Laziness is forbidden," she writes; "the soul which longs for eternity must keep pressing forward. Master, Thy Will be done. Better far to be torn with pain at leaving something we love behind us on our path through life than to feel nothing. I welcome the pangs and disappointments which I am bound to know one day; I expect them, for that is the only way to come to Thee, and give Thee a heart which does not know how to love, but longs to belong to Thee." And again in a letter to her friend: "The only good thing about me is my will, and even that isn't very strong! I see and feel more and more that one must love much, and what little heart I have, I long to give entirely to our Lord."

## Chapter II—*Faith Eclipsed*

**I**T was thus the child Geneviève gradually learned more and more about life, alternately dazzled and repelled, and astonished beyond anything when she discovered other people's limitations.

She confides to her friend Jeanne her inordinate love of chocolates, and in the same letter, describing a girl friend of both, exclaims: "She has no notion of what it means to care for anyone or anything. Jeanne, how can one live like that?"

Geneviève at this time was full of ideas of disinterested love, with a kind of premonition of inevitable and accepted suffering. She was not content with vague aspirations: that she practised her religion with a definite sense of its obligations is quite clear from these words written to her friend: "The only way to reach our Lord is by suffering or love, is it not?"

Nevertheless, she was drawing near a crisis in her interior life, when her faith was nearly shipwrecked. In 1904, at the age of eighteen, she writes to her friend of the "torture of loneliness" which she feels in church or at Mass, at times when prayers rise naturally to her lips at the sight of her Crucifix, or of a glorious sunset, for she is "then really conscious of the presence of God."

She asks herself in an agony whether her faith in the Real Presence be lost. "Is this a temptation? . . . I hope it may be only that. . . . I have tried to shut my eyes to my own thoughts, first unconsciously, and then deliberately, but I feel this is not honest, and so I write to you. . . . Tell me what it is. I try to unravel my own thoughts, but I can't make out what is the matter; I have really and sincerely asked myself if this be not one more delusion of exaggerated intellectual pride, but I fancy that in that case I should have continued to shut my eyes, for, after all, what I am telling you does not do me much credit. I ask myself if there lives such a vilely ungrateful creature as I, but I have not brought about this dreadful state of things on purpose; it is too painful. I pray as much as I can, but I feel more and more alone: do, do try and help me!"

This state of things grew worse and worse for two years. She went on suffering and struggling, reading far too much, with no standard and no guide, sometimes drawn towards *Les Avantages de la Philosophie Positive*, which she tried to analyze, and sometimes to Maeterlinck. She is so attracted by him that she writes: "Maeterlinck is life to me. Others interest, excite, or bore me by turns; I let myself go emotionally, but my mind has nothing really in common with them. Maeterlinck is my only remedy against loneliness."

Then she began to take an interest in the poor and in good works, she kept up her music and painting, she travelled, but still the torturing questions persisted in her mind. What was this terrible sense of loneliness, this gulf which no human affection could fill?

She read Nietzsche, Seneca, Père Gratry, Hello, Kant, Plato, Anatole France, St. Augustine, St. Paul, Emerson, and countless others. Her scattered notes and extracts show what abundance of different matter she had absorbed. Nothing she read brought light to Geneviève; in spite of an externally contented appearance, the girl was struggling in an ever-deepening mental fog. She asks herself if the Catholic Church is really the one to which "Christ gave the eternal promises." The following lines show how her perplexities developed:

"To my mind," she writes, "there is a contradiction between the Catholic Church and the spirit of her Founder. I do not say that the Catholic Church has produced nothing good, nor do I deny that Catholicism had a great influence over our civilization, and implanted in us the germ of the purest idealism; but if the Church had been really animated by the spirit of the Gospel, she could have played an even greater part, and no one nowadays who had resolved to lead the best and truest life, would be left hesitating between

the different aspects of truth which conflicting systems offer us."

Geneviève's language is almost violent in repudiating the Church's authority, though she admits that no contradictory philosophies "nor unstable moral codes" can satisfy her.

Each time she sees some system crumbling away under honest criticism she feels a pang. This crisis of the interior life is not difficult to account for. Geneviève had listened more attentively to Kant and Nietzsche than to the followers of St. Thomas Aquinas, and up to that time she had not been attracted by the doctrines of the *Summa*. But her doubts were not started in the first instance by ignorance of the fundamentals of the Catholic Faith. It is to be feared that what disturbed her most was the way in which she too often saw that faith practised. She was one of those whom tepidity puzzles more than contradiction. She could not understand how very fervent externals of piety could ever be found with petty meanness, a spirit of worldliness, and furtive malevolence. She heard people pass judgment on others, severe and unjust condemnation of honest, upright, kindly folk, but who had not the faith.

Geneviève was too fair-minded not to admit that believers sometimes misrepresent the intentions, caricature the actions, and belittle the good deeds of those who either have no

faith or are not Catholics. Hating interference, and longing to see a spirit of unity, concord, and fraternity, she was repelled and disappointed, and made the mistake of holding the Catholic Church responsible for the shortcomings of a few of her unedifying members.

Certain expressions infuriated her. Once when staying in Switzerland she made the following notes:

*"Impressions de Mademoiselle X — à Wilderswyll."*

“ ‘What a pity such a lovely place should be heathen !’ Heathen indeed, because the inhabitants don’t go to Mass. Nearly all Catholics have a touch of this brilliant mentality. Those who do not think as they do are ignorant, worthless, Calvinists. They pray for the poor devils, of course, but from behind barriers which divide them from the reprobate, and they take a delight in exaggerating and widening the breach, magnifying the slightest differences into something phenomenal !”

Geneviève winds up her opinion of this view by a few sentences which show the Deistic tendencies uppermost in her at that time.

“ Do not try to bring down your Creator to your own puny image,” she writes; “ He is too great. Do not try to confine Him within your wretched walls !

"Can you not feel Him within and all around you? Learn to find Him everywhere, learn to look at Nature and to hear her voice; she is our great teacher, leading us to the kingdom of the beautiful and the Divine; follow her, and if you are dazzled by the sunlit, flowery path, and your heart thrills within you with an infinite ecstasy, sing praises and fall on your knees. That is true prayer. . . ."

In perfect sincerity Geneviève worked, investigated, and even still tried to pray, but in spite of all she felt miserable and bewildered at the inequalities of human life: the lot of rich and poor, all the miseries, all the selfishness, all the hatreds, and all the sufferings of her fellow-creatures. She feared to sink into indifference or revolt, and her studies seemed to teach her nothing of any actual or practical value.

She sought salvation in charity.

## Chapter III—“*The Poor ye have always with you*”

FROM early childhood Geneviève’s natural kindness of heart, as well as her training, had attracted her to the poor. Her parents, and especially the aunt “Taty” who figures so largely in her home life, put her in the way of seeing poverty, and did not try to check her inquiring mind. They did not approve of the system of keeping children in cotton-wool and in an artificial atmosphere where they hear of nothing but pleasant things, and are destined to grow up ferociously selfish towards the very people who have so safeguarded them.

Geneviève had been taught enough to think of poverty as an evil not to be deplored only, but remedied. The advice of those about her was to waste as little time as possible in talking and lamenting over troubles, and it did not fall on deaf ears. As quite a little girl she had learned to take an interest in the poor at an age when few children do, and when she grew older was not content with caring for them at a distance. She did not, as so many do, put mere almsgiving before personal help and contact. She visited the unfortunate, nursed and waited on them, and received them in her own home. It was not mere hearsay that made her write:

“Our only teachers after God are the poor and suffering. I smile when I hear preachers declare that we set a great example to the poor by going to look after them, and that they learn charity, etc., by contact with us. The smart hats in the congregation approve of these sentiments and bristle with pride, joy, and holiness . . . it makes me feel like a wolf in a poultry yard. . . . I am always at my best with the poor and the humble, and quite out of my element with rich people, or those,” she adds, “who consider themselves so.” For Geneviève had already realized how relative riches and poverty can be. “Poor creatures,” she says elsewhere, “they always get the worst of it in everything! We who are supposed to help and succour them have often to force our way into their houses, and wring their poor, shameful secrets out of them. We have all, and they have nothing. Perhaps we should not venture to approach them until we have given up what few comforts seem essential to our daily lives. Can we expect them to believe us when we tell them that God Himself became a poor man, that He loved the poor, and said poverty was the mother of eternal life?

“‘Why don’t you imitate your God, then?’ they might answer, ‘instead of enjoying the comforts and pleasures of this world while you go on saying the future life is so much better than this? Take off the mask, and tell

us that you don't believe all the consoling things you say.'"

Geneviève felt this same justifiable exasperation whenever she saw a Christian satisfying his easy-going conscience by some rather pharisaical action which for him fulfilled the law of charity. In her eyes charity was no vague abstraction of duty to be fulfilled by getting up matinées and concerts or organizing bazaars for benevolent purposes, but a stern and strict obligation, a debt which must be paid.

Geneviève obeyed the laws of love and justice, and sometimes (though rarely) she tells us of her own successful efforts and the good results obtained. After saving the life of a poor boy by unceasing care in nursing Geneviève writes: "Yesterday the doctor, to his own astonishment, was able to pronounce him out of danger. You can imagine how wildly delighted I was. I had always longed to know joy such as our Lord felt when he gave back her son to the Widow of Naim in the Gospel story. Thank God, we can realize a little of what it was. . . .

"It was my great good fortune to help nurse a little girl of two with congestion of the lungs," she writes one summer from the mountains. "Her parents had not the least idea of nursing. I cupped her with a kitchen tumbler, and gave her baths to reduce the

temperature, and now she is quite convalescent. You may imagine my joy !”

Geneviève was often to know such joys. Many a time, concealing her movements from all and forbidding her name to be mentioned, did she climb dark staircases, slippery with dirt, and bravely make her way into a stifling atmosphere of vice and poverty, only to meet with a surly repulse. Perhaps at first she hesitated, as we all do; then, in spite of repugnance stifled in secret, and by dint of patience and loving perseverance, succeeded in changing the moral as well as the physical atmosphere, and so brought healing both to body and soul.

“The poor are our friends,” she writes.

Is “friend” really the word we should expect to hear from the lips of those who dispense some charity instead of merely thinking about it, and while seeing clearly the gulf between themselves and the poor, yet mix with them in their daily life ? Friends must give naturally, if the title is not to be usurped. Were the poor really Geneviève’s friends, or, more truly speaking, did she not love them as brothers in Jesus Christ ? Did she not love them as her neighbour, as herself, or even more, since she exceeded even the commandment ?

It is quite certain that in one sense doing good is always an advantage to ourselves, and

that helping our neighbour brings about our own highest spiritual good. But this was not what Geneviève meant when she called the poor her friends. She was thinking of the examples set her by those she helped, and the deep truths she had learned from some of them. She was thinking of a young orphan girl from Charonne, alone in the world at the age of seventeen, and making three francs (2s. 6d.) a day at lead-soldering, who sheltered, fed, and clothed another younger and quite forsaken girl, giving up every minute of her spare time to the child.

“Suzanne,” she says, “bought her shoes when she had none herself. She takes a pride in the little one and calls her ‘my daughter.’” Geneviève knew that such adoptions represented daily privations and real suffering, and could not but compare them with the conventional benevolence which dares to masquerade as charity, when the giver parts with just a trifle of her superfluities, and ignores the very meaning of the word “privation.”

Deeply did Gèneviève prize such lessons in practical charity. She came across many more such instances than would be believed in her determined search for unknown cases of distress; receiving and treasuring them in her heart as a consolation in times of weariness: for the merits of others were always more in her eyes than her own.

23     “*The Poor ye have always with you*”

Weighing well all the different circumstances and surroundings with the difficulties of each individual, she always came to the conclusion that greater effort was to be expected from herself.

It was at this time she came to know *Le Sillon*, and found her great opportunity.

## Chapter IV—*Le Sillon*

**L**E SILLON, that great educational and democratic movement, took its name from its principal organ, a review edited by Marc Sangnier. Léonard Constant, a former *Sillonniste*, explains the spirit of the movement in his fine memoir of Henry du Roure. “It was the wonderful effect of friendship,” he says, “which made *Le Sillon* so strong and so real.” Human zeal and the love of God closely blended, and often acting as one, kept the fire of enthusiasm alight in those pure young hearts who had not frittered away their powers of loving on unworthy objects. Friends with similar spiritual aims are usually scattered all over the world, carrying their message of mercy like frail and lonely vessels across the great ocean of charity; but Marc Sangnier conceived the bold idea of uniting them all to himself as in one huge and all-embracing net, and utilized them as a great power for both propaganda and action. This was the most novel feature of the scheme.

*Le Sillon’s* outward activities took varied forms, but underlying all Sangnier’s plans we always find the one great human reality which gave them life and vigour, the close bond of friendship and spiritual union between him, his companions, and their friends.

Writing in 1903 to the head of *Le Sillon*,

Comte A. de Mun says: "There exists a natural sympathy between us which a word, a glance, or a hand-shake is enough to arouse, for the same leaven stirs in both our souls when they come into contact. One day some thirty years ago, when I was touring France for the first time from town to town, as you are, carrying the same message of love and fraternity that you are now going to deliver, I had just concluded my speech in a certain town, when a workman left a knot of his companions and came up to me. Instead of speaking, he burst into tears, and threw himself into my arms. . . . He kissed me . . . I can never tell you the effect it had on me . . . even now, after thirty years, I can still feel that workman's kiss on my cheek."

This letter, quoted by Constant, exactly illustrates the irresistible attraction which drew the *Sillonnistes* together. Geneviève, with her ideal of what was true charity, was bound to join *Le Sillon*. She found there such goodwill and friendship, such tolerance and persevering effort, and such patience in the face of obstacles, as filled her with joy. She was in the midst of truly brotherly workers who, instead of philosophizing over the troubles of others, set themselves practically to work to relieve them.

Above all, she met with Catholics whose faith was really dear to them: they lived by it,

and put it before everything, hesitating at no sacrifice in order to live up to their religion. When Geneviève, who was then about twenty, joined *Le Sillon*, and saw Catholic life and ideals developed to their fullest, her doubts fell away from her. Her humble and anxious search for truth had led her to this burning centre of Christian zeal; by the sweetness and beauty of its "fruits" she knew the "tree." She discovered that what she had taken for stains were only shadows, and that one must not expect men to be angels.

Geneviève was never able to put into words the sum of her happiness in returning to full allegiance to the Catholic Faith; the secret remained hidden in her inmost soul.

She became an ardent *Sillonniste*. Now that the lapse of time has brought about calmer judgments, even the opponents of *Le Sillon* admit the greatness of its adherents in fighting, struggling, and working to realize an ideal without thought of personal advantage, and nobly confessing to mistakes which had resulted only from their own too great zeal in well-doing. They wish now to hear more about some of those who loved the movement. Léonard Constant has given us a touching account of Henry du Roure's life of duty. Geneviève, writing of his death on the field of battle, says: "It was the only fitting death for Henry du Roure: he was a Saint." The

*Sillonnistes* aspired to nothing less. They knew that every true Catholic should try to become a saint, and each one worked his hardest to realize the ideal.

Geneviève dwells on a very favourite theory of the *Sillonnistes*: "If we wish to see progress in the social order according to the laws of life and movement," she writes, "we must never tire of trying to improve ourselves; that is the great thing. We all have certain gifts to make use of; and we often lament over those who either waste these Divine treasures in idleness or simply throw them away. We tell ourselves that in their place we should do much better; let us look at home and turn what we have to good account. If we do our utmost God will increase our capacity."

Geneviève often spoke of the happiness it had given her to join *Le Sillon*, and her firm determination to follow it at all costs. "From the day we got to know *Le Sillon*," she writes, "we found the light, and our life in it is the best opportunity possible for our work. If we have to destroy and alter many things, and the process is painful, we must never forget that we have our reward, for before our tasks began we found the Truth and the Life on a pathway of Light."

Geneviève never speaks of *Le Sillon* without examining her own conscience and making good resolves.

"We say at *Le Sillon*," she writes, "that we have no prejudices, and certainly we are against prejudice in others. . . . When we ourselves are in question we must take our chance, and remember that we must be ready at all times to spend and be spent in the service of others. . . . We try to show people who say that there is nothing but wickedness in the world that they are wrong, and we want to set a great example of purity and high aims. What are we ourselves in the sight of God, Who alone sees all that is hidden from the eye? The life which the world looks at is all righteousness, the inner one despicable, and full of cowardly reservations. If we had to decide at any moment between Christ and ourselves, should we not be very unhappy to see how little we really belong to Him?"

One great pitfall for these young people banded together might have been an exaggerated sense of their own individual importance, but *Le Sillon* had the true Christian spirit of humility even in the midst of success.

"There are few festivals in the year," writes Geneviève, "and many ordinary days; these, too, should bear fruit. Our days are made up of trifles, and though we complain of their insignificance, they must not be neglected. No work is considered too humble for *Le Sillon*.

"What is worth doing is worth doing well.

Careless people see nothing but waste ground where an observant eye will discover precious things; great opportunities only offer themselves to those who do not disdain small tasks."

We feel the same Christian spirit in what Geneviève writes about the troubles of the Association:

"We must pray for our opponents, and try to love them for helping us to grow in the spiritual life."

Geneviève was in full agreement with *Le Sillon* on social problems. She believed that no young people, and more especially girls, can stand aloof from these questions. "In all walks of life, high or low, we always find a certain amount of selfishness and suffering."

She and her friends of *Le Sillon* considered that no one should allow others to suffer if it can possibly be helped, and this explains her conception of the rôle of the young girl in society. After long and careful meditation on the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, she sets down her views:

"Two paths lie before young people of the present day. One is smooth and easy, and many follow it with a comfortable interpretation of our Lord's words, 'The poor ye always have with you.' The other is narrower and harder, and calls us to leave the comfortable family fireside and devote all our energies and powers to the cause of truth and justice.

In a world where selfishness and love of money are the moving spirit of all endeavour, we should be the very ones to see things as they are and to sacrifice ourselves, not for the mere chivalry of the thing, but for love of our fellow-men."

When once she had settled this in her mind, it did not take her long to make her choice; she resolutely started on the path indicated by *Le Sillon*. Its theories corresponded with her thirst for justice, and appealed to all that was best in her own nature. But she began quite modestly and simply by realizing that her first task should be humble, persevering effort at self-improvement, and fully understanding that, though this is the most difficult work of all, it is the most necessary. To the honour of *Sillonnistes* as a group (and Geneviève as an individual, be it said), they fully grasped the fact that results would entirely depend on their own interior lives. These young people saw clearly that even love, mutual help, and co-operation in good works were not enough. They did not shrink from applying their own theory to themselves, though the task was a hard one.

Geneviève had many ordeals to pass through; she did not always avoid friction in discussion, and sometimes her sense of justice rebelled. But although occasionally her ideas were set aside as a joke, discussed with contempt, or repulsed altogether, and she herself wounded

and irritated, she kept firmly and simply to her choice, and did not allow her peace of mind to be seriously disturbed.

"What matters it," she writes, "if we are not deferred to, nor even treated with respect? The great thing is to get the best possible results from our life-work." But naturally she tried to inculcate her own views, and the persuasive influence of such a vivid personality attracted many adherents to the cause she had so much at heart. She expounded her theories in her own circle, to her women friends, and the young girls in whom she was interested, but always with the greatest care to avoid any sort of pressure or unfair use of influence.

"These are my opinions and my ideas," she writes to a working-girl, "but you know that I do not wish to force them upon anyone. I take all responsibility for them myself."

If Geneviève had her trials in working for *Le Sillon*, she got great happiness out of her work, and, above all, made many friends. Writing to a young girl railway-clerk after a Congress, she says:

"It is quite impossible to tell you how wonderful the Congress was, and you will only get a very faint idea from the report which will appear later; but the thing to realize was the wonderful spirit underlying the whole *Sillon*, which united thousands of us in the pursuit of a single ideal and a common hope. All our

years of work and struggles have not been in vain, and these last few days we have gazed at each other in amazement, for we ourselves hardly understood the strength that is in us, and is bound to lead us on to great victories if only we remain faithful and devoted in the truest and fullest sense of the words.

"The great impression we all carried away was one of strong, youthful vigour, and a vision of future hope. Many true and beautiful things were said during the discussion, and they were quite practical, though approached from such a high standpoint. Monsieur T——'s report was unanimously approved. I am so glad, because it gave a broad outline of women's mission in *Le Sillon*, completing as it does that of our male comrades by its influence on the home, where they are not always able to work. He spoke of woman as educator, principally in her own environment, and of the spread of *Sillon* theories in families. This work is very important, and perhaps demands more patient and untiring effort than any other. A great many of our women-friends came from the provinces, but many others who, like yourself, are obliged to stay at home, give strength to our work by attending faithfully to humble daily duties. It is a great thing to work in the spirit of *Le Sillon*, even when we cannot take part in these public demonstrations. I know this well, as although I have belonged

to it for five years, this is the first Congress I have been able to attend; and even now I could not be there all the time, for two of the days were taken up with decorating the St. Paul riding-school. I must thank you for your affectionate letter, which touched me very much. How sweet it is to think we love each other so much and from such a distance, without ever having met! This often happens in *Le Sillon*, but the world would think it a phenomenon."

In this great community Geneviève met intelligent and exceptional people of every class in life. It was in *Le Sillon* that she met Madame S—, whose Catholic social work and inexhaustible kindness has saved so many from ruin.

"I am living here in an ideal city," writes Geneviève from Langeais, to a young girl telephone-clerk to whom she was much attached. "It is wonderful to be with Madame S—. She is unique. Grief makes some people bitter and sours their better nature; but she, on the contrary, is more sweet and loving than ever, even after losing a husband she adored. It is a beautiful thing to be brought so near a great sorrow borne like this, by one who sets such an example. If you only knew her goodness to all around her! Here at Langeais, in this almost royal château, she does the work, not of three women, but of three men. We are

never tired of talking of *Le Sillon*, and we agree completely in our views. Close by at St. Laurent, as I told you, there is a home for anæmic girls. I often go; there are some charming ones amongst them. . . . Did you go to *Le Sillon* workroom on Sunday evening at 5.30? I am sure you stayed outside in a tremendous fit of shyness, because I was not there to take you. But now you are so much attached to *Le Sillon*, you must throw yourself thoroughly into the life, and help others around you to do so too. And in order to do this you must get to understand our ideas thoroughly, and learn to explain them, if necessary. Get to know all about our theories of co-operation and syndicates, talk to the young girls you will meet there, and don't mind how many questions you ask them; borrow books, and make them explain everything you don't quite grasp: things seem always more real after you have discussed them with someone else. If the conversation seems to stray from the point, don't be afraid to bring it back, and if you meet (as you will do) with *Sillonnistes* whose ideas are not quite so elevated as they might be (which is the case at times with us all on some point or other), tell yourself that *Le Sillon* does not stand or fall by this or that individual's views, and dismiss it from your mind. If by chance you seem to be neglected, take no notice; but go straight ahead. If you feel that you lack strength, don't go to

any human being to keep you from wavering, but to the Gospel."

Geneviève's life at Langeais was very busy, and she was surrounded by kindred spirits.

"We brought back some interesting people from Tours," she writes to her mother: "a very nice headmistress of a school and two of her women-teachers. There were also two *Sillonnistes* and Jacques Roedel; it was almost like a *Sillon* banquet. We were in the beautiful dining-room, and it was a great success. That is the kind of dinner-party I like; not on account of the meal itself, but because all the guests are interesting, and one does not have to struggle to keep awake, as at some houses.

"I am lecturing as best I can at St. Laurent, so as not to get out of the way of it, and am really improving. My ideas are growing clearer and I am getting to express them better."

And again: "Monsieur Léonard Constant is here, and conversation has become more than interesting; it is quite absorbing. They discuss every possible subject. Madame S— is amazingly brilliant. Under the circumstances I need only keep quiet and listen, for there is much to be learnt.

"I am teaching my little Russian girl French in a most original manner. She wants a vocabulary in which to express her ideas on philosophical and social questions. We take some subject, such as idealism, for instance.

