

THE LIFE OF
ST. GEMMA GALGANI

BY HER SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

FR. GERMANUS
OF ST. STANISLAUS, PASSIONIST

TRANSLATED BY

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In humble deference to the Decrees of the Holy See I protest and declare most explicitly, that I do not wish any other than human faith or significance to be attributed to my words or statements regarding the Servant of God, Gemma Galgani. Not intending therefore in any way to forestall the infallible judgment of the Church, whose alone it is to pronounce in matters of virtue and Sanctity, I submit myself and this book unreservedly to its censure.

Fr. Germanus

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Translator's Preface

I want to say something that will help to spread a knowledge of the Servant of God, Gemma Galgani, and don't quite know how to put it briefly.

This something has nothing to do directly with the translation of her biography. It starts from a conviction that, the facts of this wonderful yet comparatively hidden life being recent, they are emphatically on that account calculated to do more good than if they were of a remote period.

Having tried unsuccessfully to find someone who would undertake to do this *Life* into English, I was induced to attempt it because kind and capable friends were ready to help me. Impelling motives were: my devotion to this Seraphic Virgin of Lucca, my desire to meet the wish of the author, Father Germanus of St. Stanislaus, whom I greatly esteemed, and my veneration for the Apostolic Institute of the Passionists to which he belonged; also my hope that the story of this Servant of God would do as much good among English readers as it was already doing among others.

The lives of Saints are generally of past history and considered by many to be almost necessarily of that very elastic period, "the Middle Ages." They are looked upon also by many as out of reach of ordinary mortals, and merely as interesting subjects to be preserved in a sort of moral museum—encased in the annals of the Church to be looked at; perhaps also to colour more vividly the supposed truths of fiction. We know how false such ideas are. We have Saints with us today as in the past, but it is true that their lives do not come to be known immediately. Their whole aim is to imitate Him who is meek and humble of Heart,

and to live up to the teachings of the Gospel as opposed to the maxims and ways of the world; their choice is always to be unknown and totally forgotten. Another marked characteristic of the lives of God's faithful servants is that, while here denying themselves and carrying their cross, they are always strengthened and consoled by the Church in this warfare which is the lot of man; whereas, no sooner have they triumphed in the battlefield and gone to their reward, than the Church becomes silent with regard to their virtues. She then awaits the manifestation of their heroism sooner or later by the body of the faithful, who in their turn invariably come to observe, to inquire, to be moved to devotion, and loudly and universally to call on her to examine and pronounce on such holy lives.

The greatest value, I think, attaches to this *Life* from the exceptional fact that it is not of past history. This young girl has been with us quite lately; indeed, so recently that we all might have known her. Add to this another fact that enhances the preciousness of this biography: the great saints whom we know to have received some of the extraordinary favours vouchsafed by Heaven to this humble virgin, were either religious, or were living in the world singular lives that attracted public attention and curiosity. Gemma Galgani did not belong to either class, but lived an uneventful commonplace life.

Behold this unassuming girl: of few years, but reaching the old age of a spotless life; a little child of the weaker sex, yet already stronger than all the powers of darkness. Then we have in her a talented girl also of striking candour, always consistent in her words and actions, of perfectly uniform temperament, and at the same time full of active energy and ready to sacrifice herself for others. She scrupulously avoided all singularity, so that none could be detected in her, except her rare attractiveness and an indescribable majesty of bearing. She strove to hide her heavenly

endowments from all, and partly succeeded. God, however, effected the ends He had in view during her life through her ingenuous simplicity, and spoke, while she was silent, through her angelic grace and dignity which riveted the attention of beholders and illuminated their minds. In a word, Gemma was an ideal. According to a distinguished writer, all the Saints of the Catholic Church are ideal men and women. She, like them, charmed and satisfied everyone, leaving nothing to be desired.

But it is her most wonderful supernatural endowments which specially signalize this child of Heaven as a messenger of light and encouragement to this generation. Indeed, it may be claimed that no other Servant of God of whom anything is known has been found to have received so many of those extraordinary and exceptional gifts which even among the Saints are reserved to a chosen few. These marvels, owing no doubt to the fervent prayers and unceasing watchfulness of this angelic girl, have only become generally known since her death; and observe here again that, precisely because of their recent occurrence, they have all been verified beyond a shadow of doubt. They have likewise, through the testimony of countless witnesses still living, brought with them the most unanswerable refutation of most of the empty assertions of modern scientists regarding such supernatural matters. This innocent girl is a proof, standing in our midst, of the Infinite Mercy and Love lavished by our Saviour on His creatures in the Incarnation, and another instance of His intimate personal dealings with His faithful servants.

The pages of this *Life* are to many as rays of light and gifts of grace. That some will not reverence the miraculous works of God in His faithful servant goes without saying. The votaries of atheistic science, ignoring the First Cause, build on an unsettled foundation, and refusing to raise their minds to the supernatural, they necessarily remain grovelling in sense. They cannot, because

they will not, understand; for pride will never yield to Eternal Truth. Of such it is written: “The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand.”

We await with reverent submission the infallible judgment of Holy Mother Church, for whom alone it is to pronounce on the sanctity of her children, and are full of hope that she will soon proclaim the sanctity of Gemma Galgani.¹ We are emboldened in this by the widespread and rapidly increasing devotion to this child of benediction, and by the numerous miracles that are being wrought through her intercession.

It is my humble and trustful prayer that this angelic virgin may take under her spiritual patronage all those who have helped to continue the mission she had on earth by helping to spread the knowledge of her life.

Fr. A. M. O’Sullivan, O.S.B.

¹ St. Gemma Galgani was canonized on 2 May 1940 by Pope Pius XII.

Author's Preface

When about to write the first edition of this wonderful life of the Servant of God, Gemma Galgani, discouraging and perplexing thoughts beset me. That was not because of the difficulty I found in the undertaking; it was owing to the distorted line of thought and reasoning so often met with when discussing supernatural things. Who does not know how, today, the Christian sentiment has become enervated, and the faith has grown cold? Shameless theories and absurd doctrines have become a sort of gospel. Nay, one must scarcely speak of God even with bated breath, and eternal good is willingly renounced for the sake of temporal pleasures. Society at large has returned in mind and heart to neopaganism, and, what is worse, those who propound and practice perverse theories are looked up to as possessed of gifted minds and as restorers of the human race; hence, they are gladly listened to and followed without inquiry.

In the midst of such sad realities, what credit, I asked myself, would be given to the wonderful things that marked at every stage the life of this humble Christian maiden?

This question has since been satisfactorily answered by facts; and I will now merely say that I began to write the *Life* with the conviction that at least most of those who would have the patience to read this *Life* through, and not be content with glancing at detached passages, would remain convinced of the genuineness and truth of what was stated in it. They would find fresh motives of edification and greater strength of faith. They would have proofs that Our Lord has not ceased to lavish love on His poor creatures, and that, in the midst of the general

corruption of the world, there ever exist chosen souls who by the fragrance of spotless and holy lives restore our fallen nature.

Most of the fears I expressed in my Preface to the first edition have been dispelled. The biography has pleased the public. It was sought for and read with avidity. One after another new edition was called for, and in little more than two years, 23,000 copies had gone. The demand continues, the volume is read with unabated interest, and what is more important, the effect for good has been extraordinary.

It seems as if God wished to be glorified in His faithful servant and, making her merits prevail for the good of souls, has thrown around her a halo of singular attractiveness. On being merely named she becomes admired, and on hearing of her virtues, listeners feel stimulated to imitate her.

I have by me hundreds of letters from persons of every class, lay and clerical. The Holy Father, Pope Pius X, several cardinals, countless bishops, all, in a word, unite in expressing their great admiration of this angelic girl, and their devotion to her.

The Catholic press, becoming aware of this general manifestation, so singular in the case of a humble maiden lately gone from us after a short and hidden life, has been profoundly impressed and has spoken of it in eloquent terms. Italian papers have continued a chain of praise, and many foreign journals are following their example. From France and Germany, from Russia, Poland, England and Spain, from India and America, etc., applications have come for leave to translate *The Life of Gemma Galgani*. Those who obtained this leave set immediately to work; Portuguese, German and Polish editions are already in circulation, and others will soon follow.

Those whose applications to translate the *Life* were forestalled have nevertheless expressed their devotion to the Virgin of Lucca by writing charming articles about her in numberless periodicals.

It is noteworthy that no special effort whatever has been made through advertisement, reviews, or otherwise, either to push the sale of this biography or to excite the marvellous widespread devotion to the Servant of God that has arisen so universally. The movement has been entirely spontaneous, having its origin merely in the minds of individuals.

I have been enabled to improve the sixth edition because of the time allowed me for ample study of all the documents already in my possession; also because of the new and fuller information that I have received regarding the life of this humble maiden, and finally through the chronological ordering of the chapters.

Although the task of writing this *Life* is difficult and laborious, it is rendered less so by the abundance of matter at my disposal and the extraordinary beauty and limpidity of the soul it portrays.

To very few biographers indeed, if any, has such an abundance of riches fallen. There has not been the least need to look up by-gones or to consult remote traditions in order to describe the life of this angelic girl.

I have no need to present to my readers, instead of historic truths, the mere impressions of witnesses, who may not always be the most reliable. I myself am in this case the witness. In fact, the greater and better part of the mystic life of this virgin has passed, so to say, before my eyes. Hence in all truth I may say in the words of St. John: "We come to make known to you what we ourselves have seen and heard, and our hands have touched." And in this my position has not been that of an ordinary observer who in like circumstances might have seen and tested what was only exterior. My dealings with her have been most intimate as

her confessor and spiritual director, in which capacity nothing in the main can have escaped me of the secret mysteries of her soul.

I will add that, after God had entrusted the direction of this child's conscience to me by ways that were indeed extraordinary, I subjected her to a most rigid examination for a considerable time. Having thus made myself well assured of the quality of her spiritual disposition and of the unmistakable truth of the divine action in her soul, I set myself to study and observe her attentively in all her movements so that nothing might escape me. Seeing that she avoided speaking of anything that concerned herself—the usual way with Saints—I frequently contrived to put to her artful questions on various topics; and she with the candour of a little child, though in her profound humility fearing to err, always answered me to the point as well in conversation as by letter. I continued to collect her answers and compare them one with another, the earlier ones with the more recent, examining them when needed on the principles of mystical science. Thus I became daily more convinced that heavenly grace, so multiform, as St. Paul says, in its effects, and yet so consistent because divine, was actively working in her soul.