I explain what it is and how it works. She repeats my explanation. I give a thorough definition of each expression, and end up by dictating some of *Les Lectures Sillonnistes*, giving her the grammatical rule for every mistake she makes. This serves as an excellent lesson in French combined with *Sillonniste* instruction. . . . I am quite in my element, between the beautiful theories always under discussion here and the lovely country all around us."

Geneviève's eager temperament thrrove in the *Sillonniste* atmosphere. The renewal of faith had restored her wholesome love of life, and given her the assurance that she was of some use in the world.

## Chapter V—*Pascal*

**A**N examination of conscience, contained in a book where Geneviève sometimes wrote down her thoughts and plans, ends thus:

“ Everything is in my favour if I am to take the lead in work: atavism, education, intellectual surroundings, and strong will. But I am inclined to be vague, and do not class my ideas methodically. This fault causes feebleness, and a kind of moral anaemia, by which I fail to make my influence felt. I must be logical. I must be able to give a reason for each of my fundamental theories, and make them really my own, not only instinctively and because they have been taught me, but as the choice of my own free will. I must learn to be in myself a source of moral support. I must try and overcome my diffidence in asking questions and my dislike to threshing out a subject thoroughly, or breaking the ice of reserve in others.”

When once Geneviève had made these resolves, she kept them. She got through a great deal of study, and to anyone who knew what her life was this appears no small achievement. It is impossible to calculate exactly how much of her time was given to the poor, for we only hear of those good works which needed the collaboration of others and were,

so to speak, known publicly. The "big girls" of the *Saint Germain des Près* Mission interested Geneviève very much, and she did a great deal for them. Sometimes she would explain texts from the Gospel to them, sometimes read them a Rostand play, and often take them to the Louvre. Besides this, there were the friendly, home-like meetings of *Le Sillon* and her music; all these interests filled up an existence which was always too full for "slackness."

In the evenings she read until late at night, and only those books which really feed the mind. It is pathetic to go over the closely-packed shelves of her book-case, in which each volume was a friend. An ancient edition of Pascal's *Pensées sur la religion et quelques autres sujets* was her favourite among them all. Often and often did she pore over the old book in its faded brown binding; a narrow blue ribbon still marks the place where she was wont to meditate so deeply in her hours of doubt:

"*I blame equally those who take on themselves to praise man, those who take on themselves to blame him, and those who merely amuse themselves. I can approve only those who seek with tears. The stoics say, 'Retire within yourselves; then you will find your rest,' which is not true. Others say, 'Go out of yourselves, and seek your happiness in diversion;'* nor is that true, for sickness may come. Happiness is neither without nor

within us; it is in God both without us and within us."<sup>1</sup>

Geneviève had sought "with tears" for the truth, and with no thought of distraction. She loved Pascal's writings so much because she felt akin to him in her anguish of doubt and her horror of indifference. They were affinities. Most men grow dizzy on great heights, but such air was the only atmosphere where the author of *Les Pensées* could breathe and exhale the aspirations of his passionate soul. Geneviève from early girlhood followed him swiftly in his ascent, and walked step by step with him in his disappointments and his bewilderment. These lines are underscored by her pencil as if she had read them many times:

*"When I see the blindness and misery of man, when I survey the whole dumb universe, and man without light, left to himself and lost, as it were, in this corner of the universe, not knowing who has placed him here, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, and incapable of any knowledge whatever, I fall into terror like that of a man who, having been carried in his sleep to an island desert and terrible, should awake ignorant of his whereabouts, and with no means of escape; and thereupon I wonder how those in so miserable a state do not fall into despair. I see other persons round me of like nature; I ask them if they are better informed than I am,*

<sup>1</sup> *Les Pensées.* C. Kegan Paul's translation.

and they say they are not; and thereupon these miserable wanderers, having looked about them, and seen some objects pleasing to themselves, have given and attached themselves to these. As for me, I cannot attach myself to them, and considering how strongly appearances show that there is something else than what is visible to me, I have sought to discover whether this God has not left some impress of Himself."<sup>1</sup>

Pascal's anguish consoled Geneviève for her own, but, not content with reading and admiring him, she would go over and over his theories in her own mind with devouring anxiety. In her comfortable home-like room in the Rue St. Dominique, surrounded by her restful Tanagra statuettes, the flowers which her friends were always sending her, and her growing collection of books, Geneviève would sit up night after night, heedless alike of fatigue or of her luxurious surroundings. She would take up her Pascal and interrogate its pages, every now and then raising her eyes to the Crucifix, and noting down what answers her meditations suggested on the margin of the book. . . .

Pascal says: "It is the heart which is conscious of God, not the reason. This, then, is faith; God is sensible to the heart, not to the reason."<sup>2</sup>

And on the yellow margin Geneviève pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Les Pensées.* C. Kegan Paul's translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

tests: "God can be apprehended both by the heart and the reason."

In the same chapter these words are underlined: "*Men often mistake their imagination for their heart, and they believe they are converted as soon as they think of being converted.*"<sup>1</sup>

Geneviève, always on her guard against her own imagination, felt that the words showed profound experience. But this did not prevent her thinking the stern reflections which occur a little farther on rather exaggerated.

"*If there be a God, we ought to love Him alone, and not the creatures of a day. The reasoning of the wicked in the Book of Wisdom is only founded on the non-existence of God. ('Given that there is no God,' they say, 'let us take delight in the creature.') It is because there is nothing better. But were there a God to love they would not have come to this conclusion, but the contrary. And this is the conclusion of the wise: 'There is a God; therefore we ought not to take delight in the creature.'*

"*Therefore all that leads us to attach ourselves to the creature is evil, because it hinders us from serving God if we know Him, and from seeking Him if we know Him not. Now we are full of lust. Therefore we are full of evil, therefore we should hate ourselves, and all which urges us to attach ourselves to aught but God.*"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Les Pensées.* C. Kegan Paul's translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

On the margin are a few lines pencilled in a firm, clear handwriting: "This is not true; it is glorying God to love His creatures. There is not one kind of love only. We must take what is best in others, and give them what is best in ourselves."

Farther on she writes, in answer to the Jansenist sentiment, "*We must love God only, and hate self only,*"<sup>1</sup> "*We should love God only, and hate evil.*"

The lines in pencil which underscore several other sentences farther on, and an occasional mark of interrogation in a clear handwriting which is being gradually rubbed out, give a strangely lifelike look to the book she read so often.

When Geneviève was twenty-four she wrote down her reflections on her "great friend." "Pascal's ideas," she says, "still dominate the present generation, and in order thoroughly to understand him people must look up to Heaven. Pascal's example is one of the most beautiful offered to them; a life of energy harmoniously flowing towards a single aim, and that the greatest which man can pursue, and while all the time his faculties were being developed to their fullest and truest proportions. And why should we not call it even an example of humility? Towards the end of his life Pascal became as a child in simplicity and

<sup>1</sup> *Les Pensées.* C. Kegan Paul's translation.

truthfulness, one of those ‘little ones’ to whom the kingdom of heaven has been promised. Perhaps this was the secret of his ultimate convictions. He sought truth before he knew what truth was, and having found it left all else behind him, attaching himself with all his heart to his discovery and living the doctrine he professed. ‘Because,’ as Plato so finely says, ‘he went in search of Truth, Truth came and abode with him.’”

Geneviève loved Pascal and understood him; one may even go so far as to say that there was real affinity of soul between the great genius and the young girl. One proof of this is a humble page of grey-ruled paper, probably torn out of a hospital notebook and hurriedly thrust into a portfolio, to be destroyed later, on which Geneviève had written the following words in her big, clear handwriting: “The only really important thing which I must never forget, the only thing I must really learn to face with love, the only thought worth taking for my watchword, is that I must die, and much sooner than I think. That is TRUE. Meanwhile I must live my life to its fullest, love with all my heart, banish all discord, and associate only with those who are in harmony with me. Light, peace, serenity, joy, harmony, love. I must begin to live the life of the next world while I am here. Why should we fear to care for creatures? They are only reflec-

tions, it is true, but we can only see reflections of the Light we aspire to; to love them is to love the Light, and we must love all things. The more we know, the more we love."

After reading attentively these lines, so impregnated with premonitions of bodily death and eternal life, one is reminded of the *in-folio* sheet exhibited in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, the first page of Pascal's autograph manuscript of *Les Pensées*; broken phrases and disjointed words flash across the memory like lightning: "Security, Security, Feeling, Joy, Peace."<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Maurice Barrès boldly, but in all reverence, has ventured to interpret this venerable document, and with that same insight which springs from the heart, he has found the clue; for throughout the ages there are always certain words which express the same language. Pascal's decisive crisis, his sudden vision of light which was indeed no delusion, that "sommet de l'extase," that "plus grand effort d'approche devant Dieu," as Barrès calls it, was realized by Geneviève Hennet de Goutel, if with less intensity. But as she was meditating on her approaching death in the midst of youth, and abandoning herself to the Will of God, a great light was vouchsafed to her. "Light, peace, serenity, joy, harmony, love"—these words convey a plenitude of happiness and an inexpressible sense of

<sup>1</sup> *Les Pensées.* C. Kegan Paul's translation.

utter peace. This disconnected phrase contains a whole world of thought, and hints at ecstasy. Nothing is wanting: the vision of sacrifice with free consent, renouncement, and self-oblation, and the light already shining in recompense on the soul which loves creatures, because they are the children of a common Father, and is consecrating itself to them until the day when He shall call her to Himself.

It was Pascal who said that an eternity of happiness is the reward of one day's work on earth.

## Chapter VI—*The End of Le Sillon*

THEN after all these years of strenuous life came the end of *Le Sillon*. In the summer of the year 1910, while Geneviève Hennet de Goutel was in her beloved Savoy, she received the sad news of its condemnation by the Sovereign Pontiff. Without an instant's hesitation she joined in the act of submission which Marc Sangnier had caused to be sent to Rome, and used her utmost influence to calm and console her friends. She wrote to them from Sallanches, and received letters in return full of "surprise at her optimism." She answered kindly but firmly, pointing out that Marc Sangnier, Henry du Roure, and all those who had worked hardest for the movement, had been the first to bow to the decision, and had sworn fidelity to the Holy Father without restriction or mental reservation of any kind. This calm resignation had not been achieved without a "pang that would not lightly be forgotten," as Henry du Roure wrote to his mother.

The end of *Le Sillon* was an act of faith which friends and enemies alike could but admire. They saw that the Father of the Faithful still had the power to loose and unloose, and that his children tasted to the full the fruits of peace, when they remained steadfast in loving obedience to his decree. This cruel ordeal, although

it cost Geneviève great pain, was a valuable part of her spiritual training. She pondered over her future and wondered what she should do with the part of her life so long bound up in *Le Sillon*. Should she give ear to the counsels of weariness, urging her to an easier existence? Or would the temptation to live solely for art overpower her, now that every day proved more and more what gifts she possessed?

Throughout the close of that summer Geneviève worked steadily at her painting, trying her best to calm herself amidst restful surroundings. "To unravel our real motives and thoughts we must be alone at any cost; Solitude is an indispensable friend."

Geneviève had all the blessings of solitude among the mountains, and felt herself grow stronger as she meditated in the peaceful spot.

"I don't know if I ought to write to you about our glorious mountains," she writes to a woman-friend; "perhaps it will make you sad instead of giving you pleasure. You are always in my thoughts; every cloud that rests on the peaks, every sunbeam that falls on the melting snow, the blue mists, the outlines of ice-pinnacles against the sky—all these things remind me of you, and make me wish you were here. . . . Of an evening when I feel my way through the shadows to the organ-loft of our little church, I feel you nearer to me than ever; you are always in my thoughts at the close of day, and

then my fingers unconsciously shape harmonies which I had never heard before, and never shall again. They are the voice of the mountains thrilling my very soul, and speaking to me at the foot of the Tabernacle. When anyone comes in the charm is suddenly broken, the visions vanish, and I find myself on my chair labouring through a Bach fugue."

These few weeks of quiet meditation helped Geneviève to recover her balance and choose between the different forms of activity before her.

When she went back to Paris in the autumn, she decided to work hard at her painting, and to look after poor people, especially her girls, with more power to help them materially. For some time past Geneviève had thought of trying to make money, because, fond as she was of giving, she disliked intensely having to beg.

She felt drawn to work, as she herself says, by another consideration—"the wish to become a worker among workers who toil without respite, and thus deserve her place in God's universe."

Directly after her return she started regular attendance at more than one studio, and took up drawing and water-colours as a professional.

As quite a child she had tried to draw, and had learned too much from admiring the immortal masterpieces of her grandfather's

friends to be content with mere mediocrity. Furthermore, she inherited from her forbears the innate gift which nothing can replace. Not only were her grandfather and great-uncle Balze artists, but also Alphonse Hennet de Goutel, her paternal grandfather, whose historical pictures as well as his portraits are still remembered. No one had gone into raptures over Geneviève's first sketches, in spite of the undoubted talent they showed. She herself realized the necessity for hard work, and knew that it is not enough to have an eye if you have no execution. Her grandfather Balze's death in 1909 was a great grief to her, but it was a very peaceful end to a long life. He faded away as winter ended, keeping his radiant serenity to the last, calling up visions of the works he had loved best, and saying to his daughters: "Raphael has been to see me; to-morrow he is going to introduce me to Poussin."

Next day Raymond Balze died a happy death, after a life of full intellectual enjoyment, and his best legacies to his granddaughters were his own unerring taste and conscientious devotion to work.

Talent is a word too often abused, and too carelessly applied to mediocre performances, but it may be said of Geneviève Hennet de Goutel that she possessed a really great gift, as can be proved by the portfolios of water-

colours she left. Her landscapes give the very soul of the scenery she loved. For she had a real love for our frowning Savoy mountains, for the flower-laden banks of the Mayeuse, and the golden stones of Malmajour. The painting conveys this with touching fidelity, and will always remain a memento of her ardent love of life and Nature. Mademoiselle Agnes S—, who understood her so thoroughly, writes in answer to a question about her correspondence: "That unique personality must not be forgotten, but, alas, I have but few of her letters! We did not write often to each other, nor even meet often, strange to say. But Geneviève's character impressed you without need of speech. She was a woman one would have liked never to lose sight of, and as far as I myself am concerned, her writings and her pictures seemed to convey a special message. She appealed to me as no one else did."

This was true of all that Geneviève did, as the penetrating intellect of Mademoiselle S— discovered.

She wrote little, and was chary of revealing her inmost thoughts, but in her pictures she gives a full outlet to her enthusiasm and love of Nature.

"For the last ten days," she writes, describing her happiness in her lovely surroundings, "I have roamed from morning to night among woodland paths, like some wild forest animal,

not allowing myself to think or to analyze, but just rejoicing to be alive. I don't open the interesting book I brought with me, nor play from the music I have here; I just lie on the grass listening to the rushing torrent, and watching the quivering of the branches overhead."

" You will see our glorious mountains," she writes to her sister from Zermatt, " in all their great and peaceful beauty. Mountains repay us for loving them; they give such a wonderful response."

And again, in a letter to a woman-friend: " I am still thinking of our mountains, which, alas, you have never seen. You don't know what it is to look out upon flowery meadows, grassy fields, and sunbaked turf; beeches, rhododendrons, with sharp-cut circles of glacier rock standing up like a ring of fortresses round their beloved Snow-Fairy. All these things are infinite in variety, and yet they form one harmonious whole; whether the paths run from north or south, through sun or shadow, all lead to the summit, the solitary peak which melts into the sky."

Writing to her father during a journey in Switzerland, she says: " We have been making a long excursion. We left our mules at the *Lac Noir*, and climbed the *Hörnli*, the peak nearest the *Cervin*. For those who are not accustomed to it it is rather giddy work climb-

ing among these rocks, but I enjoyed it intensely. One feels lifted high above everything there, face to face with beauty itself. I never felt more refreshed by mountain air."

Geneviève's water-colours repeat the same pæans of thanksgiving, and more eloquently than any words. During more difficult excursions, and while her companions were resting, she would block in the landscape with a quick bold brush, carefully bringing out all values without unnecessary detail.

The leaves from her sketching-block give us dewy pastures, deep blue mountain lakes, harsh outlines of bare peaks, smooth, treacherous plains of snow covering the deadly crevasse beneath, and dazzling mirrors of melting ice. Geneviève set herself to reproduce with absolute fidelity all the changes which pass over the mountain hour by hour, under the blazing August sun or on misty days of autumn. The peculiar attraction of her work is its sincerity; she was always real from the days when she was quite an inexperienced beginner. All lovers of mountain solitudes will appreciate these water-colour drawings. Wonderful effects of limpid air and blue sky, new fallen snow crumbling at a breath, frozen ground crackling beneath the tread, and wooden châlet resting-places; bushy pine-trees, gentle declivities where white violets, orchids, golden mountain immortelles, dark blue gentian, and

the weird soap-wort still grow—all these are there, as well as glimpses of bare, wild mountain-tops where no flower will bloom.

And these sketches reveal something even more grandiose still; they speak of that sacred emotion which overcomes us face to face with immensity, when all that is artificial falls away from us, and in our weakness we turn to thoughts of God.

Geneviève did not make her talent an excuse for vanity. She exhibited at the *Peintres de Montagne*, but was never unduly carried away either by flattery from critics or the appreciation of friends. Her work was her joy, and she was always in admiration at what Nature showed her. She was nevertheless very severe with herself, and wrote sadly that she was far from realizing her "dream." It is worthy of note that in Geneviève's opinion no work, however finished, can rank with the first inspiration. She felt this, as we see in a letter to a woman-friend: "You wish to train chosen souls to spread their teaching. That used to be my dream too. You would like to make that élite understand where true beauty lies, and show it to the world in all simplicity as it comes from its Source. I am not methodical enough to help you. Whenever I produce some trifle a little out of the common rut, it is by a kind of side-wind which inspires my work and whirls my brush along with bewildering

rapidity. Every time I try to dissect my own ideas and bring them into some kind of order and precision, the inspiration goes. ‘The spirit bloweth whither it listeth. . . .’ It takes me and leaves me, and I find myself more often without inspiration than the reverse. Oh, how truly I can say of myself, ‘I am she who is not!’ This does me good, because it is so true.”

St. Catherine of Siena’s expression of deep humility does not astonish us from the lips of Geneviève; even at the height of her religious crisis she never forgot that every good gift is from God. She was too really intelligent not to see that her work was by no means equal to her ideal.

“A self-satisfied artist,” she writes, “is not worthy the name; the higher we go, the more we understand the distance between reality and achievement.”

But we must admit that everything in Geneviève’s case seemed against humility. It is true that her entourage was very cultivated, and consequently inclined to be critical, and the professional artists who congratulated her were discriminating in their praise; but their approval was all the more flattering. Still, devoted friends and admirers did not think it an exaggeration to tell her that her talent and gifts were quite exceptional, even going so far as to talk of “fame and glory.”

But she was not spoilt by adulation; she protested strongly against flattery, and disliked attracting notice in any way, and her humility was all the more praiseworthy under the circumstances.

She turned her success as a water-colour painter to account by giving the *Peintres de Montagne* some memorable posters representing, for the most part, mountain scenery or winter sports. Among them were ski-ing parties in a street of Chamonix, with a background of snow-capped church and frowning peaks, a band of laughing children tobogganing down a frozen slope, the Peak of the Dru and the Montausers, and the Arve flowing beneath the symmetrical curves of the old bridge overlooked by a cross, with Mont Blanc in the distance, and another view of Mont Blanc in autumn seen from Sallanches. Golden trees half conceal the steeple where the cock crows in the clear air. Among some views of Provence signed "Hennet de Goutel" in a large upright hand underlined with a horizontal bar is one of the noble old ruined *Château des Baux*, towering proudly over the Val d'Enfer, its walls illuminated by the midday sun. These posters and the sale of some of her pictures helped Geneviève materially in her charities. It would be interesting to know all she did for the poor, but it is impossible to penetrate the secrets of those who hide their

good deeds with such jealous care. We can never hope to reckon up all the material and moral wretchedness she soothed, nor describe all that she achieved by her kindly smile, her affectionate, generous hand-clasp, and her gentle words. The money earned by her brush was all spent on the health and happiness of others, and Geneviève herself was overjoyed at being able to give away more than she had ever done before.

She kept up her meetings for young work-girls and shop-hands in whom she was interested, as well as other work of the kind which one of her dearest friends had started before becoming a nun.

Geneviève was very fond of these young girls, and did not forget them between the times of meeting. When she heard anything in the way of music that particularly pleased her, she would practise it in order to play to them. She made notes of any books that might interest them, and tried to share all her pleasures with them. These quiet little Sunday meetings were full of varied interests. They included lessons in first-aid, in art, and in Gregorian chant, playing and singing, reading aloud, discussion on theories, and a light meal. The girls were invited to ask questions, and when some point arose which called for more reflection or advice, Geneviève would promise careful consideration and an answer at the next

meeting. Thus, these friendly gatherings paved the way for serious instruction, while keeping to their original purpose of recreation. Every girl there felt that Geneviève really liked her, and would give her the best advice or help to each one's individual demand. All were perfectly happy and at ease in the congenial atmosphere.

Geneviève would often play them Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata (this always touched them deeply), or César Franck's music, which they even preferred. She put her whole soul into her playing, and her best reward was to see the young faces round her bright with enthusiasm or sometimes moved to tears. Her constant endeavour was to develop a truer sense of beauty in these girls. She trained them to prefer a photograph to a chromo, a good plaster cast to a common statuette, and the simplest field flowers to the most elaborate artificial ones. When she dressed a Christmas-tree for them, Geneviève managed to make the humblest objects look pretty. She understood how to encourage skill and good taste by an occasional remark on a well-cut dress or a becoming colour.

She did her best to persuade them of the necessity of tidiness and cleanliness in their homes for their health's sake, and of the wisdom of making whatever place they lived in as restful and pleasant as possible, so that it

should be no hardship to spend any of their time there, giving them practical examples of how to effect great improvements at a trifling cost. The girls felt that no friend could have their best interests more at heart than Geneviève, and they responded to her efforts with intelligence and affection. She herself did not neglect her own intellectual pursuits, and at this time was studying Gregorian chant under Dom Poitevin in an artistic society formed for producing the best liturgical plain-song in churches lacking an adequate choir. She often went to the Benedictine chapel in the *Rue Monsieur*, where so many fervent prayers are constantly ascending to God that the very atmosphere is, so to speak, spiritualized. She had a special affection for plain-song. Referring to music as heard in parish churches (even when a great composition is well executed) Geneviève writes: "It takes up the attention without in the least elevating the mind. We can understand such music without effort, for it is quite within our capacity, makes us feel sentimental instead of really devout, and feeds our wandering imagination and the more sensuous and ignorant side of our religious emotions. This kind of music, because it makes no real demand on us, does us no practical good. Many people flatter themselves they have been praying fervently because they have listened dreamily to chanting in the warm,

incense-laden atmosphere of a lighted church, but they have got no good from such prayers, because their own sensations were what really held them captive. The stern, strange Gregorian chant, so far removed from facile soothing harmonies, seldom fails to raise the soul to great heights."

One of Geneviève's greatest joys was to dwell on the beauties of the Church's liturgy.

"I cannot forget the wonderful office of Holy Week," she writes. "The Maundy Thursday Psalms, in their infinite beauty, are the voices of the ages, rising one by one to tell us of the sufferings of Christ, in accents which are not of this world. The rhythm of their construction, like waves rolling in and out with the tide, quite overcomes me."

In the summer Geneviève became choir-mistress, organist, and conductor in her country parish, and trained the young people there to form a choir. "On August 15th," she writes from Savoy, "we are going to have a Gregorian Mass sung by the choirs (one of young men of the district and one of peasant girls), with others who are spending the summer at Les Houches. The little shepherd boys have rather a limited range, but they sing loudly and in time. I have had to interfere between two of them who were quarrel-

ling over the respective merits of the *Kyrie* and the *Sanctus* of the Mass *Cum Jubilo*. In order to bring them to reason, I had to point out that the words of the *Kyrie* did not suit the air of the *Sanctus* and *vice versa*, and that each piece was superb in its own way. At last they took it in; but I like to see such enthusiasm."