God was pleased in a wonderful way to cooperate with my efforts to obtain information. He so disposed things that the dear child should be taken into the house of a pious lady in Lucca, who loved her as if she were her own daughter and venerated her as a Saint. As this lady also was far advanced in God's ways, she was, more than any other, in a position to value the great virtues of this chosen soul. By keeping Gemma continually near her she was able easily to follow with attentive eyes the effects of grace in her adopted child and to note the most minute circumstances of its wonderful manifestations. As I could not always be near Gemma a happy thought struck me; it was to enjoin on her through my authority as her director that, in order to avoid all

deceit of the enemy, she should manifest regularly to her Mamma, as she affectionately called this lady, all her inner experiences, without concealing anything. The latter would then be able to report everything to me faithfully, and I should be better able to give advice and direction. By these means, seconded by the rare ingenuousness of the child, I was able in a short time to collect so much information that if I were to publish all it would fill several volumes.

With a view to render this poor work of mine still more useful, I shall not be satisfied with cursorily relating particulars of the life of the Servant of God. I shall make it a subject of study, confronting every fact with the most approved mystical doctrines, and writing only what I know to be true. This method will serve to prove the genuineness of all that is stated, and will afford directors of souls a certain practical guidance in this divine science. All are aware how abstruse this science is, and how difficult to be understood by means of theories. Hence, not a few will be grateful to me for having set it forth in its practical application to a soul whom God had destined to pass through all its ways. Notwithstanding what has been said, I do not pretend to be able to please everybody, and am well aware that if men of mind and thought are satisfied with what is reasonably related, it is not so with those whose aim is to fish in muddy waters. The latter, not being able to refute directly what they are unwilling to accept, give vent very often to personalities against the unfortunate writer who has dared to put the distasteful doctrine before them. And who will assure us, they say, that he has not been deluded by excessive credulity? May he not be an impulsive fantastic or mistaken writer? He asserts without proving his statements. Can we hold to his words or to those of his heroine, whose revelations are often the only proof of what he says about her? Good heavens!

But let me answer: If a historian, in order to gain the confidence of the public, were obliged to prove with positive arguments that he is truly a right-minded man and incapable of the least error, who would dare to take his pen in hand to write? And besides, it is assuredly a ridiculous pretension to demand that one who declares himself an ocular witness of what he narrates should step by step prove its truth as a condition of credibility. With how much greater force must not this be said when it is a question, as in the present case, not merely of stating historical facts, but of describing the internal action of grace in a soul? As a matter of fact, only two persons can here give true evidence: the soul herself, by revealing what passes within her to her director, and the director who examines those secrets of conscience, in order to be well informed regarding them. But what kind of evidence would they look for in this matter with a view to make certain of the truth? The most they could expect would be renewed proofs from exterior manifestation, for holiness is not so confined to the inmost soul as not to let its beauty be evident in exterior actions. I shall not fail from time to time to bring such renewed proofs before my readers, together with abundant corroboration by witnesses most worthy of belief.

My work is to write a biography, and a biography is a collection of lines like those of a portrait, the result of which when put together must be either failure, if correspondence be wanting between them and the prototype; or a true picture, if the individual they depict cannot be mistaken for any other person. The painter of this likeness may easily be at fault in some unimportant details, since it is human to err, or in not having been able to see all the minute accessories. It must not be wondered at, should he draw a little from the less carefully made statements of other people. But the fact remains that a picture, to be true, must faithfully represent and must be drawn from the original. That my biography or portrait truly represents, and has been carefully

drawn from the original, is proved by countless facts and living witnesses. Hence, those who without having seen or known the original despise it because they imagine they detect in it some inaccuracy, give proofs of deficient judgment or of prejudiced minds.

“But instead of a humble child,” they say, you are presenting us with a Saint of the first order fit to stand side by side with a Teresa, a Mary Magdalene, a Veronica Juliana. And I answer: Why not? Is there anything repugnant in the fact that a humble child of our own time should be as highly favoured by Heaven as were, three centuries ago, the above-named Saints? Certainly, judging from outward appearance, no one would have imagined such things of Gemma Galgani. But who can claim to have known her intimately and to have dealt with her familiarly, so as to arrogate to himself the right to say: “You have excessively exaggerated the lines of your portrait.” With much more reason could I in all truth retort: it is you who are at fault; you seek to lessen the power of the Omnipotent, who precisely from the most despised and contemptible of the world is wont to raise up His most glorious Saints. The Church of Christ was and ever will be the fruitful Mother of Saints. Blessed indeed are those who can glory in having had one in their midst! And wretched indeed they who, ignoring the gifts of God, render themselves guilty of that ingratitude with which Our Lord reproached the Nazarenes when He said, *Non est propheta sine honore, nisi in patria sua et in domo sua*: “A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

May God be glorified in all things, as He will always be glorified in His Saints! *Qui glorificatur in conspectu sanctorum suorum.*

Fr. Germanus

Introduction

At the Beatification of Blessed Gabriel of the Addolorata in 1908, to many of us who had the privilege of being at the function in St. Peter's, the most interesting figure among those present was certainly the Passionist, Father Germano di S. Stanislao. Not only had the result of the process for canonization depended in great measure upon the zeal, work and prudence of this holy priest, but he had also given us an account of the Saint's wonderful and saintly life.