Geneviève did not allow herself much leisure in Paris. She did not care for society, and went out as little as she possibly could without giving offence. But she really enjoyed with all her heart the musical evenings which some very intimate friends of her family gave every fortnight. Famous artists performed at these parties, and the programmes were arranged with the most perfect taste. Monsieur Georges N—— writes to Geneviève: "I was quite sincere when I told you yesterday that *Les Béatitudes* was given 'for you.' . . . I owe you many good things; not the least among them is the having taught me to appreciate so deeply the work of your friend Franck, which, if unequal in parts, is unsurpassable at its best. Another pleasure you have given me is the privilege of watching you listen and feeling you understand."

Many of Geneviève's greatest friends had this pleasure, too; they watched her "listen," and they felt she "understood."

She longed to know and appreciate all things

which are really beautiful, and worked hard to this end, not only for her own sake, but that others might have all the enjoyment which her generous heart wished them to share with her.

## Chapter VII—*Literary Efforts and Correspondence*

THROUGHOUT her life Geneviève was fond of children, and they were her chief attraction among the poor. The little ones seemed to know this, and would come up to her holding out a confiding hand, or lifting up their faces to be kissed. When she saw how pale and thin the poor babies were, ripe for the hospital as are so many of the intelligent-looking but unwholesome children of the Paris slums, she would remember her beloved Savoy, and think of all the good the fresh mountain air would do them. She pictured them playing at the foot of the hills, forgetting all their sharp eyes had seen and the evil their precocious minds had already guessed at; fresh air would be their cure in every sense of the words, for the atmosphere of crowded streets is bad both physically and morally. They would learn to know Nature and forget all their sad experiences, and perhaps—who knows?—get such a love of the country that when the time came to go out into the world and earn their living they would leave the great city for ever. But here the question of expense arose. Sending these children to Savoy would take a considerable amount of money, and Geneviève wondered how she could increase the small

holiday fund started by her friends, and which had only sufficed hitherto by the greatest ingenuity and economy on their part. She thought of getting up a play to be acted by children she knew; but the difficulty was to find a piece that was interesting, and yet within the scope of such young performers.

At last, after much vain searching and reading of innumerable dull plays, it struck her that perhaps she might produce something herself. She hurriedly wrote a legend of the fifteenth century, which was played for the first time in the February of 1908, at the *Salle du Luxembourg*, and drew a large audience, attracted by the name of the authoress and the idea of a troupe of children.

That year, thanks to *Le Miracle des Fuseaux* ("The Miracle of the Bobbins"<sup>1</sup>), a hundred children made their first acquaintance with real country, and came back to Paris looking healthier than anyone had ever seen them before. It turned out that the success of the Miracle Play was not entirely due to the indulgence of a friendly audience; for when it appeared in book form it became very popular, and deservedly so, for it is charming and absolutely free from the sickly conventionality which too often spoils pieces of the kind.

Before the curtain rises, the Master of the

<sup>1</sup> *Fuseau* is said of spindles, but in lace the *bobbin* is used.—*Translator's Note.*

Revels (*Meneur de Jeu*), attired as a herald or mediæval Town-Crier, unrolls a huge parchment, and makes his announcement:

“Good people all, both simple and gentle, who have come from afar, deign to listen to this great miracle !

“Know that you are no longer in this hall, nor in the City of Paris, but in the ancient town of Bruges, on a snowy night in winter in the year of our Lord fourteen hundred and three. You will see the humble abode of a poor lace-maker who made wonderful lace in the dark for a high and powerful Princess; you shall hear how My Lady Vanity and My Lady Frivolity wrought much evil.”

The Master of the Revels is about to leave the stage, when he turns back to say :

“And you yourselves shall learn thereby a good and wholesome lesson.”

The curtain then rises and displays the home of *Gudule* the lace-maker. It is dark and poverty-stricken, and the only decoration is a statue of Our Lady with a little withered rose-tree at Her feet.

For twenty years a wonderful piece of lace intended for the young *Comtesse de Valkerke* has been there in process of working. *Gudule* has worn out her eyesight, because “for lace to be really beautiful it must be made in a dark damp atmosphere, so that the sunlight may not spoil the colour of the thread”; but she has

taught the wonderful stitch to *Trude*, her granddaughter, and handed on the bobbins to her.

The noble lady comes to see the lace-makers, being curious to see the trimming which her old waiting-maid *Ortrade* has so often described. *Trude* is absent, having gone to consult the leech about her sick child. While *Hilda de Valkerke* is impatiently awaiting her return, *Gudule* tells the young girl how long ago the Countess her mother brought a magnificent design to be copied and asked *Gudule* to do it, as no other in Bruges was capable of such work; it was to be given to the daughter of the Countess on her twenty-first birthday. The Countess is dead, but her promise still holds good. *Hilda* hardly listens to the praises of her beautiful mother, so good and pitiful to the poor; but when *Trude* comes back and shows her work, the young girl is seized with admiration at the wonderful lace, and insists that she must have it very soon for her wedding-day; when she is to be married to the *Landgrave of Hainault*. In vain do the poor women protest that they are still eight months ahead of the appointed time for finishing the lace, and that it cannot be completed in a few weeks. *Trude* has also her sick child to look after. The leech has told her that her little one wants air and sun, “and if he dwelleth here will never smile again.”

*Hilda* cares nothing for this. She promises

*Trude* one thousand French crowns, but insists on having the lace for her wedding-day; and departs leaving unhappiness behind her in the wretched home. The promised sum would mean health for the child and riches for all, but how can *Trude* work night and day, and nurse her baby and its blind grandmother without dying at her task? She resolves to do her best "with the help of God."

The second act takes place in the same room.

The blind woman is rocking the cradle while *Trude* works, but night is coming on; worn out with fatigue, and bitterly wounded by the heartlessness of the young Countess, whom she thought as good as she was beautiful, the lace-maker pushes her lace pillow away.

"My child will die," she cries in despair, "and yet there are so many children close by, all well and happy in the sunshine! What has he done, or what have we done to deserve such misery?"

*Gudule* makes no answer, but asks *Trude* to fetch the Bible and open it and read. *Trude* reads:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the land.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 2-4.

*Trude* is consoled, and rises to her feet; she hears the curfew ringing and the voice of the night-watchman in the distance, closes the air-shaft which shows that a light is burning, and returns to her bobbins. The blind woman, overcome by sleep, lets fall her distaff; the child whimpers in its cradle, and the heartbroken *Trude*, who cannot stop to rock it, continues to work and tries to sing it to sleep. The song is interrupted by tears, and she invokes Our Lady *Consolatrix Afflictorum*. A knock is heard and a voice asks for shelter. It is snowing as *Trude* opens the door, and admits a wayfaring woman enveloped in a long cloak; she gives her a seat by the fire and the last piece of bread in the trough.

The Woman is surprised to see them working so late at night; she begins to rock the cradle while the poor mother pours out all her troubles, her bobbins flying busily all the time. At last *Trude*, worn out by fatigue, falls asleep. The woman rises, lets fall her cloak, and appears clothed in light, the counterpart of the statue before which *Trude* had been praying. Our Lady invokes her Son:

“*O Toi que la nature entière  
À genoux adore et revère,  
Mon fils, mon Dieu,  
À la prière de Ta Mère  
Fais que la paix et la lumière  
Soient en ce lieu !”*

(Oh Thou, whom all the world adores,  
    My Son, My God, give heed.  
It is Thy Mother who implores,  
    For creatures in their need:  
Within this humble room to-night  
    The weary workers sleep;  
Send down Thy peace, Thy love, Thy light,  
    While angels vigil keep.)<sup>1</sup>

Our Lady summons the Angels; they enter and fill the trough with bread and rekindle the dead embers on the hearth; they cause the rose-tree to blossom, and finish the lace, while Our Lady takes the sick child in Her arms, and beneath Her gaze the blind woman recovers her sight.

Then the Master of the Revels comes on to conclude the play, and appeal to the generosity of the audience.

After being so charmingly staged, this pretty, naïve legend was in demand from all parts of the world, and it would be well if such pieces more often took the place of the insipid productions which bear as much relation to true dramatic art as vague objects do to pictures by great artists.

Emboldened by success, Geneviève went on writing, and among other plays she composed a one-act pastoral entitled *Au Pays des Cigales* ("In Grasshopper Land"), in which she begs the girls of Camargue and the Alpilles not to forsake the land of tamarisk, olive, and cricket.

<sup>1</sup> L. M. L.

Mistral, writing to her about this piece, says: "I thank you in the name of those who will come to hear you, for you write from the heart."

Geneviève always followed the guiding of her heart, and as love supplies such countless needs, those who work for love's sake will never feel their energies misplaced or wasted, however many forms they may take. Geneviève wrote some quite pretty songs with piano accompaniments for *Le Miracle des Fuseaux* and *La Dame de Ceans* ("The Lady of the House"), an episode of the Middle Ages by Jeanne de Balze. She catered for children by contriving an adaptation of *Malbrook en va-t-en Guerre*, and illustrated the old-time ditty with delightful pictures. In addition to these, Geneviève wrote and produced a Christmas fantasy in two acts called *Nuit de Cristal* ("Stars and Snow"), and a Mystery Play entitled *Les Saints Dormants* ("The Slumber of the Saints"), which was given for the first time in 1913 at the *Théâtre de L'Athénée St. Germain*.

As well as being author and impresario, Geneviève cheerfully carried nearly all the rest of the work of production on her own shoulders. With the help of one or two women-friends she designed the dresses and scenery, handling the paint-brush as gaily as the paste-pot, scissors or needle, arranging all the details of

the stage-setting, putting the chorus through rehearsals or playing accompaniments, and encouraging the timid, till by dint of tact, skill, and practical kindness, she achieved really wonderful results. Her little troupe (consisting of her younger sister, some of her friends, and a few others) well deserved the applause they got.

Her plays were also given at the *St. Germain des Prés* Mission, and the girls acted in them with great success.

"It was a beautiful trait in Geneviève's character that, richly gifted as she was, no duty was too prosaic or humble for her to fulfil. This naturally entailed much fatigue, as she took no care of herself and counted on the summer holidays for a resting-time. She writes to a telephone-girl, Mademoiselle B—— (who was on her holiday also): "It is rather a nuisance that here I am not allowed to read or write anything but letters. That is not much, especially when one is in one's room all day. I console myself by going over the past year in my mind, for I really think it was well spent. Little trifling, daily tasks seem nothing, and it is sad to have put so little of oneself into them; but when one looks back things seem better, and we can feel that we have all made some progress. However, for the time being the one thing needful is to 'slack off' a little, without, of course, letting ourselves

'go' in the sense of deterioration. We must bear in mind that the coming year will bring fresh duties and other work, and during this time of rest, when no great responsibilities are weighing on us, we must go over our 'machinery,' and do all the repairing and 'oiling' necessary, so as to get all the work out of it we can, and bring it well under control."

And truly Geneviève herself had succeeded in bringing her nature well under control. She knew the danger of illusion, and of allowing her enthusiastic disposition to aim at big achievements only, while neglecting the commonplace duties of daily life. In one of her notebooks under the heading "Resolutions against Day-dreams," she wrote: "I must never neglect the duties nearest at hand, such as mending, tidying, letter-writing, etc. When I ought to be doing these things I always seem to have an excellent excuse for putting them off; but this must not be."

She did not disdain humble and monotonous tasks, but had the wisdom to see that quiet, steady work, undertaken with humility, is of the greatest profit to the soul. In temporal as in spiritual things she was contemptuous of nothing and no one. This attitude of mind was perhaps her greatest source of strength, and explains the influence she had over so many people. In judging of a whole life or its principal characteristics, it is not enough to

look at achievements; for the best results are not always those which are seen of men, but are the fruit of unobtrusive tact and loving patience. The friends we make are a pretty good criterion of what we are worth ourselves; Geneviève made many, and friendship was the greatest happiness of her life.

Despite Geneviève's veneration for Pascal's works, she was grieved at his idea of repelling the love of creatures. To her idea the fact of loving God, instead of separating creatures, should unite them in one great family. When she was very young people were very much attracted by her cheerfulness and extreme good nature, and as she grew older and her knowledge of human misery increased, instead of loving her neighbour less, she loved him better and more effectually. She realized the terrible loneliness of many who have lost not only their faith, but all belief in their fellow-creatures, with whom they seem to have nothing further in common. Whenever she came across such cases she would hold out a helping, pitying hand.

Sometimes those who had been wounded in the battle of life shrank at first from showing their scars; but when they came to see all the loving-kindness of the heart which felt for them, they would become less hard and allow themselves to believe once more in human affection.

Not one of these ever had cause to regret

his or her trust, and this fact is rare enough to be recorded. The history of Geneviève's apostolate may be read in its entirety in her friendships. She was the pioneer showing the way to her women-friends, who had thought they could do nothing because of their position in the world. Even Geneviève's artistic gifts were not the chief factor in these friendships; it was her generous, open-hearted wish to serve her fellow-creatures. And each of us can do this if we will. People were drawn to her at first sight. Her kindness was written in her face, her welcome always sincere, her manner the right blend of charity and civility, and her conversation absolutely free from commonplace or conventionality. She used the same expressions as other women of her class and position, but in her mouth they seemed transformed into realities heard for the first time. "Speak from your soul," she writes, "and you will always be understood."

Unlike many of her contemporaries, she never posed for being an enigma. This attitude she considered as merely a convenient cloak for people who have little strength of character and less heart; and such people, unfortunately, are by no means rare. Wherever she went Geneviève made friends by her unselfishness, her genuine interest in the welfare of others, and her warm-hearted energy.

"Nothing is successful that is not a living

reality; nothing can take the place of personal initiative—that is to say, influence and example.” The shining example of an upright conscience does more good than all the reasoning and arguing in the world. Deeds done in silence are worth more than words which accomplish nothing.

Unfortunately, it is so rare to see anyone lead a truly Christian life that an example is proof as well as encouragement.

Pascal says: “I can readily believe a witness who will let himself be put to death.”

It is true he was speaking of martyrs, but every one of us is more or less of a martyr when it comes to the stern obligations of principle. The truth does not ask our life of us; on the contrary, it is the secret of supreme consolation, and gives us a foretaste of it even in this life; but truth asks the sacrifice of so many things in us that the onlooker imagines a holy life to be a prodigy. And it is a prodigy of Divine Grace, a sign of something higher in man than his own nature, a proof of that inward battle between human weakness and the sublime ideal put before us.

Many among the large congregation who listened to F. de Sertillanges in St. *Étienne-du-Mont* thought of Geneviève Hennet de Goutel as he spoke these words from the pulpit: “Nothing is successful that is not a living reality.”

Who shall say how many secrets were confided to Geneviève, how much moral anguish and bitterness she soothed, what were the hatreds she appeased, and the wounds dressed by her gentle hand, and how countless the souls she taught to know first her own human love, and then the love of God; first the fruit and then the tree; first the cooling spring and then its source !

Some little measure of the peace of God which passeth understanding is what souls crave of each other. Many were the letters she received, and no one who knew her, however slightly, was willing to let the acquaintance drop. A young girl on the point of starting for the Far East Missions writes: "I don't know whether I shall be able to write to you or not, but even if you don't hear from me *I shall never forget you.* I only knew you slightly, but enough for me *always* to remember my great friend. It does one so much good to meet an ideal character, and there are so few. . . ."

A Roumanian girl whom Geneviève met in a Swiss hotel writes: "Your empty place will make me feel miserable . . . I can't tell you how glad I am to have known you."

"I do miss you so," writes one of her poor people; "please write to me, Mademoiselle Geneviève."

"I don't often take much of a fancy to any-

one," writes a work-girl, "as I did to you. My sisters feel a real veneration for you."

And in different letters from friends such phrases as these occur:

"Your letter gave me much real joy . . . one only confides in people who can help. . . ."

"Your long, kind letter has encouraged me immensely . . . thank you for being *what you are*. . . ."

"My thoughts are always with you: you do really *understand*. . . . I want your assistance badly; I am in very great trouble. . . . Write to me—oh! do write; I must hear from you. . . ."

A girl railway-clerk says: "I am afraid I am a nuisance, but do write soon, and don't keep me waiting for a letter."

"When I am bored," writes another business girl, "which happens sometimes, I think of the days which passed so quietly, but which I shall always remember, when you stayed with us. I feel so lonely now; I can't tell anyone my real thoughts as I used to to you, Mademoiselle Geneviève; I showed you a corner of my soul that no one else has ever seen."

Geneviève answered all these letters, encouraging some of the writers, rousing others, and giving the help which each one craved. She knew when to give comfort and when to be firm, with the gentle, persuasive authority born of love.

"Who are you that you should settle beforehand whether your whole life is to be happy or not?" she writes to a thoroughly discouraged girl. "You know nothing about it; the present is all you can be certain about, and from one moment to another some quite unexpected influence may change everything. You can't foresee what may happen to you even next week, and yet in your own mind you are settling what the next forty years are to be like! You really must have a little more faith, darling. Neither happiness nor pain are anything in themselves; they are only sent to help us rise to better things. There is the flower-crowned mountain all gold and rose-colour beneath the blue sky, and there is the black rock which we climb in the pouring rain, breaking our nails as we clutch the sides; but above is the summit, and on our path there is no turning back. It leads to the ineffable Beauty for which we were created, and which we are for ever aspiring to in our thirst for eternity. That is reality; all else is but a passing shadow. What would you think of a traveller who because he was storm-beaten and nearly worn-out should settle down at the second stopping-place on his ascent, and when the guide said he must go next day in better weather should refuse and say: 'No; the weather will always be bad and I shall never reach the top; I will stay here for good. I will live out the rest of my

miserable existence between these stone walls. I would rather the weather never improved, and then I could give up the idea of moving on. . . . ?

“ . . . If you had even a little faith, darling, you would know that everything happens for the best. Out of evil comes good, only we cannot see it. Don’t you remember how we used to amuse ourselves by discussing life, trying to understand the meaning of certain events—quarrels, reparations, and the like—and how we came to the conclusion these things dovetail into each other in a really marvellous way? Of course, one only sees this on looking back, which we are sometimes too near to do. But we are too distrustful. If you would simply put your trust in God, all your troubles would vanish and be turned into joy. But you will go on calculating and making up your own mind beforehand that you are always going to be unhappy, because some particular thing you wanted does not come on the very day you expected! What a baby you are! *It is in times of darkness that the thought of light is so glorious.*”

One Christmas night Geneviève wrote: “ I feel I must tell you how I love you, and with what sort of love; for there is none better. Why are you so timid, why do you fear the light? I long so for us to live the same life, for we have been too long apart. Our separa-

tion has made me feel more than ever the depth of my affection for you, but won't you end it? Let us go together to the One who has been my Light and will be yours. If Jesus crucified is too terrible a sight for you to look at, go to the Child who makes Himself a Child for your sake, and only asks from you the simplicity and trust of little children. If you, like myself, have nothing to give Him, remember Verlaine's words and offer Him 'the blood you have not shed, the hands which have not worked for Him, and the heart He loves so dearly, although it has rejected Him.' He knows that you have nothing, yet He asks for all you have. Give Him that 'nothing' which is 'all,' for it is that which He came on earth to seek. Darling, won't you come with me and follow Him?"

"I am very pleased with your letter," she writes to a young employée; "it is so like you, and you write so frankly that I feel as if you were looking straight at me with your nice big bright eyes. I like your expression, '*The light attracts my eyes and my soul;*' that is true as well as beautiful, and we are only sent into the world to learn to draw nearer and nearer to the Source of all life. Our paths often vary; yours is smooth now, but it may lead you to labour and sorrow. What matter? When we love the light we can always reach it."

To a young girl postal clerk who confides her religious doubts and anxieties to Geneviève, she writes:

"Your affectionate, trustful letter has touched me very much; it gives me as much pain as pleasure, because, although I rejoice to think that distance is no barrier between us, I am deeply grieved that you should be suffering in the same cruel way as I once did myself. Don't mistake me, my dear girl; I do not even regret my past intellectual struggles if my experience can be of any use to you, but I think honestly that each one of us must fight the fight, so to speak, alone, by loyally working to discover the truth with a real wish to find it. We seem to take what is evidently the hardest and longest road. It would be simpler, of course, to bring forward no objections; but when once they have been threshed out and disposed of, I believe the process will be found to have been of infinite value morally. To come to the details of your letter. You speak of Darwin, and, if I understand you rightly, you are attracted by the doctrine of evolution, but it repels you as leading directly to materialism, which you detest."

After a long disquisition on this doctrine, Geneviève continues: "But now listen, dear little J——: the great danger of such studies is that you are not equal to holding your ground with a writer whose books interest you. When

his theories attract you, you accept them without reservations; when they displease you, you close the book. This is a great mistake. There is truth as well as error in almost everything (except in a book we both love)."

Going on to the objection that "the Church is the enemy of science," she concludes by saying:

"The Church says: 'Believe this or that, do such and such things, abstain from others which are bad,' and that ends the matter. Beyond this you are free to alter the conditions of your life, to make whatever wonderful discoveries you please, to dissect, to analyze, and to experiment freely. The Church is the only authority which gives the true solution of the origin of all things when scientists are unable to agree. This solution is the existence of God. The doctrines of Divine Providence and Redemption from Original Sin have nothing in them which could possibly conflict with the advancement of human knowledge. On the contrary, the more you study biology and natural science, the more you feel the absolute necessity of an infinite intelligence; the farther you go in psychology, the more clearly you understand the bearing of the doctrine of Original Sin on our inmost natures; and the longer you live, the more you see that the only logical and just solution of the social questions which divide mankind is the doctrine of re-

wards and punishments. That is a long explanation, J——, is it not? But, speaking quite sincerely, these pages are the ultimate conclusion of long years of study and pain. If they can be of any use to you, keep them by all means. If not, dear, then remember that the kingdom of heaven (that is to say, peace and joy) is promised to the meek and humble of heart, who go towards the light as little children to their mother.

“ Seek by all means, but keep an open mind, and be willing to recognize and embrace the truth. Searching for truth merely for the sake of intellectual certainty is very unprofitable; seek it for the love and knowledge of God. Pray to Him, dear! One moment’s heartfelt prayer with a real will and wish to do right is worth infinitely more than hours of sterile and vainglorious study. Don’t become a blue-stocking; they are horrible dried-up sticks, withered grain, producing nothing.

“ But seek the truth with all your soul, and follow it.”

Geneviève constantly wrote such letters as these, adapted to each one’s spiritual and intellectual needs, for she had many friends whose affection was precious to her; but she was not spared some very painful disappointments. With all her many great qualities, Geneviève had the defect (which, after all, is only a weakness) of attaching herself

too easily. Whenever she felt very much drawn to anyone, she lost all power of criticism and was easily deceived. A few lines in one of her notebooks, evidently written after she had been deeply hurt and rebuffed, show how she took such things to heart.

"Dear Lord," she exclaims, "I feel such a stranger on earth! Nothing satisfies my aspirations, and no one suits me even in mind. I am terribly lonely, and always unhappy. Is it possible people don't see what a lot of sham there is in their lives, and how mediocre they are in everything; friendship, art, social relationships, life and love?"

However, Geneviève learned a great deal from her disappointments; she became more discerning and less apt to credit everyone with as much good-feeling as herself. Her judgment matured, and in time her real friendships were solidly established and deeply rooted. It may be said that she was one of those privileged people who find this real treasure on their way through the world. If there is one sentiment in the heart of man which we cannot attempt to gauge, it is friendship. Real, true friendship, that best of God's good gifts, hides itself in the depths of the heart with more shrinking from the vulgar gaze than even love. When we have known what friendship can be, we are saddened to see how really lonely so many people are. It seems hardly kind to

flaunt before them the happiness of "two walking together who are agreed," the absolute and unrestrained confidence and union which God not only allows but safeguards, so that it may bring those kindred ones more surely to His feet.

Only those who are entirely bent on good can know the infinite sweetness of mutual help and support, of understanding and being understood, the joy of finding the one chosen friend in that secret garden whose gate opens but once, and there kneeling together in an impulse of gratitude and love to Him who has granted them so great a boon.