The same Padre Germano di S. Stanislao, who only died a few months ago, is also the author of the *Life* of the Servant of God, Gemma Galgani, which is here translated for the benefit of English readers.

Gemma had the advantage of having as her chief director in the spiritual life this saintly Passionist Father, evidently so well-skilled in the science of the Saints. It is fortunate indeed that he was spared to complete the *Life* of this holy soul, for no one could have given the particulars so fully, or with such authority, or have won the confidence of the reader to credit the marvels he has to relate as the author who writes with such transparent honesty, calm common sense and perfect knowledge. He hoped, as he says, that he might be allowed to live long enough to see his spiritual daughter, Gemma Galgani, beatified. This has not been granted to him, but by this *Life* he has written, he will have made it morally certain at no long delayed date, and his prayers in the other world will no doubt hasten the consummation of his pious wish expressed in this.

The story of Gemma Galgani will well repay perusal, for though it is merely the narrative of the life of a young girl born in a village

near to the city of Lucca in our own times, it would, I think, be hard to find another such wonderful record of the dealings of Almighty God with a soul that had given itself entirely to the leadings of His Divine Grace. To us, who live in this most materialistic age of reason alone, when the very name of God is being expunged from the school books of the young, and when the dealings of His Providence with the world He has created are explained away as ridiculous and childish fables, and when the supernatural is being constantly denied altogether or, held up to so-called criticism, is declared to be at best doubtful, it is useful and refreshing to have a book like this to read, which brings before us God very near indeed to our world, and in a way that can be spoken to and attested by those that have witnessed the marvels here recorded. Personally, I do not know of the life of any Saint in any age of the Church which has brought home the supernatural to my mind more plainly and fully than Father Germano's story of the life of Gemma Galgani.

In the atmosphere in which we are called upon to live in this twentieth century, God and the things of God are apt to appear a long way off from our lives, if indeed they appear at all. Belief in the supernatural world, which our Faith teaches us is all round about, and even any real sense of the presence of God Himself, "in Whom we live, move and have our being," is often weakened and obscured, if not altogether obliterated by the general skepticism and infidelity of a world which claims to make the bodily senses the sole evidence of all that is real. In the Middle Ages, whatever may be thought of the general ignorance of the times, about which nothing need here be said, it is impossible to deny that the sense of the supernatural was very real and universal. Heaven in those simple days, as someone has well said, "was hardly even next door," and the spiritual world merged almost without distinction into the world of sense, so that the one formed the acknowledged complement of the other. There was too much

credulity perhaps, and some little tendency to superstition, but the Faith itself was very real and true and earnest, and there was a “bloom,” so to say, upon it in those simple times, which, alas, in these prosaic days of gloomy skepticism is scarcely to be recognized, and which it is hardly possible to preserve! In the “Ages of Faith,” as Cardinal Newman has somewhere written, there was a kind of life in regard to God which was almost Arcadian in its simplicity, and which reminds us of the days of the patriarchs of old, who sowed their fields and tended their herds and their sheep, and the Angels of God visited them.

We are apt to think, I fancy, that these days are no more, and that in the mists of doubt and distrust engendered by the spirit of this materialistic age of ours, not to speak of the breathless condition which allows no time for sober thought, caused by the ever quickening pace with which we hurry along the path of life lest we should be left behind, God’s presence has withdrawn itself farther from a world that has less and less to do with Him.

In regard to ourselves too, who have to live our lives in these latter days, we seem to imagine that His arm is shortened and that the marvels of His dealings with our human souls no longer appear as they did in the simpler and more peaceful ages of Faith.

Every now and then, however, we are startled into recognizing as a fact that God is with us still, and that it is mere folly to suppose that the days of His miracles have passed away. At one time, perhaps it is the fact of some miraculous cure at some chosen shrine or other, which manifests His power and His presence and stirs our failing faith; at another, it may be some personal leading of His Grace which it is impossible to doubt, which comes to our help and shows His leading hand; at another, it is perchance some evident proof of His providential care over us; at another, it is the answer to some heartfelt prayer, which proves to us at least that He is not far off from us.

The *Life* here printed I look upon as one of those helps which are given to us from time to time to assist our faith and to bring God nearer to our souls. It is quite impossible, at least so it seems to me, for any Catholic to read the following pages without deep feelings of thankfulness that Almighty God has manifested Himself in such a truly marvellous way in the person of this saintly girl, even in these our own days.

The story of this simple maiden must be read to be fully understood: but in its main lines it is as follows: Gemma Galgani, the daughter of a fairly well-to-do chemist in the village of Camigliano, near Lucca, in Tuscany, was one of several children, most of whom died young. She was born on the 12th of March 1878 and had the great advantage of having a truly saintly mother, as well as a father who was an excellent Catholic of the old school. The surroundings of the child were thus those of an ordinary Christian household of middle-class people. From her earliest years, Gemma was attracted in an extraordinary way to things of a spiritual nature, and her mother, by every means in her power, encouraged these sentiments. In fact she, of set purpose, instructed her how to walk in the way of the supernatural life, teaching her to realize from childhood the sacred presence of God and of His holy Angels, and to yearn after the personal love of our Divine Lord with all the ardour of her pure heart. The child responded to these early lessons of her mother, who, however, died of consumption when Gemma was but seven years old. But even at this early age the child had already experienced at the time of her Confirmation, which took place May 26, 1885, the beginnings of that direct and personal leading of the Holy Spirit, which continued all through her life and brought her, while young in years, to tread the higher paths of the spiritual life. She herself describes this "leading" as "a voice at my heart" which "said to me" so and so.