Many of Geneviève's friendships dated from childhood, and matured with time into solid and affectionate links with the past; but the day came at last when she found her affinity. It was to this sister-soul that she writes one evening:

"When Père Sertillanges spoke so splendidly about friendship he said it lasted far beyond the grave. I so wished you had been there, that we might have both enjoyed these lights on another world together. . . ."

She adds some more sayings of Père Sertillanges which had impressed her:

"Friendship is a mirror which increases the best part of two natures. . . . When two people are friends, each should prefer the other to himself. . . .

"Friendship should be founded on whatever is best in the nature of either friend. . . .

"I realize how true this is when I am with you. . . . This evening I felt as if the soul of Lacordaire were speaking by his (the preacher's) mouth. . . ."

But the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Geneviève's friend heard the Divine call, and nothing would have kept her back, save, perhaps, this earthly affection, which she was always to retain, but never more to enjoy. Both were torn with conflicting feelings, but Geneviève grieved the most, being the one who had no vocation and was left behind. She resigned herself, however, and had to see her friend disappear into the cloister. It was not quite like losing her by death, and if Geneviève had known then the real despair of bereavement she would have thought her suffering light; but she had never known such grief, and was quite broken down. One of her notebooks contains some lines she wrote at the time:

"Thou saidst to the multitudes, 'Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Lord, we wept, but Thou camest not. Didst Thou know what we suffered when Thou tookest away our best and dearest? Thou who art Eternal Light and Incarnate Love, even Thou didst weep at the tomb where Lazarus lay sleeping. . . . But Thou, O Christ, art God. Thou knewest that the

shadow of death is not eternal, and at Thy word joy and sunshine would illuminate the sepulchre, and yet Thou wert grieved and troubled at the death of Thy friend. What must we feel if even the Omniscient God did not disdain to weep ? O Lord, Son of the living God, look upon us and remember Lazarus !”

The absence of her friend and the almost complete severance of a correspondence which hitherto had bridged over their shortest separations were a hard ordeal for Geneviève, in spite of the peace of mind which always follows resignation. But she knew that her best remedy was forgetfulness of self, and an even greater devotion than before to the needs of others. It was borne in on her that her vocation was to nurse the sick poor, and she decided to take up this work professionally.

## Chapter VIII—*Hospital Training*

**I**N the autumn of 1913, Geneviève Hennet de Goutel put her name down at the training hospital of the *Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires* in *Les Peupliers* Square, Paris, and on November 11th of the same year started work there as a probationer.

At the end of the first day Mademoiselle Génin came to receive the new pupils, and spoke a few words to them about their duties: “A nurse must learn first of all to *obey*. She must always follow the doctor, and never *precede* him. Her watchwords must be discipline, submission, and respect for authority.”

Geneviève’s first impression of Mademoiselle Génin in her long white overall and wearing the red ribbon of a decoration was of a woman of great simplicity, quite detached from the world, of few but weighty words, and great nobility of character. This admiration and respect increased with time. As for her companions, Geneviève’s anxiety was to know whether they would really be friends of the poor. “It is right that we should think of the poor as friends,” she says; “a friend is more than a brother. ‘I have called you friends. . . .’”

It was in this spirit that she entered on her new tasks.

If she could have seen the little book called

*Le Guide du Visiteur aux pauvres,*<sup>1</sup> written by the Abbé Viollet and dedicated “to all those whom love for the poor takes the form of deeds, not words,” she would have delighted in it. The thoughts it expressed were thoroughly in agreement with her own. “Whoever does not look upon the poor as brothers, and does not try to love them with an unselfish love, will never really touch their hearts nor relieve their loneliness and poverty.”

Geneviève’s heart had always gone out to those who had found life too hard for them, and she was more than ever compassionate to those who were sick and in pain.

She followed her training with her best energies, and studied assiduously the smallest details of hygiene and asepsis in order to make sure that her nursing should be efficient. But in spite of this she never allowed her interest in her professional studies, as such, to come before the patient. One evening as she was watching the application of a *minerve*<sup>2</sup> in an interesting case of tuberculosis of the cervical vertebræ she saw that out of ten probationers who were listening to the surgeon’s explanation only one had noticed that the patient was shivering, and had thought of getting him warm again. “I hate the word ‘interesting,’ ”

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1918, by the *Bureaux de l’Assistance Educative*, Paris, 92 Rue du Moulin Vert. 1 franc.

<sup>2</sup> Technical term for head-treatment.

writes Geneviève; "interest implies an intellectual enjoyment in the sufferings of others. I can't bear the expression."

Farther on she writes with even greater intensity of feeling: "I have seen all kinds of things. . . . It is all fascinating, and horrible, splendid and cruel. . . . Everything happens too quickly; I know this must be, but it is terrible. There ought to be an extra ward where the patients could be comforted afterwards."

As such a ward does not exist, Geneviève did her best to make up for the lack. She became attached to her poor patients, although when she first began her training they were very troublesome. People get strange notions of this type of hospital, and you often hear it said that there is more snobbishness than charity in such places. This may be true of some training hospitals, but certainly not of *Les Peupliers*. The probationers were spared nothing. This is a record of some of Geneviève's work in the beginning.

"I only finished some horrible bandaging at five o'clock," she writes one evening. "The poor man had one leg completely eaten away, and the other in a very bad state. I put my whole heart into the work and tried to do my very best, but by the time that I had finished I was so tired and broken down that I cried over the awful wound. I don't know whether tears

are an antiseptic. . . . I finished the bandaging by myself, but I was thoroughly worn out. . . . I felt utterly helpless in the face of overwhelming sufferings that I could neither prevent nor cure. . . . I wonder if the poor man will sleep to-night? He assured me that he should, but I shall not be able to. . . .”

Geneviève’s experiences were not always so painful; her difficulties lessened with practice, and her literary sense revived. This is a later description:

“I have just been attending to a very funny old man. He has had a huge ulcer on his leg since the war of 1870, and it has been dressed here ever since the hospital was first opened. Certain patients are in the habit of coming regularly. They seem more or less at home, and show no impatience at being kept waiting for their turn. They issue their own instructions to the awkward little probationers (in a whisper, of course, because it is against the rules), but with all the assurance in the world. ‘Now put on a cold compress . . . empty your pail. . . . You must put on some *Lucas-Champonnière* powder, but Madame Lopez will have a compress put over it to prevent it coming off. . . . She’s very particular, is Madame Lopez,’ says the old boy, with a sly look. As she happens to be at the opposite end of the ward and can’t hear, I venture on a little conversation with him. ‘You would

make a very good instructress yourself, my man. You certainly ought to be wearing an armlet. . . .’ ‘Well, if I did I should give you a jolly good report, but that’s no good; what you want is a report from Madame Lopez.’

“He rolls out the name with subdued emphasis, like a rising crescendo in an orchestra which is intended to finish with a clash of cymbals, but has been stopped by the conductor at the ‘rest.’ Every time the name recurs, he pronounces it with the same kind of subdued excitement. Madame Lopez must have been very good to the poor man. You’ll never believe that he thinks that we do all our bandaging for the sake of passing our exams, and coming out high on the list. The poor infirm old wretch cannot realize that he is of more importance than all the rich and great men on earth, because he is sent to us by his Friend and Master, and created in the image of God. He goes off with a spotless bandage, which, compared with his trousers of indescribably dirty hue, seems almost an article of luxury. He limps out, giving me a last glance as I take my place again among the other white-clad nurses. God bless and keep him . . . he does me more good than I do him. . . .”

But Geneviève confessed that the saddest sight of all was the women who came in their “sordid poverty, dressed in loathsome rags,

with shoes down at heel, filthy underlinen, and paste pins in their greasy hair."

One may well wonder whether this dirty finery surrounding faces lined with vice and sin caused her more repugnance and instinctive horror than pity. But, on the contrary, Geneviève, in her tender compassion, would bend over these poor creatures and speak to them in her gentlest voice, never forgetting to say a few kind words as she dressed their injuries. Neither was this conception of charity a weak concession: Geneviève was under no misapprehension as to who is responsible for such a state of things. She laid the blame at the door of those whose watchword is "No God and no Master," and who have pulled down the old edifices without setting up anything in their place. She blamed the women who make a vulgar display of wealth, the Pharisees of her own sex who boast of their virtue and yet seek unwholesome excitement in low places of amusement, flaunting indecent fashions in the streets and pretending to be surprised when their dresses are copied in still more indecent form; she blamed those young girls who have time, and often money, to spare, but at any rate can always do some sort of good, and who yet go through life without a thought beyond their own future, wasting the hours, days, and years, which might be so fruitful. And this is not to say that Geneviève wanted

to upset all social conditions and suggest impossible ideals. She fully realized what a difficult problem it was, as her own very moderate words show:

“ There are no perfect conditions anywhere, and we must try and be an influence for good even amidst unsatisfactory surroundings. The world will not better itself; it is we by our tact and discretion who must try and alter what is wrong, or at any rate part of what ought not to be.”

Geneviève very much regretted that after her long day's work at the hospital it was impossible to follow up her patients. They came at irregular intervals, and then totally disappeared, and in her capacity as a mere probationer Geneviève had no means of tracing them.

“ I wonder,” she writes, “ what has become of the poor sick baby whose head was one big wound? I did so love nursing the poor little creature; I can't get him out of my thoughts; I never loved a child so much, though no one guessed it. Oh, I remember the poor little shapeless skull, covered with bleeding abscesses! Poor baby! I can still see the tiny arms, the skeleton fingers, and the old, old face, all wrinkled up with pain! I can still hear the moaning and panting when the child was too weak to cry out any longer. I did the bandaging as carefully as possible, and he seemed to

know it. The little face would relax and grow calmer, the lovely blue eyes, full of tears, would look into mine, and when he felt the relief of the soft gauze wrappings he would try to smile. . . . Oh, poor, poor little child!"

Geneviève had the maternal instinct, and that natural gift of tenderness which some childless women have and put to good account all their lives. The woman with a vocation to the cloister, the hospital, or the crèche, who prays and obtains mercy for souls, or who nurses suffering human beings, is in the truest sense a mother and a sister. The woman who lives unmarried in the world, among joys and sorrows with which she has no concern herself, helping everyone, willing to be overlooked, working for orphans, and for those who perhaps had better have been orphans, she too utilizes the gift of spiritual motherhood, which every woman may use if she will. Every suffering being is a child crying for its mother; all pain calls for consolation. . . . Yet there are women in the world who say they have no object in life, and consider themselves dispensed from every duty because they have no home or children. God is calling them to give the treasure of their love to all about them, in full measure and running over. It was this which Geneviève so thoroughly understood: without setting her face definitely against the idea of marriage, she did not wait

to be a wife before planning out a life of usefulness and work for others.

Here is another record written at the end of a day's work in hospital:

"I am thinking of the poor woman whose death I heard of the day before yesterday. When she came for the first time to the dispensary, I was quite a beginner, and was set to bandage her finger. There was not much the matter, a touch of inflammation from a pin-prick the day before, but she seemed very unhappy and in much pain. She did not by any means accept the sufferings in the spirit of a St. Theresa; she scowled at me and gave me surly answers, and went off in silence, looking very gloomy, as if she guessed what was in store. Two days after the finger was worse. Although she was put under an anæsthetic, when the lancet touched her she yelled. It was only a slight incision, but suppuration set in and went on increasing; about this time I lost sight of her for about a fortnight, as I was sent into the disinfecting-room before going to the obstetric ward. Then came the holidays, and the day I came back to the bandaging-room she was not there. When I did see her again, she was but the shadow of her former self. Her poor hand was nothing but a huge shapeless lump, as big as a child's head. It no longer bore any resemblance to a human hand, but was a mere mass of gangrened flesh, streaming

with matter and congealed blood. Inflammation had spread up to the shoulder, which was too painful to be touched. The terrible lump which, God help us ! she still spoke of as her hand had five indiarubber tubes fixed through it. Oh, my God, how terrible must be the punishments which Thy justice holds in reserve for the fortunate ones of this world, who obstinately close their eyes and ears that they may be deaf and blind to the suffering of others !

" It was ordained that the poor woman, who had already suffered so much, should endure a last martyrdom. Every week deeper and deeper incisions had to be made, and her shrieks of agony seemed to come from her very soul. The last time I saw her the hand was nothing but blood and corruption. God knows we were as careful and gentle as possible in changing the awful soaking dressings. ' Take care,' said my instructress warningly, ' it's septic; ' and, indeed, no precautions were too great, for the sake not only of the patient, but to prevent the dangerous microbe infecting others whom we had to attend to after.

" It is at such times that one realizes what a wonderful thing a nurse's life may be, with its responsibilities and its unswerving obedience to conscience, even in what may seem absurd trifles. No precautions are too trifling in infectious cases, and yet there are things we could omit which no one would ever see or

hear of. Of course, one must be prepared for such remarks as, ‘ My dear soul, if you had been in Morocco, you wouldn’t fuss so;’ or, ‘ You’ve only finished one dressing while I was doing five, and you know that counts in exams;’ and plenty more of the same kind. But there is no paltering with conscience; our only aim must be the perfect fulfilment of duty. But to return to the sick woman. I gave her her last permanganate bath, the doctors having decided to amputate, although neither she nor I knew it. When the strappings were finished, she went away with death and despair written in her face. I heard no details of the operation, because, as we had no more empty beds, she was sent to a pauper hospital, where she died three days later. She died there nursed by hirelings, among the long rows of sufferers in the dingy beds, quite alone, with no one to soothe or comfort her in her last hours. She had to take her last journey in loneliness and misery, as she had always lived. Her martyrdom was over. Oh, my God, Thou must have taken pity on her and snatched her soul from everlasting death! Perhaps she did not know Thy name; but her hand, like Thine, was pierced, and with five wounds! I remember Thy words: *Blessed are they that suffer . . . for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . .*”

Geneviève thought more of the human element in a patient than of the “ interest ”

of "the case," and saw something besides merely the suffering body. This explains the kind of nurse she was. In the March of 1914 she obtained her certificate with a most flattering mention, and when this stage was concluded she made her examination of conscience, and recorded the result.

"I did my best," she writes, "to live on good terms with all my companions, to make them like Madame X—, and especially to make them love the poor; and among them I came across several exceptional women whom I am very sorry to leave. But for the rest I can say nothing. . . . What strikes me most in so many people I meet is their dull, lifeless uniformity; they seem incapable of feeling either grief or joy, they are dead in the real sense of the word, and do not possess a single original idea, or take one single step on their own initiative. Oh, dear Lord, keep us from such; give us Thy life, and teach us to make those we love to know Thee!"

Before leaving the training hospital, Geneviève signed on with an ambulance which was pledged, in the event of war breaking out, to go straight to Verdun. This was in the March, 1914.

After her training at *Les Peupliers*, Geneviève broke down from overwork; her health had often given way from time to time, and she had warnings not to trifle with her strength.

But she paid scant attention to counsels of wisdom, having never been able to bring herself to refuse any kind of work. Her view was that "intervals of rest are only a fad, and fatigue only another word for cowardice."

For all that, in the spring of 1914 Geneviève found herself obliged to take a rest, and she spent the month of April in Mayenne with a friend. If the respite was to do her any good she could not remain idle, and must devote at least a part of her time to others; so she arranged with her friend to give the young girls of the neighbourhood a short course in first-aid. The lessons were extremely simple and practical. She spoke to them of the necessity of presence of mind in case of accident, pointed out the danger of neglecting slight injuries, impressed upon them the value of scrupulous cleanliness, and showed them how to disinfect and sterilize with the materials at their command, such as boiling water, brown or yellow soap, bleaching powder, and methylated spirits.

She taught them how to sterilize infected objects by passing them through boiling water or flames, and her lectures were listened to attentively and with much profit. On her return to Paris, Geneviève took up her usual life again, but firmly resolved to go farther into hospital training, with a view to undertaking more difficult cases. While recognizing to

the full the importance of small tasks, and never refusing her help, she felt it her duty to turn the training and experience she had had to the fullest account. So she worked hard, but without neglecting the interior life of her soul. It must have been some premonition in these early months of 1914 that urged her to deepen within herself all the moral strength she possessed, and draw even nearer to the Source of Life.

"Courage," she writes. "When I look at myself I see every reason to be discouraged, but when I look at God I see none. This means that I must think less of self and more of my aim in life, which is to be an instrument in the Divine scheme of things. This ideal should become clearer and more unmistakable every day, and everything should point to this one consummation. The rest is nothing . . . but I have still a long way to go."

Geneviève's resolutions always ended in humility, and that is, no doubt, why they always bore fruit. She was quite ready to sink her very vivid personality, and to look upon herself as a tiny wheel in the great mechanism of the Catholic Church. It was in this sense that she wrote:

" You can only develop your own personality in proportion as you are willing to spend and be spent in the service of others. The Gospel law is: 'He that findeth his life shall lose it;

and he that shall lose his life for Me, shall find it.' . . .

"We are not isolated units, but part of one great family, and we must serve our fellow-men without dividing them in thought."

## Chapter IX—*The Call*

IT was during the month of July, 1914, while Geneviève Hennet de Goutel was in the Chamonix Valley with some of her family, that she heard the first summons of war in the quiet little village of Savoy.

She felt convinced that the hour had come at last, and that France would not flinch before the long-dreaded aggression. To make quite sure of being able to join the hospital at Verdun to which she was pledged to go to at the first call to arms, Geneviève started, little knowing that she was in the last train to run between Chamonix and Paris before the mobilization.

During her journey she reflected on this opportunity of utilizing her knowledge of nursing, and thanked God that she was fully equipped for the new duties before her. She remembered how many times Verdun, the fortress town, had been besieged before its capitulation in 1870, and a voice seemed to tell her it would still hold out and that victory would crown our arms. With beating heart she thought of all these things, while practical as ever, she counted up the few indispensable objects which would make up her kit. Directly she got to the station, and before going to the Red Cross Bureau to get her marching orders, Geneviève hurried off to her father to bid him good-bye. She found him ailing, but quite

determined not to abandon his post whatever might happen. The order to mobilize was already posted up, trains no longer ran, and Geneviève realized that her father would be left alone for a long time. Her duty seemed plain; she went to the Red Cross Bureau, sent in her resignation, and Ambulance No. 14 started without Geneviève Hennet de Goutel. The sacrifice was hard. To begin the war by getting out of a promise with a special view to hostilities, to give up a post of honour, perhaps of danger, and remain passively at home while France was organizing all her resources—all this was terribly disappointing; but she did her best to hide her feelings. Her pride in the splendid behaviour of the Parisians is the only impression she records on the second day of mobilization: calm, dignified, silent heroism is in the very air.

“How many of your family have gone? Two. . . . Five of mine. . . .” Each one tries to outdo the other, and the father who has sent the most sons to the war is the proudest of all.

“Such pride, such dignity, such glorious self-control! France is on her feet; until she woke up we did not know she was such a majestic figure!”

Geneviève next tried to get work in Paris itself. She was half promised a post at the *Invalides*, but everything was filled up.

August passed in the most terrible anxiety. On the 22nd her family were to come back to Paris at last, and the same day Geneviève was sent by the Red Cross to St. Denis to open a hospital in a large house on the Boulevard Ornans, offered to the authorities by a charitable organization.

With the help of the matron whom she found there, and the latter's brother, a priest, Geneviève was able to get together the requisites for a hospital, and to extemporize something as like as possible to the working of her beloved *Peupliers*. She asked the girls of a neighbouring school to give what assistance they could, turned to account each one's capabilities and goodwill, and accepted help in the smallest trifles, so that, as everybody tried to do their best, the hospital was really ready at last. But on September 1st, just as they were expecting to receive the first batch of wounded, the Military Authorities gave orders to close the building, as it was within the danger zone.

All the hard work and willing help were wasted, but there was nothing for it but to submit. Next day Monsieur Hennet de Goutel received instructions to go into the provinces, and asked his daughter to accompany him, and, as Geneviève considered it her duty to do so, they left Paris on September 3rd. Not only was she prevented from nursing the wounded

in an exposed part of Paris, but she had to leave while the town was in danger, and people were hurrying away !

On September 3rd, 1914, she writes pouring out her troubles to a woman-friend :

“ It breaks my heart to forsake our brave Paris before such an ordeal. If even I was not to nurse the wounded, I should like to have stayed with the bereaved to comfort them . . . but Providence has willed it otherwise. I wonder what I have done that I am never left in a post of honour ? Well, we must leave it at that. Hitherto I have done my duty, and I shall continue to ; I offer all to God ; it is He who must accept or refuse me. . . . ”

At Bordeaux Geneviève tried to make herself useful by offering her services to the Red Cross, but met with an abrupt refusal. After the atmosphere of *Les Peupliers* she was painfully surprised, not because she was not taken on as a nurse, for it was only natural that there should be no more vacancies, but at receiving a rebuff when she had a right to expect something so different. Repeated disappointments of the kind, added to the strain of war anxieties, had such an effect on Geneviève that she became seriously ill, and was in bed for some weeks. During her convalescence at Arcachon she writes to a friend : “ I was rather cross at being ill ; although I have so often prayed for suffering. . . . Still, I never expected my cross would

take the form of uselessness. . . . I look at the glorious sea with mixed feelings of joy and pain; for when I think of the war all this beauty brings tears to my eyes. . . . I am quite humbly knitting socks for soldiers . . . and they are rather badly done! . . .”

Geneviève had nearly recovered by the beginning of October, when several suggestions were made to her. She was wanted in more than one direction; but not being strong enough for regular hospital work, she joined an old friend in Mayenne who had turned her house into a home for convalescent soldiers. It was here that Geneviève had given lessons in first-aid to the girls of the neighbourhood in April, 1914, and now she was going to put her own training and experience into practice for the first time by nursing wounded soldiers.

It was principally convalescents who were sent to Bois Gamast for fresh air and rest; and while looking after them Geneviève herself recovered completely.

“From my window,” she writes, “I can see them lying on the grass like the dead on the field of battle. One is looking up at the sky with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross; another has rammed his cap down over his eyes, and wrapped himself in his cape; another is curled up in a ball like a hedgehog. In a bath of sun and warm air, every muscle relaxed, and breathing in strength at every

pore, they are enjoying to the full that perfect repose of body which makes up for the tremendous strain they have undergone.

"There they lie asleep in the sun, all brothers, and yet all from different provinces. Among the latest arrivals is a handsome fair-haired Zouave, who is already looking better. He is a manly sort of fellow; he objects to being cossetted, and never comes at the appointed time for massage and fomentation. He makes up for it by doing odd jobs for everyone in the house, for he is a carpenter by trade, and has managed somehow to get hold of a box of tools. He mends the furniture, doors, and woodwork generally, and has just finished a very pretty little whatnot for the dormitory; but he is very proud and dislikes being thanked. I must confess that he is the only one of my patients who really makes me feel a little shy. I should hate him to know it, but I am afraid he does, and when I see him coming I go the other way . . . I seem to have the same effect on him. . . .

"R—— knows any amount of songs," she says of a wounded Breton. "He weeps when he sings them, but if we make some little joke or other, he bursts into a hearty laugh !

"And he is really wonderfully good to one of the men, a Breton also, a very peculiar creature, rather 'touched,' I think, and quite illiterate. I rather fear the war has given him some kind of brain shock which he will never

get rid of. R—— does all in his power to hide the peculiarities of his ‘ friend from down home.’ He writes the other man’s letters and answers for him if anyone asks a puzzling question, but without drawing attention to himself. He plays interminable games of draughts with Le B——, and it must be very boring, for the other man hardly knows how to play at all. But it is pretty to watch R—— allowing himself to be ‘ huffed’ on purpose, scratching his head in pretended perplexity when his chum takes one of the pieces which have been carefully put in his way.”