Throughout her whole life she could have no doubt both as to the reality of the voices which spoke so clearly to her soul nor as to their meaning. It was as clear and certain as if the voices were external. Generally it was Our Blessed Lord Himself who thus manifested His desires and commands to her, for with the eyes of her soul she saw as well as heard Him. Those with whom she lived, who were nearest to her and most intimate with her, as well as her spiritual director, had likewise no more doubt than she had as to the honesty and reality of these manifestations. Later on in her life when she was frequently unconscious in her ecstasy, many intimate friends were witnesses without her knowledge of what at least she answered in the conversations she had with Our Lord; and these replies were so clear that from them it was possible to judge of the nature of the communications. She also, at the bidding of her director, wrote down a great deal of what was told her during these spiritual “locutions,” as they are called in this *Life*.

Another manifestation of the supernatural world allowed to this simple girl was the constant visible presence of her Guardian Angel. He watched over her at all times, conversed with her and often showed her what to do in order best to please her Divine Master, which was her great, and in fact her only, desire. From the time of her First Communion, as she told her confessor, she experienced “an ardent desire to know in detail all the life and sufferings of Jesus,” and it may be said that the memory of Our Lord’s Passion was constantly in her mind during the rest of her life, and was the perpetual subject of her meditations and her prayers.

It must be borne in mind that during all the time she was the recipient of the remarkable supernatural favours from God which characterized her brief existence in this world, Gemma always retained the simplicity and docility of a child. Her surroundings,

as I have said, were at first those of an ordinary fairly well-to-do home, in which she took her share with the rest in carrying out the domestic duties of the household. After her father's death, when the family was reduced to poverty and she had been adopted, really on account of her piety, by a devout lady, she found herself among a number of children, in a small house which left her even less privacy than she had enjoyed in her former home, since she often had to share her room with one or other of the daughters of the house. Here, too, she took her share of the domestic duties. It was in this way that some, at least, of the marvels wrought by God's grace in her later years were known so well to others, many of whom must still be living. We have also the absolute testimony of those who knew Gemma, that so far from obtruding these favours or publishing them abroad, she did everything that was possible to hide all knowledge of them from others. She was ever modest, simple, humble and a model of obedience in everything and to all. She lived as the others lived, and worked with the rest of the household, and she did as the rest were wont to do in every way, and was much loved and respected by all.

The account of her exalted gift of prayer given by her spiritual director in Chapter 24 of this *Life* is very instructive and interesting. She began the exercise of ordinary meditation under her mother's guidance while quite a small child of under seven years, and from the first she applied herself to it at fixed hours of the day with obvious pleasure. The morning while at church and the evening before going to bed were sacred times of mental prayer, but besides these she devoted every other spare moment she could get in the day to this holy occupation, which was really her greatest delight. At first she followed out the rules for preparation, etc., for her mental prayer, which are laid down by most spiritual writers and which are necessary for some souls and are useful to many others. Quickly, however, she found

that these ordinary helps to mental prayer did not assist her, but on the contrary were calculated to hinder her from entering upon that intimate communing of her spirit with God, which is of course the real end of all such prayer of the soul. She apparently had no difficulty whatever in regulating her thoughts and required no artificial aids to bring God's presence before her mind. No sooner had she set herself to pray than the world seemed to vanish from her imagination, and, as her biographer states, "she remained free to treat with God as if the earth no longer existed." The whole account of her state of prayer will well repay study, for her gift of contemplation was such that it will be difficult to find examples of it in the lives of many Saints.

The statement as to her method of prayer, which she wrote down at the bidding of her spiritual director, is worth quoting from here:

When I place myself to meditate [she says], I use no effort. My soul immediately feels itself absorbed in the immense greatness of God, now lost at one point, now at another. But first I begin by making my soul reflect that being made to the image and likeness of God, He alone has to be its end. Then, in a moment, it seems that my soul flies away to God, loses the weight of the body and I, finding myself in the presence of Jesus, lose myself totally in Him. I feel that I love the heavenly Lover of His creatures, and the more I think of Him, the more I come to know how sweet and amiable He is.

But all these great spiritual favours were but the preparation for what was to come. The favourite, and indeed almost constant, subject of thought and prayer with Gemma was Our Lord's sacred Passion. Often she begged of Our Blessed Lord to be allowed to share those sufferings with Him, or at least to be

permitted to feel physically something of what He had to bear in the hours of His Passion and at the time of His death. Some few years before her own death in 1903, her longing was partly satisfied by the reception of the stigmata in her hands, feet and side. These wounds opened and poured forth copious streams of blood every week for some years, during the period between each Thursday to Friday night. They then closed of themselves in such a way that by Saturday, all trace of anything beyond a white mark in the flesh had disappeared. Besides these marks of the Crucifixion, at various times Gemma received other tokens of her participation in the torments which Our Lord endured. For example, on July 19, 1900, while in an ecstasy, the vision of Christ wounded and bleeding came so clearly before her that she begged Him to let her suffer yet more of His Agony and bodily pains, upon which He took the Crown of Thorns from His own Head and pressed it upon hers. From that time, on the Fridays, she bore also the marks of the thorns. Her forehead was frequently seen by many witnesses to be encircled with punctures such as the actual thorns would have made, and more strangely still, the whole of her head was found to be pierced in various places as it would have been had the crown been made in the shape of an entire cap, as the revelations of some Saints have indeed described it.

Besides these marks of the Passion, Gemma was permitted on many occasions to suffer a sweat of blood like Our Saviour underwent in His Agony in the Garden. This phenomenon, which naturally could not be hidden from those who lived with her, is testified to by many witnesses, and the fact cannot reasonably be called in question. She also had on her left shoulder the open wound which, according to some revelations, although it is not recorded in Holy Scripture, Our Blessed Lord received from carrying the Cross to Calvary. With this also came the bruised knees, which must have been caused by His repeated falls.

But perhaps the most extraordinary marks of Our Lord's sufferings which the saintly girl bore on her flesh, were those of the terrible Scourging at the Pillar. These marks on her body are described by many witnesses as fearful to behold: great gashes appeared in the flesh of her body, on her legs and arms, as if they had really been torn open, in places even to the very bone, by the loaded whips of the soldiers, as in the case of Our Lord.

Sufficient has been here said to show that the life of this saintly maiden, here made accessible to English readers, is no ordinary one, although it is the story of a young girl of our own time. A perusal of its pages cannot but make Catholics realize the fact that God is really nearer to us than, in the midst of our usual absorbing occupations in this rationalistic age, we have perhaps thought possible. Of course those who are not of the "Household of the Faith" will probably be skeptical about the whole account. and the words "fraud" and "hysteria" will be taken by many to explain satisfactorily the strange phenomena here recorded. I would beg anyone into whose hands this volume may come who may think this an adequate explanation, to read the Appendixes before passing a definite judgment. In these, this precise question is discussed by the author of the *Life*, who had the best knowledge of the holy maiden that it is possible for anyone to have.

Catholics, who believe that God is ever with the world He has created and that even in our materialistic age His arm is not shortened, however much our vision may be restricted by our surroundings, may well thank Him for this manifestation of the power of His Grace in the life of Gemma Galgani, which brings so clearly before us the fact that the supernatural world is as sure, as real and as near to us as the world of which our senses tell us. God is indeed "wonderful in His Saints."

Fr. Abbot Aidan Gasquet, O.S.B.

Chapter 1

BIRTH—EARLY EDUCATION—FIRST VIRTUES*1878-1885*

Camigliano, a village in Tuscany near Lucca, was the birthplace of the angelic girl whose life I am about to write.

She was born on the 12th of March, 1878. Her parents were Henry Galgani, a chemist, descended we are told from the family of the Blessed John Leonardi; and Aurelia, of the noble house of Landi, both good Catholics of the old school and honoured citizens. They had eight children, five boys and three girls. All of them, except three who are still living [at the time this life was first written], died in their youth.

According to the custom of truly Christian parents, these good people were careful that their children should be baptized as soon as possible; and so Gemma, fourth child and eldest daughter, was baptized the day after her birth in the Parish Church of St. Michael in Camigliano by the rector, D. Peter Quilici.

The name given her in Baptism seemed providential, for she was destined to give luster to her family by the splendour of her virtues and to shine as a brilliant gem in the Church of God. The parents of this child of benediction were no doubt moved in a special way to give her this name, for we are told that her mother, just before she was born, was full of joy; and her father also, as soon as he saw her, was impressed with feelings of special gladness. Not having experienced such feelings at the birth of any other of their children, it was natural for them to look on her as a specially precious gift and to call her Gemma. It is certain

that they so regarded her as long as they lived. In their eyes Gemma was always the first among all her brothers and sisters. Her father was often heard to exclaim: "I have only two children, Gemma and Gino." Gino, though her elder by some years, yet tried to copy the virtues of his little sister and thus came to have the second place in his father's affections. He was an angel of purity and innocence. When he died he was aspiring to the priesthood and had already received minor orders.

Signor Galgani, soon after Gemma's birth, in order to provide efficiently for the education of his children, took his family permanently to Lucca.

When two years old, Gemma was sent with her brothers and sisters to a private half-boarding school for little boys and girls of the best families. It was kept by two excellent ladies of Lucca, Emilia and Helen Vallini. She continued to go to that school for five years. Her good mistresses some years later in a written report expressed their admiration of her as follows:

Dear Gemma was only two years old when confided to us. From that early age she gave evidence of ripe intelligence and seemed to have already attained the use of reason. She was serious, thoughtful, wise in everything, and differed from all her companions. She was never seen to cry nor to quarrel; her countenance was always calm and sweet. Whether petted or blamed, it was all the same, her only reply was a modest smile, and her bearing was one of imperturbable composure. Her disposition was vivacious and ardent, yet during her whole time with us we were never obliged to punish her; for in the small faults that necessarily attach to that tender age, the slightest reproof was enough for her and she at once obeyed. She had two brothers and two sisters at school with her. She was never seen at variance with them and invariably yielded the

best of everything to them, depriving herself of it. At the school dinner, Gemma was always satisfied, and the smile that played on her lips was her only complaint or approval. She learned at once all the prayers that are daily said by children, although, if repeated together, they would occupy half an hour. When five years old, she read the Office of Our Lady and the Office of the Dead from the Breviary as easily and quickly as a grown person. This was owing to the special diligence of the angelic child, from her knowing that the Breviary was a network of Divine praise. She was assiduous at her studies and quickly learned all that was taught her, even things that were superior to her tender years. Gemma was greatly loved in the school, especially by the little girls, who always longed to be with her.