Geneviève was interested in all the details of her patients’ rather monotonous life. But although this convalescent home in the depths of the country was of real use to the men in setting them quickly on their legs again, it was too far from a town for the doctors to get backwards and forwards easily, and had to be closed. The doctor-in-charge, who had greatly appreciated Geneviève’s services, put her into communication with the head-surgeon of a military hospital then being started at Laval. The latter wanted nurses, and Geneviève agreed to go to No. 37 Hospital, which she entered on November 1st, 1914. The arrangements had only just been completed, and a great deal still remained to be done for the comfort of the wounded. Everything was most primitive; there were only straw mattresses

for the men and a general lack of necessaries, not to speak of rudimentary arrangements for disinfecting, so that it was almost impossible to carry on the work under existing conditions. But what could be done to reorganize a hospital where every bed was full? Geneviève started on the task with all her characteristic energy. Setting aside her old dislike of begging, she went from door to door asking for contributions. Both shopkeepers and householders were most generous; they could not resist the touching appeal made with simple directness and that confident trust in the goodwill of others which was one of Geneviève's greatest charms.

"It was such a dreadful journey," she would say; "they are so tired, and there isn't even a proper bed. . . . We have nowhere to put the sterilized wool; we haven't enough glass jars. . . . The surgeons are doing all in their power, but they can't afford to equip the entire hospital out of their own pockets. . . . You will help us, won't you? . . ."

They responded generously, being only too glad to help the kindly lady who thanked them with a warm hand-shake, a bright glance from her dark eyes, and a few friendly words of invitation to the hospital, that they might see for themselves what comforts their contributions had procured for the wounded.

Geneviève's friend joined her as assistant-nurse, subscribing most generously to the

hospital, and Geneviève herself contrived the most astonishing results from a trifling outlay. For instance, a friendly cheesemonger's wife having given her some small wooden packing-cases, and another shopkeeper some lathes, she had them mounted on legs, covered the tops with checked red and white oilcloth, enamelled the other parts, and made them into very convenient bed-tables. The wounded supplied the labour, and one hundred tables were turned out at the cost of half a franc each (5d.).

This was only one of Geneviève's many contrivances.

She invented an arrangement of webbing to support the patient when under the anaesthetic in the operating-theatre, and countless of her other simple and practical suggestions were helpful in cases requiring long and complicated treatment.

The hospital, with its eight hundred beds, was soon completely transformed. Geneviève's helpers were three nuns, her friend Madame de B—, her sister, and one or two nurses from Laval; and with the aid of whitewash, a plentiful use of the paste-pot, stencilling on the walls, and quantities of plants and flowers, she managed to give the old building the friendly aspect of a haven of rest and healing.

Meanwhile she was making progress in her profession. The surgeon admitted her to the

operating-theatre, and, seeing her passion for information, initiated her into many practical details which completed her training as a nurse. But Geneviève was always more interested in the patient than in the study of cases as such. Her modest ambition was to improve more and more in nursing. We have her own conception of the duties of her profession in a letter to a friend, in which she lays stress on the distinction between a born nurse and the woman who apes her. Here are the few essentials which Geneviève enumerates:

“A nurse must never permit herself to criticize her superior, whomsoever he (*sic*) may be.

“It is her duty to carry out the order she receives punctually and in silence.

“She should never speak of her own attainments, still less of things she does not understand.

“She should look upon her humbler and more painful tasks as the best part of her nursing.

“Her watchwords should be order, cleanliness, activity, punctuality, and silence.

“The patient may complain, the nurse never.

“She should respect her costume as if it were a religious habit, and love it as if it were a soldier’s uniform.

“Lastly, the great principle which sums up

the whole duty of a nurse is: Do your duty properly, and keep in the background."

Geneviève Hennet de Goutel's modesty and obedience were all the more remarkable because of her exceptional gifts, and it is not therefore surprising that all the surgeons and doctors under whom she worked should have reported her most favourably wherever she went.

The surgeon of No. 37 Hospital wrote in her testimonial book that she "worked in her modest capacity with really remarkable simplicity and obedience considering her knowledge of surgery and her real skill."

The house-doctor added that "she always fulfilled her duty as a nurse with a zeal and earnestness beyond all praise."

Geneviève had very little spare time at No. 37, but whenever she could indulge in a short rest she would go to Mayenne, and forget all her fatigue in her beloved painting.

Laval has preserved the old traditions, and for a Corpus Christi procession there Geneviève painted a large picture of the Sacred Heart, suggested by a stained-glass window by her grandfather Balze. And she did not forget to provide amusements for her wounded. Every day during the nurses' recreation hour she played and sang to them, got up choruses, and planned entertainments.

At Yuletide Geneviève and her companions

supplemented the time-honoured distributions from the Christmas-tree by a big banquet, to which were invited all the wounded who could leave their cots, as well as the medical staff of the hospital. The nurses waited on them, and Geneviève's dream of the "one great family" was realized. One of her friends wrote to her that the wounded must "worship" her. No wonder she was beloved by all; she did so much more for them than was strictly necessary, and was always thinking of some kind action. On Twelfth Night they had another entertainment, with a procession of the Kings crowned, and all kinds of amusements on Shrove Tuesday; in fact, the nurses spared no pains to make their patients happy. They decorated three hundred yards of corridor with splendid wreaths of ivy studded with red flowers and fastened together by Alsatian bows of tricolour ribbon. Of course, Geneviève had help; she could not have done all these things alone; but she was the soul of all the gaieties. These homely, happy gatherings had a touch of refinement about them which would have surprised anyone who did not know Geneviève's ways and methods. She got up singing-choruses, which she conducted herself, and even the cot cases were not forgotten, for not a day passed without her thinking of something to relieve the monotony of their long hours of pain.

This, of course, meant a very strenuous life for Geneviève, more especially as she wished to help in the training of her companions, neither of whom had had any previous hospital experience. The doctors undertook to give them a course of the theory of nursing, Geneviève undertook the practical part of their instruction, and, thanks to the goodwill and energy of both teachers and taught, they ended by turning out excellent nurses. But it would not be quite fair to say that Geneviève's hospital life was one of uninterrupted triumph and satisfaction; the very fact of her success roused occasional jealousies; her ingenious suggestions and activities sometimes got in the way of careless routine, and more than once she was misunderstood and even rather badly treated. Her patience and good-nature overcame all this in most instances, but not without very praiseworthy efforts at self-control on her part. A few lines in one of her private notebooks show her state of mind at the time:

"Injustice is perhaps the hardest of all sufferings to bear. If we can put up with it, it will be our best remedy against conceit, vanity, and pride. . . . What of that? . . . Poor soul, these lies are nothing but lies. . . . This injustice is sent to teach us a true opinion of ourselves. Did you think yourself fair-minded, perfect, a torch to light the way to others and kindle the zeal of everyone in the house,

the salt of the earth? A salt-cellar with nothing in it. . . . Now, can you look upon this injustice as really deserved? Can you accept it cheerfully? This is the moment for the ‘perfect joy’ of St. Francis. ‘Brother Leo,’ said the Saint, ‘when they shut the door in our faces after overwhelming us with insults and blows, and when we go back barefooted through the storm and the darkness, then, Brother Leo, little lamb of God, you will know the meaning of perfect joy.’”

Geneviève’s truly Franciscan soul turned both good and evil days to account, learning lessons of humility and making fresh resolves of greater and more sustained activity and energy.

But the work was getting too much for her, and when, after nine months’ uninterrupted nursing at Laval, Geneviève poisoned her finger by a slight puncture, the wound looked very unfavourable. She was obliged to take a complete rest, and, being quite incapacitated for the time being, she left Laval on July 20th, 1915, and joined her family in Savoy.

## Chapter X—*Hospital Work*

ALTHOUGH “the Land of Happiness” did not justify its name in war-time, it was certainly a place of rest and healing. Geneviève Hennet de Goutel was overjoyed at being with her relations again. Three weeks of family life in the Château de Pingou, so delightfully situated at Motte-Servolex, between Chambéry and the Lac du Bourget, did her a wonderful amount of good. Too tired to touch her brushes or even to take any of her favourite long walks, she just let herself enjoy the exquisite peace of this nook in Savoy where she meant to spend some part of her life in the future. But in September she felt stronger and wished to lose no time in answering the appeals made to her. Two very dear friends of Geneviève were at Nevers, and this circumstance induced her to accept a post in No. 5 Auxiliary Hospital, belonging to the *Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires*, which she entered on October 3rd, 1915. The large buildings of the St. Cyr institution had been given up to this Hospital, and Geneviève had charge of a ward containing thirty wounded. She lived on the premises, and seldom left them. Here she led an apparently uneventful existence, every day dressing the same kind of wounds, and going through exactly the same routine of work. But her life was monotonous

in externals only; Geneviève managed to make herself personally acquainted with each one of her patients. She asked no questions, and made no investigations, and yet after a few days seemed to know the most important thing in each man's circumstances. Her whole manner gave them confidence, and they opened their hearts freely to her consolation, advice, and sympathy.

Some of Geneviève's letters at the time show how she regarded her hospital work.

"I was sure you had not forgotten me," she writes to a telephone-girl, "but it is very pleasant to have ocular proof. Yvonne must have told you something of my work here. My life is entirely given up to the wounded; my days are spent in the happiness of helping the dying, comforting the sick, and cheering the convalescent. Indeed, it is the best life one can lead during this horrible war."

"I think, too, of the reaction afterwards, and all the reconstruction to be done! France will need all our energies! We must try our hardest to become adaptable, intelligent, capable instruments in the hands of those who work for our country's future welfare. A hospital is a good training-ground for this, and one learns all kinds of things here. . . . You were only a child when we last met, and by this time I feel sure you have developed and brought out all the promising traits in your character."

I can picture quite well to myself what you are like now. How many splendid young men are gone! Those who remain must fill the breach at home, and try to make up to our country for her losses. I say this to myself of an evening when I have had an extra hard day. If you and I were together we could have one of our old chats. Those days will come back some day, perhaps, and if not, our friendship is too firmly rooted to perish of absence. . . .”

Geneviève foresaw that perhaps the past was never to be renewed, and from 1915 to 1916 she thought constantly of death, no doubt preparing herself to be a willing sacrifice. The only person to whom she confided her inmost thoughts was a much older woman, a friend who used to talk to her in the St. Cyr Gardens in the evenings after a long, tiring day.

“I was surprised,” says Madame B——, “that such a young, vigorous creature should face the idea of death so calmly, and I said to her, ‘A young person like you has a long future before her. You must think of life; there is so much good to be done in this world.’ ‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘we are only on earth to do good! We must always try to go higher and higher. But death is not so sad; it is the full completion of life. And something tells me I shall die young. . . . It will be soon.’ . . .

“Geneviève spoke to me several times in

much the same words, but at last she saw that it astonished and depressed me, and gave it up. . . . My impression was that she kept the thought to herself, but never lost sight of it."

This premonition of the approach of death did not depress Geneviève herself. On the contrary, she was one of those who thought of it as "a night march towards the dawn." While waiting and preparing for it, she gave herself up to her work for souls and all her other duties with increasing conscientiousness and unruffled calm.

She often had to nurse very serious and anxious cases, and her work was by no means simple. She was very much attached to the matron-in-charge, and they sometimes took it in turns to nurse the same case, as we see by the following letter, in which Geneviève is careful to put her friend well in the foreground.

"One of our wounded has just died of blood-poisoning and other things which I will spare you: suffice it to say the poor corpse mortified in the course of twelve hours, and with the rapidity of lightning became a mass of liquid corruption. Neither the orderlies nor anyone else could be prevailed upon to touch it, or to enter the room where the body lay. It was then Madame B—— set an example which none of us will ever forget. Ever since that day, and though I did much less than she did, things are very different. The orderlies are

much more obedient, the sisters let me have as many flowers as I want, and even our dispenser himself arrived this morning with a bunch of roses! But all this seems a trifle compared with the battle of Verdun. . . .”

Geneviève’s moral influence over all those around her was so tactfully exercised that it seemed unconscious. She continued her rôle of peacemaker. Writing from Nevers to her sister, she says:

“There is nothing fresh to tell you about the work here, except that Mademoiselle X—— is getting much more amiable, and I am on better terms with Mademoiselle Y——. I pass my days telling each what I think it will please her to hear about the other, and this system works wonderfully well. As for Mademoiselle Z——, you would find her very changed. She shakes hands with the wounded and speaks so nicely to them! It is quite a pleasure to them now to see her come into the ward. . . .

“. . . Dear M—— is delightful as ever. You don’t know what a wonderful interest she takes, morally speaking, in the wounded. I am only too glad. I never asked her to do anything, but it seemed to come about quite naturally. . . .”

These transformations were, of course, Geneviève’s work and the result of the kindly atmosphere she always succeeded in creating

around her. But the most interesting incidents cannot be told, as they were too personal.

People often said: "She brings the best out of one, and makes one feel capable of sacrifice and ashamed of one's limitations. . . ."

The wounded were grateful for all that Geneviève did for their moral as well as their physical well-being. Not only did she nurse them with a skill and devotion that they thoroughly appreciated, but she took an interest in the smallest details of their hospital life.

"I have had the wards entirely renovated," she writes (being of opinion that the men should live amidst agreeable surroundings); "we have been in a tremendous muddle with painting, curtain-hanging, and a heap of little new arrangements. I am proud of my wards. Some nurses who have special wards will not interest themselves in anything but 'My ward' and 'My wounded'; luckily, I have managed to avoid this peculiarity, for Madame B— sends me through every ward in the hospital. So I do my best to make each one as comfortable and attractive as possible before passing on to the next. I take all the trouble, and some other nurse gets the credit, which is as it should be. I think it a good plan to put the men into pleasant and comfortable surroundings. I don't say they need luxuries, but everything, things about them should be clean and suitable,

and they should not be made to feel themselves in a dry, official atmosphere. Everything should be cheerful, home-like, and, above all, peaceful."

Farther on she says: "The *St. Ange* and *Ste. Marie* wards are charmingly arranged—almost too pretty. I have had a lot of very pretty-shaped packing-cases given me, quite small, narrow, and long, and I have had them painted *vieux-rose*. I could not resist the temptation of planting red sage in them at twenty francs a plant. This makes a pretty border, narrow and rather prim-looking, as the sage-bushes are planted at slight intervals. Everything looks spotless with fresh paint, and the brasses shine like gold."

Naturally, the wounded realized that all these changes had not happened "without hands," and Geneviève's influence made itself more and more felt, and in different ways. In a letter to her father Geneviève describes how on her birthday she was overwhelmed with presents, such as flowers from Nice, sweets, and plants; and says how touched she was by her patients' gratitude.

"This morning I had a great favour to ask of them," she says, "and that was to leave off playing at cards for money, as it was becoming rather serious, and the young boys with very little money were getting involved. Well, some men might have flatly refused and made

themselves very unpleasant, but they did nothing of the sort. ‘Mademoiselle,’ they said, ‘we shall be only too pleased to stop it, as a proof of our gratitude to you; and we give you our word it shall not occur again.’ Very nice of them, wasn’t it? I can’t express how delighted I am to be a hospital nurse! Many of the men, when once their wounds have been dressed and the ward is cleaned up, don’t know quite what to do with themselves, so Marguerite and I talk to them and try to find them occupation. The man I gave your little note to is as proud as Punch. He shows it to everyone, and thinks you are a kind of Royal Personage.”

Geneviève was always ready to give advice on matters of everyday life, but in all things pertaining to religion she was most discreet and tactful. While never refusing advice, nor refraining from giving her opinion, she kept to her resolve not to force her views on anyone. Tolerance was her strong point, and was all the more appreciated because they all felt her to be a fervent believer. Geneviève’s patients could not help seeing that only a very high ideal could make anyone so thoroughly conscientious. Her actions did more to serve the cause she had at heart than any words could have done.

“Every man in both my wards,” she writes, “has been to his Easter duties—every one of

them; and there were several cot cases to whom it meant a great effort. And I had never even said a word to them on the subject ! But they know what I believe and practise; they have a chaplain our dear Superior, who is a real saint as well as being remarkably clever . . . and there it is. Almighty God turns everything to good.”

Geneviève’s work for souls was closely bound up with her patriotism, which is but natural. Many of the wounded arrived thoroughly down-hearted and worn-out; their terrible ordeals left them as men who have been rescued from an explosion in a coal-mine and shudder at the remembrance. Many were even more shattered in mind than in body, having lost their first enthusiasm and even their faith in ultimate victory; all their original stoicism in the face of death seemed merged in horror of past experiences and dread of having to face them again. Many more, after long suffering, were longing to plunge once more into the old doubtful pleasures, which were awaiting them at the very hospital gates. Every one of these men, at some time or other, must have caught whispered words, which no hospital nurse should utter, however much she may wish to speak them: “ You have paid your debt; let others take your place now !”

Geneviève tried to keep all such temptations and all enervating forms of sympathy away from

her wards, and to replace all this by the noble spirit of the men at the front, the spirit of discipline and sacrifice so characteristic of the French soldier. And this was not from any lack of tenderness or pity for her patients, as we know from her ejaculation when the pain and anguish around her was at its height: “Oh, my God, vouchsafe to tell us the value of men’s sufferings!” Neither was it from lack of admiration, for Geneviève was very proud of the heroic impulses she discovered among the wounded.

“I am wonderfully impressed,” she writes, “by the *moral* of our Verdun wounded. This morning a little Zouave of seventeen left the hospital, having hurried through his convalescence as quickly as he could to get back to Verdun and ‘see,’ as he said, ‘how things were going on, and whether his Boches were getting sick of it!’

“All our wounded, officers, sergeants, Zouaves and infantry, say the Germans will never get through, and they try their utmost to get well enough to go back in as short a time as possible! One would think it was some great jollification they were hurrying off to, for they had not liked being in the trenches nor in the Champagne offensive. My little monkey of a Zouave (one of his lungs is not quite sound) told me he used to cough so much that his Lieutenant insisted on his going into the

ambulance. Hardly had he reached it, when a shell burst, and the Surgeon-Major was killed. My Zouave rushed back to his officer and said: "I am not going to leave you again, sir; the Major has had his head blown off."<sup>1</sup> The officer could not refuse to take him back. 'Drop your haversack, my boy,' he said, 'to-night you can march with us.' 'I was obliged to throw away my haversack,' the boy continued, 'because it was orders, but I managed without his seeing me to fill my pockets with hand-grenades to shy at the Boches whenever I came across them. They were heavier than the haversack, and afterwards I got so tired I wanted to throw them away, after all. But I stuck to them, and threw them at the dirty blighters (*les sales moineaux*), and it was jolly good fun.'

"He got here completely exhausted, and in a fortnight they had patched him up, and the brave little fellow went off in tearing high spirits!"

Geneviève often described her wonder at the heroic way the men went through the terribly painful hospital treatment necessary in some cases. If she did all in her power to keep her patients brave and willing to return to the front, it was because she felt strong enough herself to do whatever duty commanded.

<sup>1</sup> In the French he makes the pun that the Major had quite "lost his head."—*Translator's Note.*

She inspired them with confidence, because she was full of it herself; the men revived because of the unflagging energy of their nurse. They felt that her patriotism was the true kind which calls for total abnegation; they were comforted and consoled by her kindness, and her profession of faith had not made her hard and intolerant. Geneviève united all these things in herself, and made her noble influence felt, not only while nursing in the hospital, but long after the wounded had left.

“Mademoiselle,” writes a Territorial of the 35th, “I will give your new address to old Prosper, and I am sure he will be very glad to have news of his little nurse; we are all so proud of her, and write home about her.”

“Oh, Mademoiselle,” writes an infantryman from Dauphiné, “I can never forget you, whether I am at the dépôt or at the front.”

“I am just going back to the ‘beano’” (*la danse*), writes a man in the Engineers, “and I am not sorry, for things here are very dull. I had a game leg (*une patte amochée*), and you mended it; I must say you did your work well, for I feel no pain now. Apart from a few twinges when the weather changes, I am almost as chirpy as before the war. So I don’t fash myself, and when it’s time to get into my death-dodger kit (*mon costume de trompe la mort*) I shall trot off gaily to the shop.”

"Mademoiselle Geneviève," writes another, "I take away with me an unforgettable recollection of you."

"I should be so pleased," writes an Overseas soldier, "to have a few lines from you, Mademoiselle Geneviève. I am back at the front and with my old regiment again, on a machine-gun. I can't carry a haversack any more, but that does not prevent me being here, and I hope to do my duty in the firing-line as a soldier and a Christian, Mademoiselle Geneviève."

In November, 1915, a very seriously wounded soldier of the 74th Infantry Regiment was sent to Nevers, and brought into Geneviève's ward. When he had been a short time in No. 5 Hospital he wrote to his comrades at the front such a description of his nurse that they were emboldened to write to her as follows:

*"To our wonderful Sister-in-arms.*

"MADEMOISELLE, (for I imagine you are a spinster, and as good as you are beautiful), this is a supplication from us three 'poilus,' fellow-soldiers of dear old Charles P——.

"Here goes: We shall be most grateful if you will look after him as if he were your big brother, and talk to him sometimes about us, to console him for having had to leave us behind in the furnace. As you may have discovered, it will not be difficult, but everyone has not

got the knack of saying kind and consoling things. Mademoiselle, that is why we thought you would undertake this little matter for our dear comrade, and I know that as a brave Frenchwoman you will make it your business to do what we ask. We beg you, Mademoiselle, to accept our profound gratitude and thanks.

“Your three devoted ‘poilus’,  
“PAUL P——, RENÉ D——, GEORGES L——.”

The soldier whose friends pleaded his cause so warmly wrote later on to Geneviève himself:

“MADEMOISELLE,

“It is true that I was anxious at not hearing from you, but the terrible battle of Verdun was enough to explain your silence, and I did not even think you had forgotten me. I can well believe that you have a lot of work, with so many wounded and so few orderlies and nurses. A word of advice: take a rest, but not too often. Yes, my dear nurse, the brave soldiers of Verdun are indeed praiseworthy, and their patriotism is beyond everything. I am glad you have some of them, because you know how to comfort and compliment them, and to soothe their terrible sufferings. I am very touched that you express your beautiful thoughts to me on their great sacrifices. Now I am very much afraid that I can make no more of these sacrifices, but shall have to go with the guns, which never seemed to me so much a

duty as a matter of conscience. To-day I am in great pain. Oh, how I should like to see our beautiful ward again; it was Paradise to me! Mother's chocolate is very nice, but yours is quite as good. Oh, dear Mademoiselle Geneviève, there are some generous people in the world, but very few, and we must make much of them when we meet them."

The same man writes to her in 1916:

"MADEMOISELLE,

"I have asked to go back; I could not go before because my knee was so terribly painful, and I am still not quite well. Well, Saturday I must see about going off to join my dear brothers-in-arms, whom you know. I was very glad, in one way, to have seen for myself how unpatriotic some soldiers and civilians are. Many others are doing their best to gain laurels in this war of slaughter, but I must tell you that these people rouse me to action. I pointed out to them how infamous their behaviour was in these terrible circumstances. But they are mean-spirited fellows, and did not respond to my appeal. A few days ago I got my first 'mention in dispatches.' You can imagine the joy of my dear father and mother. Poor souls, I am leaving them for the third time. I pity them; they are so fond of me. But, my dear nurse, I must bestir myself to do what I can. I can

hear you speak to me like a mother, and say approvingly, ‘Yes, go; it is your duty.’

“Perhaps I shall come back to you with a wound, and have the joy and happiness of being nursed by you again.”

Through the pathetic clumsiness of some of these letters we can feel all that was meant and could not be better expressed, and we can guess at the heartfelt gratitude of the writers. They knew what a sincere interest Geneviève took in them, and were more grateful for that than even for the absolute nursing. Her way of arranging flowers near their beds; her attentive attitude when they had anything to say; the interest she took in all their projects for the future; her admiration for the soldiers at the front; her parting words; the meals she sent them to partake of in her parents’ house as they went through Paris; and the latters’ kindness to the soldiers discharged from hospital—all these things made a deep impression on men rough and coarse in externals only. It is no exaggeration to say (as so many of them declared) that a letter or card from Geneviève gave more pleasure than even her generously-filled parcels. Their one cry was, “Mademoiselle, we shall never forget you.”