Having lately visited the Signore Vallini in Lucca, I heard their full confirmation of the above report. It ended thus:

We also wish to say that we owe to this innocent and virtuous child a great favour we received from God. While she was attending our school, a very malignant type of whooping cough invaded Lucca, and all our family were attacked by it. We felt that we ought not to keep the five children while it lasted; but having consulted the parish priest, he advised us not to abandon them because their mother was lying ill and in danger of death. We took his advice, and, on dear Gemma praying at our request, the epidemic ceased, and not one of our pupils remained affected by it.

Emilia and Helen Vallini

Gemma's father followed attentively her rapid progress in virtue and learning. He blessed God for it, and at the same time his tender love for her increased.

He used to take her with him for walks. Whatever he gave her or got for her, he insisted should be of the best. On the days of school vacation he delighted to have her near him, and when he came indoors his first question was sure to be: "Where is Gemma?" Upon this the servants invariably pointed to the little room where she spent her time alone in study, or in work or in prayer.

Without doubt such partiality on the part of a father was not praiseworthy, and it was specially displeasing to Gemma, whose singular rectitude of mind and heart was manifest to all from her very infancy. There was not a shadow of jealousy on the part of her brothers or sisters, so great was their love for her, yet her father's partiality caused her bitter grief. She often complained to him of it, protesting that she was unworthy of such attentions and declaring how much she disliked them. And when she could not prevent them, she poured out her grief in abundant tears.

It occasionally happened that this affectionate father, taking his little one on his knee, would attempt to kiss her, but in this he never succeeded. Angel in human form that she was, though most ardent in her affection, she showed even at that early age an intense dislike to all that savoured of sense. Using all her strength to get away from her father's caresses, she used to say, "Papa, don't touch me"; and on his answering, "But surely I am your father," her reply was, "Yes, Papa, but I don't want to be touched by anyone." And he, not to sadden her, would let her go and, far from being displeased, ended by mingling his tears with hers and withdrew in astonishment at angelic tendencies like these in so young a child. Gemma in her turn attributed these victories to her tears, and being always on her guard, she knew

how to hold them in reserve and used them successfully when needed.

On one occasion a youth, her first cousin, attempted to touch her and paid dearly for it. He was on horseback at the door of their house and, having forgotten something, called out to Gemma to bring it to him. She answered at once and in an instant brought him what he wanted—she was then seven years of age. Touched by the graceful way in which that little service was rendered him, the youth, to show his gratitude to his dear little cousin, put out his hand when leaving to pat her on the cheek. But Gemma immediately repelled his action with such force that, losing his balance, he fell from the saddle and was injured by the fall.

Gemma's love for her mother was quite different from that which she bore her father and the other members of her family, although it was not less true and strong. Aurelia Galgani was not only a good Christian, but a saint and a most perfect model to all Catholic mothers. Her prayer was continual. Every morning she partook of the Bread of Life with sentiments of vivid faith, allowing no obstacle to prevent her going to church, even when suffering from fever. From this divine Food she drew strength and spirit for the perfect fulfilment of her duties. She loved all her children, but above all Gemma, in whom she, better than anyone else, was able to recognize the gifts of God. Grace had begun very early indeed to operate in the soul of the child. Its workings became evident in her perfect and humble dispositions, in her love of retirement and silence, in her abhorrence of vanity and pleasure-seeking and in a certain dignity of bearing that certainly was not that of a child. Hence her mother, well aware of her own duty and far from indulging in useless demonstrations of affection, set herself with the utmost care to cultivate in her child's soul those precious germs of all virtues. Here we see a mother becoming the spiritual directress of her daughter, and

Gemma, in her turn, full of gratitude to Our Lord for having given her such a mother, was ever mindful of the assiduous and unceasing care thus lavished on her. She used to declare that it was to her mother that she owed her knowledge of God and her love of virtue.

This saintly mother often used to take her Gemma in her arms and teach her holy things, mingling tears with her words. “I begged of Jesus,” she said to her, “to give me a daughter. He has indeed consoled me, but too late! I am failing and soon must leave thee; make good use of thy Mother’s instructions.” And then she would explain to her the truths of our holy Faith, the preciousness of the soul, the deformity of sin, the happiness of belonging entirely to God and the vanity of the world. At other times she used to show her the image of our crucified Lord and say to her, “Look, Gemma, how this dear Jesus died on the Cross for us”; and adapting herself to the capacity of the child, she studied how to make her understand the mystery of the love of God and how every Christian is obliged to correspond thereto. She taught her how to pray and habitually said prayers with her—in the morning, as soon as she arose, in the evening before going to rest, and very often in the course of the day.