## Chapter XI—*More Letters—An Interval*

ALTHOUGH the life of a hospital nurse fully satisfied all Geneviève's longings to serve her fellow-creatures, yet it called for very great sacrifices, and separated her completely from her family, her former interests, and her art. But hers was a nature which never utterly forsakes early attractions even for the most pressing needs of the moment. Whenever she had a spare interval Geneviève betook herself to her painting, and revelled in the joy of colour, which is perhaps incomprehensible to those who have not received the great gift of such appreciation.

"I am as wholly possessed by a sense of colour," writes Geneviève, "as I am by harmonies: colour never leaves me indifferent, and gives me perhaps the keenest of all the sensations which move me in spite of myself. Why are my eyes never tired of blue? It seems as necessary to me as the bread I eat or the air I breathe. I love every shade of blue. . . . Other colours appeal to me in beautiful symphonies, but I look upon them only as accessories, and quite secondary to blue. I am never tired of deep blue . . . perhaps because it is the colour of the sky, of those depths which the eye can follow so far. Oh, my

Sister Light, how much nearer art thou than most men believe! Knowledge and poetry, light and music, my greatest joys, you should give yourselves to the poor unhappy wayfarers on the road of life, to those who weep and suffer, who love no man and are beloved of none. . . . And as all beauty is but the shadow of God, the poor wayfarer is more than this: God Himself often comes to us in His image."

One of Geneviève's greatest regrets was having been obliged to leave the young girls whom she had so enjoyed looking after in Paris. Several of them had been very promising subjects, intelligent, hard-working, and thoroughly determined to lead good and useful lives. Geneviève had hoped that these particular girls would cultivate their intellectual and spiritual side sufficiently to become in their turn "centres," and by rallying their companions round them produce fruitful results for good. It was a great wrench to leave them. She kept up a separate correspondence with each, so as not to lose contact with their souls, and she united her prayers and efforts with theirs. None of them forgot her. "Oh, Mademoiselle Geneviève," writes a factory girl, "do write and tell us a little about your work. The Moonlight Sonata seems far away now. We must think of our country!"

Another writes: "Dear Mademoiselle Geneviève, I was so delighted to get your letter.

I have been out of work for the last fortnight, so I came down to my grandfather, but it is very dull here in the country. I like it all the same. When I go for a walk in the forest I think of the dear Sonata, and when I get depressed I sing *Sambre et Meuse* to myself, and then it seems as if things must go right!"

"I miss you sadly, Mademoiselle," writes another, "but in spite of all, the dear Sonata comes into my mind and comforts me . . . I can hear it still. . . ."

"Mademoiselle Geneviève," writes another, "your letter gave me the very greatest pleasure. How could I ever forget you, after your devoted kindness? . . . You behaved like a sister to me. . . ."

"When I see you again," writes another, "you won't wait to be asked, will you, but play some of your enchanting things. Oh for one hour of music! I dream of your music! . . ."

Geneviève answered all these letters, saying a great deal about her patients and very little about herself, and impressing on each of the girls that duty in time of war consists in doing our daily work even better than usual, and being united in spirit with those who have to fight. She inspired them with her own optimism, and consoled them at the same time. Nearly every letter brought her some sad news. Forgetful of fatigue, Geneviève would write in the evenings or at night, and her heart

bled for those who were too far off for her to go and comfort. Instinctively she hit upon the right thing to say; her words brought strength; her sympathy, however sweet, was never enervating, and she pointed out the royal way of the Cross. As St. Bernard said of Our Lady, they had “ recourse to her.”

Geneviève would answer their appeal by speaking of God tenderly and lovingly, without narrow-mindedness, yet without sickly sentimentality. The large, thin sheets covered by her firm, clear handwriting brought a vision of hope and a promise of peace to many a breaking heart. The good this affectionate correspondence did cannot be estimated. A young railway employée sent her a despairing letter, ending with the words “Do write to me, Mademoiselle Geneviève; I am ‘one of the wounded’ too!” and Geneviève answers as follows:

“I have just this moment received the sad letter in which you tell me of your great sorrow. Indeed, I fully understand and share your grief! What a terrible time you have been through! The loss of those we love is cruel; they seem still to be near us, it is true, but our poor hearts are so near earth that we want to have the bodies of our loved ones as well as their souls! . . . It is sad indeed to think I cannot go to you just now, and give you proof of my warm and tender affection. It would

have been such a happiness to me, but you know I am on duty here, and have so much to do and such responsibilities that I hardly ever leave the hospital at all. You must be brave, dear. You see, our generation has been chosen for the redemption of France—the men by the shedding of their blood, and the women by their devotion; we have all got to suffer, and fix our hope on the world to come. Still, that does not mean that we must refrain from active life here. France needs all our energies and the best of our strength and capabilities. We have been chosen, and we must be worthy of our mission. Don't give way to your grief, my dear little A——: that would only weaken you; but carry it upright like a flag. I, too, have lost a very dear friend. So we will both ask our heroes to inspire us with a little of their courage, so that we also may be worthy to suffer for France."

"Dearest friend," writes Geneviève to the same correspondent, "your letter is very sad, and you sound very discouraged! I should like to be near you, to rouse you by my friendship. When I think of your ordeal, my mind recalls another grief akin to yours, which shattered my life just when it was fullest of earthly hope and joy. My wound reopens, and I mingle my tears with yours. You weep for yourself and your lost happiness. . . . Will you believe me if I say that I am glad, in a

sense, of your trial. Do you see my meaning, and can you believe my friendship reaches such heights? I remember my own sorrow, and how I thought it would kill me by slow degrees without anyone on earth guessing the cause. Instead of that it has helped me to live, and in spite of many cares and anxieties my life is full of peace: I only wish I could communicate it to you, so infinite it is. I thought of you just lately when I was reading these words: ‘It is the most affectionate natures who always seem doomed to be deprived of love.’ Nothing can be truer, and the meaning is that perhaps we have too much affection in us to be given to one person only, and God knows this, and will not allow us to linger too long on the ‘smiling plain’ when we have strength to climb up higher. He does not wish to deprive us of love altogether; on the contrary, He wants us to pour it out as long as we have the breath of life, and give it with both hands to those who need it, without stopping to count the cost. He will make the balance even, and the more people we find to love, the more He will expand our hearts. Don’t let your grief bear no fruit, my dearest; it is meant to raise and ennable you. Turn your eyes away from self and look your sorrow in the face; then let yourself go, and put no limits to your affection and kindness to others. . . . Go to children, to the sick and suffering, and you will see—

or rather you will not see what peace and beauty will shine out from your soul. . . . You will not see this, but others will feel it. I will pray to your little saint to give you courage, and then, A——, whatever happens, you must try and become a saint too. Nothing else can make you happy. Forgive me for speaking to you so unreservedly and telling you things which may perhaps rather astonish you. My friendship prompts them."

To the same: "Your letter is very sad, and grieves me very much! Don't say I am better than you—far from it; perhaps I have suffered more and longer, but that is all the difference. Be that as it may, God gives to each one of us the strength we need. We are but poor creatures at the best, I suppose, and suffering must be essential to us! But, my dear A——, we must bear our sorrows bravely and with proper pride, not dwelling on them too much. What would you say to a soldier who exhausted his store of strength by constantly examining his wound? Rouse yourself, I implore of you, A——, and do not look back, but go forward. Do try to interest yourself in something outside your work. Read, or take up some object in life. I don't know X——, but one thing I do know, and that is that God in His infinite mercy has put the remedy beside the disease in all things, and that if you try and find a cure for your troubles you will not

have to seek the remedy; it will come of itself. I tell you this as a certainty, and you have my full permission to remind me of my words if at some future time I write and tell you that I am unhappy myself. Believe me, the happiness I have found in tending the poor and nursing the most horrible wounds is beyond expression. Don't say that you have nothing left. It is unfair to those who love you so dearly and whom you love. One sort of happiness has gone out of your life, but I believe that if we could realize how much grief detaches us from everything unworthy and imperceptibly helps us to rise, we should welcome our sorrow as a sister. Let the clouds roll by, and you will understand as those do who 'go towards the truth with all their soul.' (You do not forget the old motto which first united us in friendship, although we were at the opposite ends of France?) I shall no longer complain of my own sorrows if they help me to understand yours, and be of some comfort to you !

"I will pray for you as much as I can. . . ."

To the same: "We are no longer very far apart. I have been a hospital nurse at Nevers for the last three months, which have passed like magic. I don't say I am happy; I am *more* than happy. I have so many to love, and that is one of the conditions of happiness. Perhaps you don't know how much apparent monotony

and routine there are in a nurse's life. It needs a constant effort to go through the same duties day after day, but, on the other hand, one has wonderful experiences with the wounded. Some of the men have such beautiful natures, so utterly oblivious of self . . . I am often amazed at their marvellous patience . . . I have never heard one single word of complaint. After all, what are our little worries and annoyances compared to their terrible sufferings or the loss of their limbs ? I often think of that. Thank you for prayers; the most unattractive work always seems easy to me. May God take our lives and do with them what He wills for the good of France; that is my daily prayer!"

As time went on, Geneviève's interior life grew more and more intense. Every morning early, before going on duty, and in spite of being often called up at night, she went to Mass and Holy Communion in the Chapel of the St. Cyr Hospital. Her morning meditation gave her strength to go through her day's work down to the smallest detail, and sometimes it needed all her patience to bear with the excuses of those nurses who insisted on "choosing" what was to be their share of the duty; so that when it was rumoured that all the nurses, without exception, were to receive salaries, Geneviève, instead of being indignant, wrote as follows to her sister:

"I am not sorry, for now we shall have only

those who have a real vocation. This will put an end to snobbishness, and weed out the society ladies, and ‘humble work’ will no longer be able to boast even of being voluntary.” “Humble work” is the only expression which describes what Geneviève was really doing in the hospital, as all agreed who saw her.

She wrote again from Nevers saying: “Our little trio is known as the Nurses of the Wooden Cross. ‘Doing anything for the Wooden Cross’ means undertaking whatever is tiresome, monotonous, and fatiguing, without calling attention to ourselves.” But too many “fatiguing things” end in the long run by wearing out the worker, and in spite of Geneviève having declared herself only pleasantly tired, she fell ill. Her companions nursed her with hearty goodwill; they brought her flowers and books, and were full of kind attentions. Her cubicle had a blackboard in it, on which Geneviève asked each of her nurses to write down a thought as they came in.

“The blackboard pleases everyone,” she wrote to her mother. “The last sentences on it were these:

“‘Suffering passes, its effect remains.’

“‘The more an object resembles an idea, an idea a soul, and a soul God, the more beautiful it is.’

“Don’t you think it a nice idea? In this

way my friends leave something for me to remember them by."

Perhaps Geneviève thought of this very original idea with the practical object of keeping away visitors who had so little memory or natural intelligence that they could not think of a sentence to write down. Having finished the rest-cure, as well as having prayed with "persistent importunity," Geneviève took up her work again. But after another year of nursing a change of air seemed absolutely necessary. A kind offer from Switzerland to nurses in need of rest was received at St. Cyr, and Geneviève was induced, not without regret, to leave. The matron decided that it was indispensable that she should take this chance, and she left in July, 1916.

Her reception at Geneva touched her very much. Parties of Boy Scouts seized on the luggage, while kind words of welcome were exchanged. On the way to the station buffet, a young Swiss woman came up to Geneviève and said impulsively: "You and your country have indeed suffered much; we want to make you forget your troubles for the three weeks you are here."

When the French nurses passed through Montreux every head was uncovered. Zermatt was their destination, and here they were to be entertained by Dr. A. Seiler, the owner of several fine hotels, and he and his daughter

received them with the greatest kindness. Monsieur Seiler said they were expected at the Hôtel Victoria, but that if they preferred the Ruffel Alp or any other spot rooms should be placed at their disposal there. Geneviève rejoiced to think all this kindness was so much homage paid to Frenchwomen. She was always anxious to do her best for her country, and show herself a worthy representative of France wherever she might be. The Prince-Consort of Holland, as President of the Dutch Red Cross, signified his wish to call upon the French nurses, and Geneviève learned from him some interesting details of the prisoners of war interned in Holland.

Her delight at being once more among mountains was very great, and she began to feel how much she had needed the change and rest. But nothing could make her forget all she had left across the frontier, and she wrote to her sister:

“I must confess that in spite of this most wonderful mountain air I am rather home-sick, and can think of nothing but France. It is no longer possible to feel as completely absorbed by the beauties of Nature as I used to be. I am leading a very quiet life, drawing and painting all day. I prefer to walk as little as possible, as I am here for my health. If I had no need to take care of myself, you may imagine what mountain expeditions I should have had !

But even here, and perhaps here more especially, I must not forget I am a hospital nurse sent to recover my strength. Yesterday was the 14th of July. We marked the day by having a festival in the evening with the French prisoners. They had decorated their houses with flags, hung green garlands right across the road, and put up primitive transparencies with inscriptions of '*Vive la France!*' It was simple, but most pathetic. The background was a narrow street of dark, velvety-looking châtel. In the evening they illuminated their houses and invited their nurses to a concert which they had got up, Monsieur Seiler having lent them a hall and an orchestra. It was filled to overflowing with soldiers and Swiss peasants—the men in broad hats, and the women with red handkerchiefs on their heads. No strangers were invited, and Monsieur and Madame Seiler presided over what was just like a family festival. All present sang the *Marseillaise* and the Swiss Hymn. It was most touching, and brought tears to my eyes. After this came a speech from an interned Captain, of which every word went home. Then followed more music and songs. I shall never forget this 14th of July. To-night the French flag is flying over the hotel in our honour."

While at Zermatt, Geneviève received many letters from her patients, all regretting her

absence, but expressing great satisfaction that she was taking a rest. During her short absence she received one letter in particular of formidable dimensions, ornamented with dried flowers, and ending as follows, after copious details concerning the health of the writer and his friends:

“As for G—— and myself, I don’t really know how to express our gratitude, or our edification at seeing you devote yourself so generously to the service of the wounded, who are often so difficult to manage, and so ungrateful. We are not like that, Mademoiselle, as I hope you know. We feel immensely grateful for all your kindness and care. Your big babies send you affectionate greetings.”

(Here follow twelve signatures.)

Geneviève carried away delightful memories of her Swiss visit. Everywhere she had met with the kindest of welcomes, besides making a new and most valuable friend in the person of Mademoiselle des G——, a native of Geneva, whose great intelligence and warm heart had attracted Geneviève at once.

In the beginning of August, 1916, Geneviève returned to Nevers completely recovered.

## Chapter XII—*The Journey Begins and Ends*

IT was a real joy to Geneviève Hennet de Goutel to go back to the work which she had so much regretted leaving. But towards the middle of September, at the very moment when she was being offered the part of matron at her beloved St. Cyr Hospital, a far more difficult task presented itself. Roumania declared war on Austria-Hungary on August 27th, and a few days later the *Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires* asked Geneviève to join a detachment of the Red Cross which the Society was sending to Bucharest. The question of Roumania joining the war had often been discussed between her and two of her dearest friends, Roumanians by birth and French in sympathy, the same ladies who had induced her to come to St. Cyr. The Marquise de Belloy, wife of the French Naval Attaché at Bucharest, and her daughter told Geneviève how very useful she could be in training Roumanian nurses and working with them in hospital arrangements. Both these ladies, when they left Nevers at the beginning of the summer of 1916, foresaw

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Grierul is Roumanian for cricket (*grillon* in French). Mamaliga is a national Roumanian dish of a cereal nature. Cercetas is a Roumanian word explained by the text (see p. 166 et seq.).—Translator's Note.

that the declaration of war could not be postponed much longer.

Geneviève had long loved and studied Roumania, that Latin sister-country who seems placed as a sentinel on the outposts of our civilization in the Far East. She knew that in 1914 the Roumanian statesmen, the mouth-pieces of the will of the people, had refused to join the Central Empires, who called upon them to fulfil a personal treaty of alliance signed by King Carol.

Roumanian neutrality had grown more and more benevolent since the accession of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie, and was bound to end in an alliance. Although with the example of Belgium before her, and seeing plainly all possible dangers, Roumania unhesitatingly declared herself in favour of the Allies when the right moment arrived. All France rejoiced at what seemed a presage of approaching victory. Roumania brought her full power into the war, and the French owed her all the help they could spare.

This was what Geneviève Hennet de Goutel felt when she received the proposal from the Red Cross simultaneously with letters from her friends begging her to come to Bucharest. She immediately sent word to her parents asking their permission to go, and ending a long letter (in which she described all her plans to her father) as follows:

"Perhaps you think I am writing to you as if I were a boy. It is very lucky that I have something masculine in my character, for after the war, when the whole world is being reconstructed, I shall get along all the better for it, and no one seems to have any too much energy left even now. Good-bye, darling papa; I send you heartfelt kisses. It is no use having the blood of 1870 in one's veins; we need the blood of 1918: it is stronger and more victorious."

Geneviève's parents gave their consent, which was most unselfish of them, for by that time it seemed certain that Roumania would have hard trials to face. It was understood that she should leave with the second Red Cross detachment in December, so as to spend some little time beforehand with her family. At the end of September she joined her parents in Burgundy, but while there a telegram arrived from the Red Cross asking Geneviève to replace a nurse in the first detachment. She accepted at once, sacrificing to this unexpected call of duty the time she had looked forward to spending at home, all the more precious because of the coming separation. She left Burgundy and went to Nevers, where she took a hurried farewell of her friends; went thence to Paris, where she spent forty-eight hours with her assembled relations; and on the morning of October 4th, 1916, left by

the Boulogne express with the other members of the French Medical Mission to Roumania.

Her friends and relations saw her off from the platform of the *Gare du Nord* with brave and smiling faces, hiding the grief at their hearts. A farewell waved through the carriage-window, one last look from tear-dimmed eyes, and the train started. . . . Three out of the little groups, a doctor and two nurses, were destined never to return.

Geneviève sat for a few moments in her compartment absorbed in thought, and then at once began the diary she had promised to send home:

"October 4th, 1916.—We have left Paris. Dear faces seen in a last glimpse through the carriage-window, I can still see and almost touch you, and already we are parted ! We are in two different worlds, but how dear are those one leaves behind ! My thoughts go back to Nevers, when I began my farewells; Nevers, with its wonderful hospital life, and all my cherished recollections of friends working together in war-time; then comes my good-bye to Paris, and deeper memories still; childhood and youth, and loved ones of the past. I try to carry away every detail of their faces, and keep my eyes wide open till the train starts. . . . But a mist comes over them . . . and I can see no more. . . .

"Now we have really started; we are leaving France to undertake a strenuous task, and we

must brace ourselves to the work, resolved to be calm and steadfast whatever we may have to face. We are travelling in comfort, and beginning to get acquainted. We number fifteen people, all strangers to each other but soon to become friends united by a common bond of nationality and a corporate effort of well-doing. This little detachment is the Red Cross Mission, a miniature France. May God protect us and our Mother-Country !

"Several of the nurses describe episodes of their campaigns. Heroism comes naturally to them, and they look at you with the same air of surprise as the *poilus* if you mention their decorations. 'The *Croix de Guerre*—well, really I don't know why I got it! . . .' To hear them you would think it came by the merest chance."

The French War Office sent Surgeon-Majors Clunet, Sorrel, and Moune, as well as an assistant, Dr. Ripert, with this detachment. The *Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires* put the Comte d'Harcourt and the Marquis de Clapiers in charge of the Mission, and the following were the nurses:

Mademoiselle Reboulet (*Croix de Guerre*—Serbian Retreat and Salonika).

Mademoiselle Renaudin (late matron of an important hospital in Marseilles).

Mademoiselle Chabanas and Tabourin (*Croix de Guerre*—French front).

Madame de Bouchaud de Bussy, Mademoiselle Flippes, Madame Clunet (who accompanied her husband), and Geneviève Hennet de Goutel.

The Comte du Chaffault, late of the Mountain Infantry, and invalided out of the war after a severe wound, accompanied the Mission as X-ray operator.

The first halt on the journey allowed of a pilgrimage to *Notre Dame de Boulogne*. Geneviève says in her diary: "All the houses in Boulogne are grey, and all the men in khaki—that is to say, all English. They are clean and well-groomed, and remind one of comfortable brown-leather travelling-bags, well fitted with cutlery. But oh for a sight of my dear old *poilus* on leave from the front with a beard of a fortnight's growth, and up to the eyes in that glorious grey mud! Shall I ever see you again, throwing down your haversacks in hospital, with that weary gesture which tells so much? My *poilus* on the dear soil of France, you are what I shall miss most! You are humble, and obscure; I know you have your faults, and that not one of you can resist his *litre de pinard*, but the smart khaki soldiers are not ours, and all my heart goes out to you. Race instinct is a mighty force! . . .

"Pilgrimage of the Mission to Our Lady of Boulogne. We ask Her protection, and pray to Her like poor fishermen's wives. Her statue is on a boat, and indeed She,

who is Star of the Sea, will guide us on our way.

"How much simpler and nearer to the heart of the people we are when we have left behind us the artificial standards of worldly life and are preparing for a struggle! . . ."

The detachment then proceeded to the railway-station, and received the salute of the Governor, before embarking on a British transport.

"When we see our dearly beloved France again," says Geneviève, recording her first sensation of exile, "she will be free. . . . Meanwhile, we are going where we shall make her bravery and her generosity better known. France, with her great heart, is like the Gospel widow who gave a last mite without thought of self."

The Mission landed at Folkestone, and reached London the same evening. Next day, while the Comte d'Harcourt was seeing to their passports, the little party of travellers hurried off to Westminster.

"Westminster seems the essence of English history," writes Geneviève, "and tells the story of the ancient and noble race, with its great contrasts to our own. We Frenchwomen all feel alike in the presence of these countless masterpieces incrusted like shells in Gothic tracery. All is sombre and grandiose, thickly crowded together like a forest of tree-trunks.

Gothic art, so pure and luminous, and so expressive in its harmony when seen through a French medium, seems here to wear an air of icy sternness and grim terror. As one feels this cold thrill, one compares Westminster with Chartres, Rheims, or our adorably sunny Provençal monasteries. The English are a strange people! They are very practical, but with a pronounced taste for the lugubrious, and absolutely no sense of humour. Their police are dressed as undertakers, their beadles and the men on guard at the Palace look as if they had stepped out of some alarming fairy-tale! At last I understand the heroes of Dickens; we kept meeting shadowy, pale, clean-shaven men, who looked as if they lived in haunted houses. Oh for the sunshine of France! Happily we have brought some with us and it is a pleasure to look at our fellow-travellers."

Although the London visit was very interesting, they made haste to leave as soon as their passports had been examined and passed. As the train took them through the English country, the travellers had tea, and it was borne in upon them that the news from Roumania was anything but good.

"If we can't open a hospital at Bucharest, we must have one at Odessa or elsewhere," writes Geneviève philosophically; "it doesn't matter where we unpack our cases, and the weather has time to improve before we get

to our destination. We amuse ourselves in different ways in each of the Red Cross compartments. In Madame de Clapier's they are singing Provençal songs, in the adjoining one bridge is going on, and I am writing as hard as I can. This is the best hour of the day, when one sums up one's impressions. I should like to write such lots of affectionate things on these little sheets of paper that are going home to be read, perhaps more than once, by *Papa* and *Maman*. . . . I can't put all I feel, because some things are too deep for words."

The Mission reached Newcastle and took ship for Norway. Thirty-four hours of bad weather in the North Sea, with the perpetual menace of submarines, was a long ordeal. Then came a short stoppage at Bergen, and the travellers left on October 11th for Haporanda, on the Gulf of Finland, where they arrived on the 13th. The train was very comfortable, and they passed through "endless forests of birch and pine, broken only by glimpses of great, still lakes and black torrents." The gentle undulations of Sweden succeeded the Norwegian mountains, but the Mission was in a hurry now, and did not stop at either Stockholm or Christiania. After crossing the arm of the sea which separates Lapland from Russia, two more days in a sleeping-car brought them to Petrograd, where the French colony welcomed them warmly. Geneviève's artistic

soul was stirred by the beauty of the Russian capital.