All know how tiresome it is for children to listen to sermons and recite vocal prayers, owing to their difficulty in giving fixed attention to anything and to their eagerness for novelties. But it was not so with Gemma. She found her whole delight in those first lessons of piety, and consequently she never tired of hearing sermons and praying; and when her mother got tired, or had to stop in order to attend to her home duties, Gemma, following her closely, used to say: “Mamma, tell me a little more about Jesus.”

The nearer this good mother felt herself drawing to her end, the greater became her zeal and ardour in the religious education of her children. Every Saturday she took them with her to the

church, or, if not able to go, got someone else to take them. She arranged for the elder ones to go to Confession, although some of them, including Gemma, were not yet seven years of age. She thus accustomed them while young to frequent this salutary Sacrament. She herself prepared them for it, and when it was Gemma's turn, this devout mother used to weep on seeing her gravity and attention and the great sorrow she displayed for her little faults.

On one occasion she said: "Gemma, if I could take you when Jesus calls me, would you be glad of it?"

"Where?" answered the child.

"To Paradise, with Jesus and His Angels." At these words the heart of the little one was filled with great joy, and from that moment there was kindled within her so great a desire to go to Heaven, that it never left her. Indeed, it so increased with her years as to consume her whole being. This we shall see in the progress of her story. She herself once said to me, "It was indeed my Mother who from my earliest years instilled into me this longing for Heaven." Then, alluding to my having forbidden her to ask to die, she added with indescribable simplicity: "And now, after sixteen years, if I still desire Paradise and long to go there, I get good scoldings for it. To Mamma, I answered, 'Yes': and because she so often spoke to me of Paradise, I wished never to be separated from her and never left her room."

Signora Galgani's disease was consumption, and for five years it had been wasting her away. No sooner had the doctors ascertained its nature than a strict prohibition was issued forbidding any of the children to approach their poor sick mother's bed. Gemma was bitterly afflicted at finding herself thus in an instant separated from her whom she doubly loved as a mother and as a spiritual guide. "And now," she would say in tears, "away

from Mamma, who will urge me to pray and to love Jesus?" She begged and implored, and with great difficulty obtained that in her case at least some exception might be made. We can form some idea of how this fervent child availed herself of such a permission. She so took advantage of it that, thinking over it afterward, she felt deeply grieved, believing that she had disobeyed and allowed herself to be led by caprice. She herself tells us how she was employed by that bedside: "I drew near to her and knelt by her pillow, and we prayed." Sublime instinct in a little girl not yet seven years of age!

Meanwhile, the day of final separation was drawing nigh. The sick mother grew daily worse, although outwardly the imminent danger was not visible. Even at that last stage, she showed herself ever solicitous for the spiritual good of her children. Gemma, though of such tender years, was more than well fit to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. "Now," thought her devout mother, "I cannot do better than entrust this dear child to the Holy Ghost before I die; when the last hour is near, I shall know to whom I have left her."

Gemma meanwhile had been preparing herself to worthily receive this Sacrament; and not content with that, she brought a Mistress of the Christian Doctrine to the house every evening in order to add greater perfection to her own work. When all was ready, on the first occasion that offered itself, the child was accompanied to the Basilica of St. Michael in Foro, where the Archbishop, Monsignor Nicholas Ghilardi, was giving Confirmation. It was 26 May 1885. From particulars that escaped from Gemma later on, we shall be able to form some idea of the exceptional communications she received from the Holy Spirit in that Sacrament. It is well that she herself should tell us in all her candour what happened on the occasion.

When the ceremony was over, those who had accompanied Gemma wished to remain to hear another Mass in thanksgiving, and she gladly availed herself of the opportunity in order to pray for her sick mother. “I heard Holy Mass,” she said, “as well as I could, praying for Mamma, when all of a sudden, a voice at my heart said to me: ‘Wilt thou give Me Mamma?’ ‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘but provided Thou takest me also.’ ‘No,’ replied the voice, “give Me unreservedly thy mother. For the present thou hast to wait with thy father. I will take thee to Heaven later.’ I was obliged to answer ‘Yes,’ and when Mass was over I ran home. Oh, the ways of God!” This, if we are not mistaken, was the first heavenly locution to Gemma. Many others followed which we propose to relate in their order. The circumstance of the sacramental descent of the Holy Spirit in that innocent soul is of itself a good reason for believing that He was the author of that locution, the truth of which moreover was corroborated by what followed.

Gemma had made the sacrifice to God of what she held most dear in the world; the merit of it was secured to her in Heaven. She came home from the church and found her mother dying. She knelt and prayed by her bedside, shedding bitter tears, declaring at the same time that she would not leave till all was over, as she wished to hear Mamma’s last words. But her father could not bear to leave her there, through fear that she would die before her mother. He made her a sign to leave and directed that she should go with her Aunt Helen Landi to San Gennaro and there remain till he recalled her.

Gemma had nourished a constant hope to be able to keep close to her mother and go with her to Paradise. She had only just resigned that hope at the foot of the altar, and now, again generously obeying her father’s will, she left at once. Meanwhile, her mother rallied a little but soon relapsed and, on the 19th of September, 1886, died the death of a saint in the thirty-ninth year of her age.

The sad news was taken immediately to Gemma while still in her aunt's house, and admirable beyond words was the resignation with which she received it. But we can well imagine what must have been the poignant grief of such a separation.

Thus, O my God, dost Thou will to try souls most dear to Thee, even in their tenderest years.

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