"At Petrograd," she writes, "all the minarets are gilded; this evening the sky is intensely blue and the atmosphere pure as crystal. Madame de Robien suggested going up into the dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral. We were not daunted by the idea of the five hundred steps, so behold the five Red Cross nurses going single file up a very dark little staircase, by the light of a curious lantern, held by a quaint-looking *moujik* whose speech is more peculiar still. I think he was afraid I would knock my head. It was a wonderful experience to look through the gigantic porphyry columns, and see the immense expanse of sky lit up by the rays of the sun as it sank into a sea of fire. Gold reflections were glinting in every direction, long shafts of light rested on the Neva and all its canals, and especially on the lovely gold steeples which stood up out of the dull red of the city at our feet. . . . The steeple is the symbol of prayer, and dominates us in every corner of Europe, a landmark to our souls. They rise before our eyes, and we find our way and follow it. . . . The shadows of the immense city are beginning to turn blue, and the golden points emerge and seem to float overhead in the sky. It is all so beautiful one can hardly turn away; the soul of the Slav is revealed in this Oriental colouring as it gradu-

ally sinks into darkness. I don't mind whether I know the name of this or that monument in the distance. . . . What I love is light; and this evening Petrograd looks like some great golden *ikon* enamelled in myriad colours by the last beams of the setting sun. . . . Dusk is falling and we go down.

"We go into another church the name of which I do not know. It is the end of some great religious holiday, and the whole populace is kneeling in prayer, with a simplicity of faith of which we can form no idea. The golden grating enclosing the Sanctuary opens, and the pope appears wearing gorgeous ornaments; his antique mitre is studded with enormous jewels, which catch the yellow light from the tapers. This glimpse of the East delights me. The pope is followed by a server with a head like the representations of Christ, and both go and kneel in turn before all the *ikons* round the church. No one notices them. Women drag themselves along on their knees, and men bow repeatedly as they make great signs of the Cross. The church is in darkness, and the candlesticks have seven branches, and every now and then one catches a glimpse of some wonderful object by their light. Suddenly there arises from some unseen direction a strange blending of melody, made up of human voices, sonorous as the tones of an organ; it dies away gradually all around the church

like a smouldering flame. . . . I closed my eyes and let this strange music, with its unequal rhythm, its unknown harmonies, its grave, full, satisfying tones, sink into the inmost depths of my being. Golden minarets, the shimmering of gems, strange melodies—all these things appeal to unknown emotions in one's own heart. I was listening for these harmonies, and I hear their echo in myself; nothing of real beauty is strange to us.

“‘If I were God, I would take pity on the souls of men.’ This despairing cry, heard long ago in *Pelléas et Melisande*. recurs to me here, at the sight of these kneeling people absorbed in prayer, each with his own separate grief and bereavement, as we have ours; the hearts of the women are away at the war, as are the hearts of our *Mamans* in France. One may truly say, ‘If I were God, I would take pity on them.’ . . . I feel a sister’s sympathy with all this grief and pain, and my heart joins in all these supplications rising up in the darkness amidst the fumes of incense. . . . My God, hear and grant their prayer! This morning in the Polish Catholic Church I had the same impression. Again there was wonderful chanting; it does not sound like music which has been taught, or is intended to be sung in choir or chapel, but seems the very soul and spirit of the race, exhaling itself in long-drawn melodies and harmonies, as profound as the depth of the

sea. I could listen for ever. . . . Art should be sought in the souls of the populace; we should strip off all that has veiled it so long, and allow it to develop at will. The true artist should begin by becoming a child of the people. . . . The kingdom of heaven is promised to the humble. . . .”

Geneviève was interested in all she saw, from the Rembrandts at the Hermitage, the great *ikons* in the Winter Palace and the Czar’s hospital, to the play of light on the waters of the Neva. But what touched her most was the faith of the Slav, the devout congregations in both Russian and Polish churches, and their vivid grasp of the supernatural.

“This nation really has a soul,” she writes.

Her verdict was that there was too much love of luxury in Petrograd, too many gold-laced officials and frivolous pleasure-seekers, but the populace quite reconciled her with Russia.

“There are many treasures of all sorts as well as unexplored possibilities in Russia,” she writes, “but nothing is properly organized, and people live in the wildest confusion. The only successful undertakings are managed by French people.”

Geneviève enjoyed her travels intensely, but the news from Roumania was bad; she wrote home saying that “the hospital would have to be very far from the fighting-line,” and to a friend as follows:

"I cannot write what so often comes into my mind. . . . This separation from everything and everybody is hard to bear, but I feel it is the right thing. Now it is really a case of 'France first.' We only live for our country, we speak of nothing else, work for nothing else. In four days we shall be in Bucharest. The French Minister has secured premises for us, but who knows whether the place is habitable for us or safe for the wounded. All this is guess-work, but we are completely in God's hands, and I trust Him utterly."

To another friend she writes even more significantly: "We shall soon be in Bucharest, and God alone knows what we shall find there. The journey has been wonderful in every way, and I am enjoying it very much. My one regret is that I cannot write whatever I wish. I constantly think of you, and I can't tell you so. You must believe in your little 'Gen' as we do in the dead; we see them no more, but we know they are near. Don't tell this to anyone, but I know that we shall have terrible things to undergo in Bucharest, which is being heavily bombarded. As far as I myself am concerned, I do not mind; I want to sacrifice myself a little more than I have done, but I am afraid of the effect on those I left behind."

The Mission did not stay long in Petrograd. Two more nights and a day in the train brought them to Kief, where they were met by Prince

Murat. Geneviève was much moved by her visit to the Monastery of Lavra. "Lavra is a city in itself," she writes, "all pale green with dazzling gold cupolas. When we went over it the wonderful vegetation surrounding Lavra on every side was in all the magic of its autumn colouring; green, gold, copper and crimson tints seemed to melt into the metallic reflections of the buildings. The sky was the softest shade of grey. The shadows on the rough-cast walls were turquoise-blue, and I did so long to paint them, but we were in too great a hurry. It would have been a joy to carry away some lasting memento of such peace and harmony. The whole thing was indescribable."

A very old monk of the Orthodox Church, who did not speak French, but wished to pay some compliment to the distinguished visitors, searched his memory and at last faltered out: "*Je vous aime . . . comme des roses !*"

A touch of Eastern imagery was already in the air! After a short visit to Santa Sofia the Mission departed, and at last reached the Roumanian frontier, where an officer was awaiting them with a special train.

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The first outlines of the Carpathians came in sight on the morning of October 22nd. Trains full of Roumanian soldiers greeted the

French Red Cross with cheers, and at 1.30 the Mission got into Bucharest, where it was received officially. The travellers were very surprised to see the town looking quite spruce and cheerful, as they had been told in Russia that it was half-demolished. The nurses were prepared to work and sleep in huts, instead of which they were installed in an excellent hotel, and the hospital they were to nurse in called forth exclamations of admiration. It was a splendid establishment, quite recently built and intended for a model school. The operating theatre, the disinfecting-room, the wards, and the laboratory, were all equipped with every modern improvement, and on the second floor the nurses' quarters were charming and most comfortable. The whole party were in amazement. "I have seen nothing like it, except in Petrograd at the Winter Palace," writes Geneviève, "and our quarters are, if anything, better, for one can see the place has not been converted from something else, but is a typical up-to-date hospital. Madame Blondel, the matron here (I met her days gone by in Rome, and she is delightfully amiable and clever), supervised the whole thing with great good taste and competence."

The first few days were spent in settling down. The doctors decided that this hospital should be the French Red Cross "centre" for the accommodation of two hundred wounded,

serious cases only. The other patients would be sent into an annexe in a park just outside the town. But as there were only seven French nurses for three hundred and fifty wounded, it was clear more help would be needed.

Numbers of Roumanian ladies offered their services with the greatest goodwill; but as they were totally inexperienced, Madame de Clapiers put them under Geneviève for instruction. She at once started a daily class of eighty pupils, who were most zealous and hardworking, as she records in her diary:

“I am glad to see we shall be even more useful here than I thought; there seems no lack of money, materials, or goodwill, but it all wants bringing into shape. I cannot help remembering cases I know in France of really exceptional women being set to scrub floors in hospital: how useful they would be here! We want a great many nurses for Bucharest, but they ought to be typical of their kind—ladies, but professionally trained; for everyone is keeping a sharp eye on us Frenchwomen to see how we turn out. French influence in Roumania is much more important than we had any idea of. Far from regretting that I came, I am very glad of the opportunity, not because the hospital is such a splendid one and the arrangements so good, but because I am convinced that, God willing, we shall be able to do much fruitful work, and far-reaching as

circles on the water, which widen as they go. We all have the feeling that we shall be a centre of French influence. The whole detachment is in perfect unison, and all goes well. The only thing that grieves me is the picture in my mind of a room in distant France, its colouring mellowed by age, where a group of loved ones sit of an evening wondering where I am, and what is happening to me. . . . I know others are thinking the same . . . there are many friends I miss terribly . . . and letters take such a time to get here. . . .”

Up till this time the French nurses lived in great comfort; their work of installation was most interesting, and they were welcomed cordially into Roumanian society, receiving many more invitations than they had time to accept. On October 30th Geneviève writes to her sister: “We have all the advantages of royalty, without any of the drawbacks. I assure you that our life is too pleasant; if I had known how things were going to be, I should not have come, for really we are being spoilt.”

But one must not put much faith in letters written at this time; they are manifestly too optimistic. Until the end all anxiety was hidden under an assumed gaiety. During the stay at Bucharest, Geneviève was careful to dwell on nothing but the comforts provided for the Mission. On November 13th she received her first letter from her mother,

and her joy was pathetic. She answered the same evening, rejoicing over the victory of Verdun and begging her family not to be anxious about her. "Don't worry about the Zeppelins," she says; "at first there were some casualties, for our defences were not ready, but now it is like Paris. Last night there was a warning, with loud sirens in the streets, darkness, and searchlights. We heard a little firing; our guns politely escorted the Zeppelins as far as the Danube, and all was over. The bombs are the kind which scatter widely and with great force, but have little power of penetration, so that people in the streets are in danger, but indoors one is quite safe; it is only a question of keeping under cover. As Dr. Clunet says, we should indeed be hated of the Gods for a bomb to choose the foot of one of our beds to fall on; and if it fell in the next room the party wall would prevent the fragments from reaching us. As a matter of fact, there is no danger of this happening, as the defence squadron prevent the Zeppelins from coming near enough."

But all the same the nurses were in danger. Enemy aeroplanes flew daily over the city, and victims were numerous. Queen Marie had to nurse her dying child in the cellars of the royal palace; and soon Bucharest was threatened with worse than aeroplanes.

On the afternoon of November 24th the

first wounded arrived at the French hospital, and both doctors and nurses congratulated themselves on the way all the departments were working, the new Roumanian nurses falling into line in a most satisfactory manner. Next day at noon came an order from the French Minister, Comte de St. Aulaire, to leave that same evening at 17 o'clock for Jassy, and take as many of the hospital conveniences with them as possible.

The Mission was overwhelmed with surprise. "No one understands the meaning of this departure," writes Geneviève in her diary; "it is an unheard-of thing to leave a hospital while there are wounded in it. Only a formal order from the Minister could have induced us to go, and as the papers do not announce any bad news, our hurried exit is incomprehensible. At four o'clock we were ready; the parting was very sad. I was so grieved at leaving my dear little nurses, whom I had so enjoyed teaching for the last month. They were crying. It was dreadful for me not to know whether I should ever return to Bucharest, nor why I was going away. . . . And then having to forsake my patients! . . . I left them to the new nurses' care, with as much composure as I could muster . . . but it was very hard. . . ."

The farewells of the Mission were rendered more gloomy by the utter ignorance of all

concerned as to what was really happening. The Roumanian nurses could not keep back their tears; they had become deeply attached to Geneviève in the course of the lessons, which all had felt to be so practical and so full of incentive to real abnegation, and they told her so in no measured terms. Most of the French inhabitants of Bucharest saw the Red Cross Mission off from the station, and next morning the train reached Jassy. Everyone there was in a state of gloom. The Germans were rapidly advancing, Jassy was overcrowded, and there was no room anywhere for the travellers. Jassy was full of Russians, who were somewhat languidly preparing to help the Roumanians, and everybody was very downhearted. But Dr. Clunet rescued Geneviève from inaction, the one thing able to depress her. By his energy and activity he had managed to bring away all his materials, and after endless searching succeeded in discovering a country estate, a little more than five miles from Jassy, and about sixteen from the Russian frontier, and there he proposed to open a hospital for infectious cases. On December 12th he asked Monsieur d'Harcourt for nurses, and Geneviève and Mademoiselle Flippes volunteered their services. Dr. Clunet did not conceal from them that the work would be hard; he told them that "The Cricket" (*Grierul*) was not conspicuous for comfort, and that life there

would be full of difficulty and danger. Geneviève made her preparations at once; she took sheets, body-linen, sugar, and all the provisions and utensils to be found in a convent, where the nuns are as generous as they are poor; and the travellers started in a small, heavily-loaded break, which toiled painfully up the ascent. The two nurses sat close together under a wolf-skin, listening to the doctor's plans. Geneviève's impression as she calmly faced the situation was, as she put it herself, that "We shall find nothing there; everything will have to be started fresh from the very beginning, and we must do it all."

The break passed the squalid suburbs of Jassy, with its hovels standing deep in icy mud, and reached the country. Geneviève writes that she saw "women in rags and bearded old Jews, but things are not without a beauty of their own . . . it is true, the women's rags are of staring colours, and their ragged shawls blindingly crude, but the charm is in the atmosphere. Trees and houses are sharply defined against a wonderful evening sky; exquisite tonalities seem to bathe and envelop the whole landscape. It is growing dusk, and in this latitude twilight lasts a very short time. One by one the stars appear and darkness falls. The night has come . . . a time of peace and respite from labour, a night of soft airs and moonlight casting long shadows on the bright

road. Now we are in the woods. Nothing is to be heard but the trotting of the horses' hoofs, the measured tinkle of their harness-bells, and the breathing of the three passengers. Dr. Clunet points out the line of mountains on the horizon: Grierul is on the highest point. We have a great ascent still to make, but that is well—the higher the better! The scenery is splendid and beautiful; natural surroundings will help one through anything."

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After a long climb over deep snow—for the travellers ended their journey on foot and by moonlight—they arrived frozen through and through. Madame Clunet awaited them in a little room, where the only luxury was a roaring stove fed by logs from the adjoining forest. There were no beds, nor even any straw; they had to make shift with blankets spread on the floor. Grierul is a very large villa composed of terraces built one over the other in Italian fashion, with a background of glorious pine-forest; and it stands on the edge of a little Japanese-looking lake which gives an exotic touch to the sombre surroundings. Seen from the outside, with its innumerable shields, each bearing the device of a golden cricket, the villa looked rather ostentatious. But the interior was bare, the roof leaked, everything was in need of repair, no water was laid on, and it

did not contain a single bed or article of furniture.

The travellers, however, were not discouraged. Geneviève energetically undertook the general housekeeping arrangements, until the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul should arrive to take over the management. "Things are not very comfortable," she writes, "for there is nothing here but quantities of cabbage . . . and inoffensive fowls which pick up grain off the floor of the operating-theatre. And the only thing I know how to cook is a boiled egg ! In the kitchen there is a ragged woman with four children as beautiful as little Cupids, but absolutely filthy. The youngest systematically covers himself with dirt by pushing his head right into a large pot, and one of the others stuffs raw potato. The woman has roused herself from her habitual lethargy, and now gazes at me with a distrustful eye. At present I feel quite bewildered. There is also a little *chercetas*, who eats apples and eyes me suspiciously. I was told he was dishonest, greedy, and untruthful, but he is the only one who understands French; I am going to make use of him notwithstanding. One of the fowls will have to be killed. I am trying to harden my heart and pick out the victim. Dreadful thought, must I kill it myself ? I am ready if necessary. But luckily the *chercetas* is willing to cut its throat, and the doctor has lent him

one of his operating-knives for the purpose. It is really horrible! I am a greater baby over it than the dirty-faced little brat of two years old, who tried to catch the headless bird while its neck still throbbed and its legs still waved in the air. . . . I have had some fits of extreme depression and discouragement in this horribly dirty kitchen. I had to give orders to the woman, although I felt her very much my superior; at least, she knew how to cook cabbages and 'draw' fowls! She has consented to help, but is so loathsome that one must either turn one's back or manage not to look at her—and cooking back to back is not an easy matter. Every moment one treads on a child, or on a fowl's giblets, or on some unspeakably dirty cloth; and there is not a single broom or duster, no water, no saucepans, and twenty men to feed! But we manage to get along all the same; fowls and cabbages are boiled together in a kettle, and in another the woman (who has at last realized that we must have something to eat) has mixed maize and water to make *mamaliga*, the Roumanian national dish and panacea for all ills. It is eaten here morning, noon, and night, boiled or even dry, and is something between bread and cake. *Mamaliga* made up for everything, and Clunet complimented me on the fowl and cabbage stew, which was really not bad.

"Our daily bill of fare was practically identi-

cal until the nuns arrived, as we had no variety in provisions. However, we added potatoes to the meals, and I spent my days peeling them; they were very small, and we used quantities!"

Most fortunately, ten nuns came instead of only five, the number expected. More straw mattresses were hurriedly made up for beds, and Geneviève handed over the house-keeping arrangements to the Sisters. The staff was now complete, and consisted of Dr. and Madame Clunet; Dr. Pascal, a Roumanian doctor, friend and pupil of Dr. Clunet; the assistant, Dr. Ripert; Monsieur du Chaffault, Mademoiselle Flippes, and the St. Vincent de Paul nuns. Their Superior was Sister Pucci, a charming Roumanian lady and personal friend of the Queen. Father Placid (Assumptionist priest, professor of chemistry, and ex-prisoner in a German concentration camp) was the dispenser, and Father Gervais, of the same Order, formerly Superior of a college in Bulgaria, was chaplain, infirmarian, and general helper to everyone. Everything required putting in order, and all did their best. Dr. Clunet vigorously and incessantly appealed to the Roumanian authorities for a few necessities, and beds at last reached Grierul, with some linen and a few indispensable articles of furniture, which were put in their places. Geneviève exchanged cooking for various other employments, including wood-cutting.

"Our life seems made up of asking for things we have not got," she writes; "we might be living in feudal times six centuries behind all modern improvements, and we have all the responsibility of the people we have gathered together here. When we are a party of thirty we have to cook enough for fifty, so as to be ready for anyone arriving unexpectedly, Grierul being noted for hospitality! Our methods are quite feudal; the other day we were in want of materials for sheds, and as there was an uninhabited house on the other side of the road, we sent over our working-party, borrowed some ox-carts, and in the course of the day the entire wooden house was pulled down and transported bodily to our quarters.

"Our way of living is quaint and picturesque as to details. Having no petrol as yet, we do our work by church candles; we use beds to sit on, as there are no chairs, and our decorations, which are really quite artistic, consist of pine-branches stuck in vases made of the local pottery. Our *régime* is a delightful diet of cabbage and chicken. All this may sound rather childish, but living this life is no joke. Every day the place improves, as fresh consignments of essentials arrive. The doctor says we may expect patients by the 1st of January, and we shall have a lot to do between this and then."

Matters were indeed serious. All this was taking place during intensely cold weather, in

a house in the midst of the woods under constant menace of German invasion, and where, in spite of the diary's cheerful description of a chicken diet, there was often nothing to eat but maize. In a little pocket-book containing a few of Geneviève's notes are the following lines: "We have no more wine, salt, or bread, nothing but the eternal *mamaliga*; we eat it dry, liquid, or toasted, but never with any flavouring. We drink tea, which we say is very nice, but think very nasty."

Meanwhile they watched unending streams of Russian troops marching past on their way to the front (for Grierul is on the road from Bucharest to Jassy), and soldiers of the heroic Roumanian Army returning the same way, worn out with their terrible ordeal. Dead horses lay along the road, and village children made themselves slippers from the skin of the animals, which dogs afterwards devoured. The sky was black with crows, whose dreary caw mingled with the yelps of the bloodstained dogs fighting round the carcasses. Human corpses were sometimes seen lying along the side of the road. The first time that Mademoiselle Angot (a French nurse from one of the American Missions) came from Jassy in a sledge, she asked what this meant, and was told quite calmly that they were "the bodies of men who had died of exposure and hunger."

Nevertheless, thanks to the activity of the

small staff, Grierul was beginning to look really like a hospital. On Christmas Day (December 12th, Roumanian Old Style) four patients arrived, two of them with typhus. The Red Cross Mission could not resist keeping Christmas on the French date. The whole staff of the *Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires* assembled at Grierul. Geneviève decorated the room they used for meals, and pinned her charming sketches of robust Cupids on the walls. The portable altar was dressed with great branches of pine, and before midnight Mass a rehearsal was held of the chants to be sung.

"The place is rather primitive," writes Mademoiselle Angot, "but everyone here is so nice and so thoroughly French, and they give one such a warm welcome, that one forgets how many things are lacking. The evening went off delightfully; it was really like a family party. As I was walking in the garden with Geneviève just before Mass, I saw a quantity of Roumanian soldiers prowling round the house. We fetched Dr. Clunet and Dr. Pascal at once, and they fired off several pistol-shots, which dispersed the stragglers, who were trying to come into the hospital. These stragglers are most dangerous, as they are no longer on the General Army commissariat, and hunger drives them to crime."

This Christmas night was kept in a wild

corner of Moldavia by a handful of French people with all possible solemnity, and despite poverty, danger, mortal contagion, and exile, it brought its own joys.

All this time their resources were steadily diminishing. Not only were provisions scanty, but cold had to be reckoned with, and the wearing-out of clothes. Dr. Clunet suggested wearing militia uniform, and the ladies consented cheerfully. They made themselves costumes totally unlike what they had worn on their arrival in Roumania. "I am got up in a Russian blouse," writes Geneviève to a friend, "which comes halfway down my legs, and I wear a pair of enormous Russian boots to keep me from sinking into the snow and mud."

On January 10th Grierul was full, and everyone recognized the presence of efflorescent typhus. Patients had been sent there with influenza (so-called), but their temperature had risen rapidly, and could not be reduced. A red eruption appeared everywhere but on the face, followed by delirium, coma, and often death. It was indeed the dread disease, which attacks first the sickly and then the healthy man, and develops most rapidly in constitutions already weakened by privation. When the weary and hard-driven staff met at meals they tried to joke and laugh off their danger by suggesting that the terrible insect which starts the infection should be engraved on the golden

shields outside, instead of the cricket. They suggested *L'Ordre du Pou* as a decoration! On January 17th Father Gervais writes:

"Typhus is raging, and gets worse every day. To look at our patients, you would think this a mad-house. As I sit scribbling close to the large, open wards, I can hear their high, quavering voices, each man pursuing some different phantom of his mind through the mazes of delirium. It is a real nightmare. The doctor sits close at hand taking notes and preparing his diagnosis, while Mademoiselle de Goutel helps him by making delicate water-colour diagrams of the eruption."

Geneviève not only nursed in both wards, but undertook an even more dangerous and repulsive task, going herself in the motor-ambulance to fetch patients, four at a time, from a hospital where they were handed over to her in an appalling condition. When she reached Grierul she proceeded to the most awful business of all, assisted by the nuns. "The patient," says Dr. D——, "has to be divested of his clothing, which is swarming with parasites, rubbed from head to foot with paraffin, clipped, and shaved . . . then he is pronounced completely free . . . but it is only after putting him into a disinfected nightshirt that he can be admitted into the ward."

Only those who saw Geneviève Hennet de Goutel at her work can realize the smiling

serenity and calm which she maintained until the hour when she herself fell a victim. On January 4th her first patient at Grierul died of intermittent typhus and pneumonia. Geneviève records it sadly: "Our first patient is just dead, quite peacefully, and without our getting to know much about him. Alas! there seems so little in common between them and ourselves when we cannot speak their language. This man came from the unknown outside world, and has gone to the unknown . . . all we know about him is that his name was Platon, and that he had a very gentle, boyish face. We are going into the woods to choose a place for his grave. Not far from the little lake there is a circular clearing at the edge of the forest. It is a peaceful, restful spot covered with sweet-smelling, velvety, fallen leaves, and there is plenty of room there for all those who, alas! are certain to follow our first dead man."

Someone remarked of this burying-place that it "ought to be arranged as nicely as possible, so as to make a good impression on the survivors," and went on to say in plain words that the dead themselves are of little importance. This cold materialism disgusted Geneviève; she liked the old Moldavian custom of burying the departed in their best clothes. "We are going to put his beautiful name (Platon) on his cross, in poker-work," she writes, "and plant ivy and flowers on the small mound

of earth, which will be surrounded by flat stones. This is not for the benefit of ‘the survivors,’ but in memory of the dead boy. Do I hear you say the dead do not exist? What if the dead are still living, and it is the living who have not yet begun to exist?”

Geneviève kept her family in ignorance of all these dangers and mournful incidents. When Madame de Clapiers returned to France towards the end of December, escorted by the Comte d’Harcourt, she proposed to take Geneviève back, for she saw how dangerous and difficult life was becoming at Grierul. But Geneviève refused, merely begging Madame de Clapiers to reassure her family, to whom she wrote: “Madame de Clapiers will be able to make your minds quite easy by telling you how well and happy I am at Grierul.”

The same day she wrote more openly to Mademoiselle des G——: “. . . Some of our party are returning to France, but I am staying here, as I believe it to be my duty; I have not done enough work to go back yet. I put my trust in God. He knows I love my country above all things, and that I offer all my sufferings for my beloved France.”

“It is like being at the front here,” she writes to another woman-friend, “and it consoles me for not being a soldier, which was such a grief to me, for France is all in all to us. Our country is so glorious and so beloved !

We live for France alone, and are willing to bear anything for her sake. The absence of news is the hardest trial of all. Lift up your hearts, lift them high above all frontiers, and we shall meet at last!"

Her letters only give glimpses of all she was going through. Very interesting information is supplied by the private diary of a friend of Geneviève's, a French nurse who was looking after the sick in a hospital at Jassy. In January, 1917, this lady writes:

"Distress is very great; the patients arrive in great numbers, and for lack of space have to sleep on the corridor floor: hundreds die of typhus or of exposure. At *St. Spiridion* there are so many deaths that the corpses are left for two or three days among the living, because there is no time to take them away quickly. . . . In our hospital there are three patients in each bed; and as there is not enough linen for all, some walk about the passages naked . . . it is tragic! Death is in the air here; one feels the dark messenger is only prowling round and awaiting the moment to claim us for his own. My days are passed in wretchedness, and I long for news of my dear Geneviève. . . . It is very cold, and we have no firewood. First one and then another of us falls ill. . . . The state of affairs is terrible. Sometimes all we have for dinner is a dish of boiled onions."

But neither in Geneviève's letters, nor in any of the records found after her death, is there any mention of the hardships, similar to those of her friend, which she herself endured! Just when more patients than ever were arriving at Grierul, the Military Authorities sent for Mademoiselle Flippes for the Surgical Hospital newly started at *Notre Dame de Sion*. Her departure was a great blow to Geneviève, who had attached herself greatly to Mademoiselle Flippes, for all her kindness and tact. Both felt the separation keenly, and Father Gervais, writing later, says: "Each accepted this very extreme measure in a spirit of voluntary abnegation, and I half-regretted having advised them to go forward on the hard and rugged path which was to prepare them both for a supreme sacrifice."

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It was indeed a rugged path. Moral solitude as well as physical discomfort was now Geneviève's lot at Grierul. She was too busy to go down to Jassy often, where the Marquise de Belloy was at the head of an immense hospital of a thousand beds, which she hardly ever left. Lack of news from France added to Geneviève's loneliness; but, though she wrote few letters at this time, her thoughts were always with those she had left behind. "I love you as dearly in absence and separation," she writes

to her friend, “as when I had the joy of your presence here.”

But although it was hard for a woman of Geneviève’s affectionate disposition to be so far from all she loved, yet she never lost the conviction that her exile served a purpose from a Christian as well as a purely French point of view.

The months of her life were as fruitful to her soul as years, and her spirituality grew ever deeper and more intense. Although she went on steadily with her work, there was no slackening of the moral fibre. “May every day be holy, because it is given to Christ,” she wrote, and her actions all through her life were in accordance with what she professed. The task was growing harder. Geneviève had always longed to serve her fellow-creatures to the utmost, even in the face of danger, rather than to enjoy the happiness of this world. The hour had now come when her wish was to be fulfilled, and she was found ready. These few earnest words were written in one of her pocket-books: “Utter devotion to what one intends to do. . . . Constant care to do it well. . . .”

At Grierul, as at Nevers, and everywhere else that Geneviève had worked before and during the war, she always had ‘utterly devoted’ herself. No one ever knew which of her horrible tasks was the most repulsive to her;

hard household work, watching the microbe cultures with Dr. Clunet, the repugnant but necessary business of relieving the patients of parasites, or the general nursing of typhus, for she went about them all with the same unruffled calm. She was living up to her professions of 1916 with all her might. "Every phase in our existence is meant to help us to rise, whether it be one of work, patience, or ordeals. These are so many steps devised by God, as I tell myself constantly. I have no other hope now but eternal life; I expect it daily, and day by day I feel I am drawing nearer to its portals. Life, full knowledge, and, through these, love. . . . No more obstacles between our souls and infinite beauty. . . . Life is very short."

Yes, very short. On February 2nd Geneviève, feeling very weary, went out for a short time with Father Gervais. The sun was just setting, and the snow-clad landscape was extraordinarily beautiful. Despite the very low temperature ( $20^{\circ}$  C.), she wanted to make a pastel sketch. Friends brought it later to France; it is a picturesque Moldavian cottage half-hidden in the white expanse, and gives a strange impression of chilly gloom. Geneviève came indoors feeling more tired than ever, and next morning was in a high fever, and unable to leave her bed. At first it was thought she had influenza, but her temperature rose quickly (to  $40^{\circ}$  C.) with no abatement, and soon after the efflorescent

eruption appeared, leaving no room for doubt. The same day Dr. Ripert, the assistant, developed the disease, but his life was eventually saved.

As soon as Geneviève's illness was diagnosed as typhus, no attempt was made to conceal the gravity of her condition from the patient herself. With full consciousness she offered up the sacrifice of her life. In December she had written to her great friend Mademoiselle des G——: "I should not have liked to die without accomplishing something, and we are all ready to fulfil our destiny and make the sacrifice of our lives. Did you think when we said good-bye at Zermatt that I was going so far away? But distance means nothing; all depends on how high we raise ourselves. . . ."

A few months before, Geneviève wrote to her dearest friend: "Don't you think Death seems of much less importance than it used to be, and is no longer a dreadful enemy whom we are afraid to mention? Death comes so often now, I have grown almost to love the familiar visitor. How I envy all those who have given their lives for some great ideal! . . . GIVEN it, and not had it *taken away from them*. . . . If only God would allow us to *give* our lives! . . ."

After spending all her strength in nursing the unhappy patients whose disease she contracted, Geneviève's last effort was to offer up her life as she had so longed to do.

Violent fever and delirium lasted a fortnight, and then abated. As soon as the temperature fell, Dr. Clunet believed his patient could be saved. In spite of intervals of extreme prostration, Geneviève still spoke of recovering. She was pleased at the project of her friends Mesdames de Belloy, who wanted her to spend her convalescence in their home, and had promised her she should have Enesco, the great violinist, to play to her, as she had always been such a great admirer of his. She was cared for and waited on by the nurses who were left at Grierul, as well as by the nuns, with unceasing vigilance and care, but the absolute nursing was done by Mademoiselle Flippes, who returned directly she knew Geneviève was ill, never left her day or night, and died of the same disease a month after her friend.

In spite of the decrease of temperature, Geneviève was still in danger; neither serum nor subcutaneous injections gave her any strength. Young as she was, cold, fatigue, and privations had worn her out, and her constitution no longer responded to treatment. But she was quite conscious. One day when Father Gervais, who visited her constantly with unfailing kindness, was by her bedside with Mademoiselle Flippes, she took a hand of each and said quietly: "You two are my very dear friends, but I am going to leave you," and raised her eyes to

heaven. She knew by that time that she was not going to recover. Every day Father Gervais said Mass in an adjoining room; the door was left open, and Geneviève united herself in spirit to the prayers of the priest.

On the Sunday before her death Father Gervais came, fully vested, to say the Our Father and Hail Mary with her. Geneviève was uncomplaining, but felt her strength ebbing daily away. On the report of the Minister of War, King Ferdinand of Roumania sent her the Cross of the newly-created order *Regina Maria* on February 22nd. The Queen had intended bringing in person the beautiful, massive, silver cross; but after having to leave her dead child's tomb in occupied territory, and quite broken down by the distress of her country and her own indefatigable nursing of typhus patients, the Royal lady herself had fallen ill. The reports of Geneviève's condition were more and more serious, and it was clear that all speed must be made to confer the decoration unless it was to be placed on her coffin only. Queen Marie, being unable to go to Grierul, sent Madame Lahovary, one of her ladies-in-waiting, to replace her.

“Why am I decorated?” murmured Geneviève faintly, as the cross on its white moiré ribbon was hung round her neck; “I have done nothing heroic.”

She was still fully conscious, and spoke of her family to Madame Lahovary and to the Marquis de Belloy, who came with the lady-in-waiting. When she mentioned her parents and her *petite sœur*, her voice was so pathetic that those present could not keep back their tears. She looked long at her cross, and spoke again of her relations: "I am glad for their sake; it will please them. . . . I thank the Queen," she added.

As the days went by Geneviève lay immovable, suffering in silence. She was never heard to make a single protest, and when Father Gervais asked her if she consented to all God might ask of her, she answered: "With all my heart."

Only one burst of grief came from her lips just two days before the end, when Father Gervais suggested giving her Holy Communion, for which she had often asked. All the pangs of parting came over her at the near approach of death. "*Je veux revoir Maman!*" she cried out, and then suddenly grew calm, repeating *Fiat Voluntas Tua*.

On March 4th Geneviève swooned at the moment of receiving *Viaticum*. The same afternoon Father Gervais asked her if she would like Extreme Unction and Holy Communion, and if she would make a voluntary offering of her life. She answered yes, and in a faint but distinct voice made an Act of Contrition.

After receiving the Sacraments and following all the prayers, "she remained," says Father Gervais, "absorbed in God," and at eight the same evening she expired. At last she had entered into the Life Eternal, so long her dream and aspiration, and now to be the reward of all her earthly existence.

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For a week longer her body remained at Grierul, and those who had loved her in life wept for her beside the bed where lay her mortal remains in the white uniform of a hospital nurse. Then the embalmed corpse, wrapped in the tricolour, was put into a leaden coffin sent by Queen Marie. On the coffin was fastened the medal for nursing epidemics, the *Regina Maria* Cross, and the *Croix de Guerre*. General Berthelot, head of the French Military Mission to Jassy, mentioned Geneviève Hennet de Goutel in despatches as follows:

"Volunteered and was accepted for nursing infectious cases at Grierul Hospital, Jassy. Gave the most splendid example of abnegation and sacrifice at this post of honour. . . . Braved danger with the utmost courage, and devoted herself night and day to the most serious cases. Contracted efflorescent typhus from her patients, and on March 4th, 1917, fell a victim to her self-abnegation."

On March 12th the motor-ambulance in which Geneviève used to fetch the sick took her coffin down that road to Jassy which had so delighted her artistic nature. Crowds filled the Catholic Church of the little Moldavian village. First came representatives of the Roumanian Royal Family and Ministers of the Allies with the staffs of their different Legations, followed by French and Russian Generals, all the French and Roumanian Medical Missions, and quantities of friends and strangers. Several speeches were made, full of deep emotion and fervent patriotism. France, for whom Geneviève lived and died, paid her splendid homage. Father Gervais, the Comte de St. Aulaire, and Professor Cantacuzène, all spoke in praise of the silent and humble self-sacrifice offered in distant obscurity. "It is true that when we think of all the youthful courage and cheerful self-sacrifice, all the lovable qualities which lie buried with those bright eyes, which expressed them so well, we can hardly keep back our tears," said the Comte de St. Aulaire, "and yet she herself would not wish us to mourn her for long. To a nature like hers it would have savoured of weakness to pause and grieve over even the most pathetic of deaths at a time when a cruel war, on which hangs the fate of the whole world, is at its height. 'You must wait,' I can almost hear her say, 'till happier days, for even

the right to shed tears. . . . Now is the time for deeds, not tears; for facing death, if need be, as I have done.'"

Then the procession slowly followed the flower-laden coffin to the vault of the Sisters of *Notre Dame de Sion*, where Geneviève had asked that her body might lie until it could be taken back to France. She had visited the cemetery, situated in the country, some three-quarters of a mile from Jassy, and had been struck by its name of *Eternitea* (Eternity). There the last farewells were said. Those who had loved and admired Geneviève Hennet de Goutel, and had nursed her till her death, went back blinded with tears to take up their hard task at Grierul once more. Four weeks later Mademoiselle Flippes, worn out with nursing her friend and undermined by grief, died of the same disease, and next day Dr. Clunet and Sister Antoinette both fell victims to typhus. Doctors, Sisters of Charity, and nurses had each tried to outdo the others in self-sacrifice.

Geneviève's room has been made into the hospital chapel, and on the place where she drew her last breath stands the Altar of the Holy Sacrifice. One of the new wards of Grierul (now called the *Jean-Clunet Hospital*) bears her name, and on the suggestion of Monsieur Argetoyano, a Senator of Dolj, the *Independance Roumaine* opened its columns to

a subscription for a monument "in honour of the sainted French woman who gave her life for Roumania." In a few days this newspaper had collected more than ten thousand francs (£400), an enormous sum for a country reduced to the most terrible poverty. From towns and villages, from the front, and from behind the lines, offerings poured in, sometimes modest, but always accompanied by touching letters, such as that from the 6th Infantry praising "the gentle Frenchwoman," and promising to follow "her heroic example."

These tributes of admiration and sympathy were offered to the memory of the young girl Geneviève Hennet de Goutel, and, in her person, to France.

An article in the *Indépendance Roumaine* on Geneviève Hennet de Goutel concludes in these words: "With deepest respect and emotion we salute the noble victim who has fallen on Roumanian soil. She is not the first sent us by the inexhaustible generosity of France. The example of these women will be as fruitful as that of the brave French officers killed in battle. These venerated dead will be a perpetual link of gratitude between us and their great nation."

Another paper published an article with the heading:

**“A GENTLE DAUGHTER OF FRANCE.**

“Roumania kneels in grief and respect before the tomb so lately closed. May the gentle French girl sleep in peace! Her sublime sacrifice will not be wasted. Such abnegation can never be forgotten, and her grave will be one more indissoluble link between the hearts of the two nations.”

The Comte de St. Aulaire expressed the same idea:

“This death teaches us a great lesson and inspires us with a great hope. An ideal magnificently carried out, with such total immolation of youth in its first flush, must be imperishable; a cause which we die for can never be lost. Amid the many voices rising from the trenches and from so many graves of the young, this death proclaims that a brotherhood of sacrifice between Roumania and France is the forerunner and guarantee of a fraternity in victory.”

One of the Roumanian nurses in the French Hospital at Bucharest, Mademoiselle Marillina Bocu, wrote some very touching verses to Geneviève’s memory under the title of “Fallen on the Field of Honour.”

“An heroic woman has died a soldier’s death, saluting France with all the noble ardour of her pure and aristocratic race.

" 'All for France,' and the dying glance of her eagle eyes, takes in the valiant and oppressed little country in a last warm sunset glow. The golden ray which fades with the setting sun, and shines on us from a bed of pain, must have some message for us.

" Her last look on earth was almost one of joy, as if she beheld her beloved France, for whom she had so generously shed her blood. . . .

" I can see her as I knew her first, tall and graceful, her clear sea-coloured eyes, now veiled in reverie, now sparkling into gaiety, revealing the soul of a noble, enthusiastic, generous Frenchwoman—an artist, and a lover of her fellow-creatures.

" Dearest friend, who taught us with such care all that we needed for our new career, your lessons were always simple, and easy to follow, without a trace of pedantry. . . . You helped us in our new work, and made the hardest tasks seem easy, because you accomplished them so tenderly yourself. The wounded were the objects of your most intense devotion; day and night you watched over them, going from the wounded to the diseased, and never thinking you had done enough. . . .

" Treasures of goodness and loving-kindness flowed from your heart. You came and went, leaving a ray of sunshine in the memory of all who had known and loved you.

“ Dear friend and companion, can we ever forget the days when we were so happy together in our work? Your heart was a never-failing source of generosity and goodness. I can never forget the sweet voice I used to hear at the bedside of the sick men during the long night-watches. . . .

“ Your wounded, your convalescents, your sick and diseased patients, all join with France in gratitude to place the *Croix de Guerre* upon the breast of their guardian angel and benefactress.

“ You loved Roumania and her ‘ eaglets,’ as you used to call them, and on that sad winter’s day when the sun shone for the last time on their heroine, even the sick and suffering raised themselves from their couch of pain to pay you the last honour.

“ Geneviève Hennet de Goutel, dead on the Roumanian field of honour: Long live your generous, glorious France! . . .”

These poetic and emotional lines, which are verses in the original, and are expressed in the beautiful Roumanian language better than in translation, were composed by a pupil of Geneviève’s who had studied for a month at Bucharest. Everywhere the same wave of gratitude was felt. Queen Marie of Roumania, well qualified to speak of heroism from her own bravery in nursing typhus in 1916 (and cholera in 1913), wrote some lines, under

the title *In Memoriam*, which no French man or woman can read unmoved:

"To-day I will not speak of Roumanian sufferings.

"My object is to pay the homage so justly due to those who came from 'the gentle land of France' to help that younger sister who had always loved her elder so ardently. I am of Anglo-Saxon blood, and I used to wonder at the thrill with which my Roumanians spoke of France. Their voices lingered caressingly over the very name, as if it held all the sweetness of the world. But since I have seen and known the French and watched them do even more than their duty in the midst of our threatened army and our people in distress I understand the reason, and I myself can no longer pronounce the tender and sacred word 'France' without emotion!"

And the way in which Queen Marie spoke of Geneviève Hennet de Goutel was worth hearing. "She was a model nurse," said the Queen in a voice of deepest respect, "and, what is more, a model *French* nurse!"

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Geneviève Hennet de Goutel left a shining example. Not only did she serve her country well, but she won souls; her best and perhaps her greatest work (after her death as during her life) was all in the interior life; many people

who had not known her personally heard of her departure, her life of work and privation in the solitude of Grierul, her self-sacrifice in refusing to leave her patients when she could have returned to France, and her death, foreseen and accepted. This life-story caused more than one woman to make silent comparisons in the depths of her own soul. Those who had already struggled and suffered took up their task with renewed energy; others who had hitherto given what cost them but little, and were wholly bent on leading a quiet life, suddenly realized that their attitude was rather a grudging one. And some, thanks to the example set before them, and the examination of conscience it suggested, passed in a day, so to speak, from indifference to heroism. Geneviève won more than even her *Croix de Guerre*.

A young soldier who had never seen her was being nursed in a hospital out of the danger zone by her sister, when one evening his nurse was suddenly summoned to Paris. Next day he learned the sad reason of this departure. When his nurse returned he confided to her that he had been through a great mental struggle during her absence. He confessed that, being unprepared for a soldier's life of long and patient endurance, he had made up his mind that his wound (a slight one) would wipe out his debt to his country, and had decided to prolong his convalescence as much

as possible. But the death of this young girl, who had preferred a prolonged and dangerous exile to a comfortable life at home, put things in their true light before him. "I went into the chapel hardly knowing what I was doing," he said; "I knelt down and burst into tears, and in a flash my former faith (which I thought lost) returned to me. To-morrow I return to the front. I wanted to tell you this, as perhaps it may console you to know the good your sister's example has done."

Three months later he wrote: "We are in an observation post some hundred feet away from the front line, on an absolutely bare mound, from which we cannot come down even for cold water in this great heat. It is certainly a post of great trust and honour; but sometimes things seem very hard, and I can understand the weariness and disgust of those who have not the great moral support of faith. That is not my case, for I recovered it under circumstances sad indeed for you: but every night I thank your sister in my prayers as well as yourself, who were the indirect but certain cause."

This same man (mentioned in despatches soon after in the most splendid terms) declared that he owed his *Croix de Guerre* to Geneviève Hennet de Goutel, and he was only one among many whose names we could give. The majority of the young girls whom Geneviève used to work for have persevered in the path

she laid down for them. Those who knew her wished to follow in her footsteps and carry on her work, realizing that unprofitable tears are no incentive to action. Two years have passed since her death, and though the gap left by her loss is still as deep as ever, there are signs of the harvest which she sowed. To make themselves worthy of her friendship the women Geneviève loved have worked hard. Her advice has been followed and her words treasured in the hearts of those who heard them. Many prayers have been said for her, and perhaps even more *to* her, so strong is the impression that she is powerful in the unseen world.

A girl post office clerk who knew Geneviève very well said after the second anniversary of her death: "Mademoiselle Geneviève was a great light. My work is very monotonous. I have been eight years in the same office, and I feel I should have got on better if I had had a better education; but I am going to work for the souls of those about me. Mademoiselle Geneviève said she counted on me."

Another brought flowers about this time to the little blue room where Geneviève had so often received her, saying as she came out: "When she looked at you with her great bright eyes, you felt ready for any sacrifice. Now everything seems harder. . . . But we must not be unworthy of her, after all she has done. We must persevere."

Another younger girl said : " I regret the years when I was too young and too much of a child to understand her, and I didn't try enough. Now I search my memory for everything that reminds me of her, and read her letters over and over again. . . . It is a great help to me even to see my name in her handwriting, and to remember how she told me to pray and be patient, and learn to love others. . . . Mademoiselle Geneviève's words still encourage me. . . ."

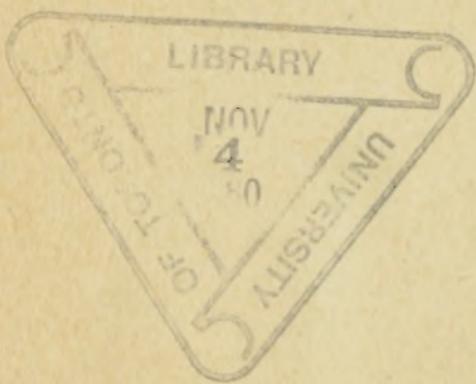
All those who knew her, however little, think the same; and it is consoling to see that some lives can never pass into utter oblivion. The girls she came in contact with, not only her friends, but even those who knew her very slightly, have a very deep and touching recollection of her—*un très grand souvenir*. All those she loved feel they owe her a debt of gratitude. All in the humility of their hearts have resolved to try and follow in her footsteps, and to become, in their turn, a source of light and peace to others. All have come, through her influence, to know the true meaning of life even in this world—that earthly life which we must not belittle, for it is a gift of God. The war has torn aside many veils, and each of these girls has learned that suffering, which inspires so many glorious poems and great works, is really the daily bread of us all, and that not one of us can, nor should hope to, escape

it if we would comfort and succour our fellow-creatures. And this revelation of the necessity of pain and sorrow, far from depressing these young creatures, has raised their souls to fresh courage. The death of those whom they aspire, with the help of God, to imitate, has shown them the right path. If a happy life with home and children such as they had pictured is not for them, they will understand that God expects of them a greater and more generous gift; and instead of condemning them to solitude, it is His will that they should let their light shine far beyond the narrow confines of one woman's hopes. Their lives are sweeter and happier for being useful and fruitful, and they know that in sickness and in health, in poverty or in wealth, in the contemplative as in the active life, it is possible and essential to win souls. . . . It seemed ordained that Geneviève Hennet de Goutel should be the guide, consoler, and friend of all those who crossed her path in this world.

The story of every sanctified life belongs of right to the whole Catholic world, and that is why this book was written.







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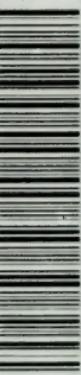
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