"The life of the renowned mystic of Cascia reads more like legend than fact, yet its reality is based on proofs at least as valid as any that exist to support history. Those whose philosophy of life is circumscribed by things material will be sceptical of this biography, but among believers it should engender new confidence in and devotion to this remarkable fifteenth-century woman—maiden, wife, mother and nun."—America.
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Declaration

The author desires it to be understood that, unless where he states that the Church or the Holy See has recognised the truth of miracles or other supernatural manifestations referred to in the following pages, he claims no belief for them beyond what the available historical evidence may warrant.
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ix

CHAPTER

I. THE SHADOWS OF THE HILLS 1

II. THE TOWN OF EARTHQUAKES 3

III. THE VILLAGE OF TWENTY HOMES 6

IV. THE BEES UPON THE HONEYED FLOWER 9

V. THE BUDDING WINGS 12

VI. THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS 15

VII. CALVARY AND THE CENTURION 18

VIII. AND IT WAS DARK 22

IX. EJA MATER 25

X. ALONE 27

XI. THROUGH DOORS THAT WERE BARRED 29

XII. IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD 33

XIII. ON THE LADDER OF JACOB 35

XIV. DRINKING THE CHALICE 38

XV. THE ONLY BOOK—CHRIST CRUCIFIED 41

XVI. THE VICTORY OF OBEDIENCE 45

XVII. A THORN FROM THE CROWN 47

XVIII. A JUBILEE WITHOUT A THORN 51

XIX. NEARING THE SUMMIT 57

XX. THE ROSE UPON THE FROZEN TREE 61

XXI. BUT ONE STEP MORE AND THEN— 64

XXII. THE SEAL OF HEAVEN 66

XXIII. THE HOMAGE OF EARTH 69

XXIV. LIFE IN DEATH 79

XXV. THE PERENNIAL MIRACLE 84
NOTABLE DATES

1381 Birth.
1381 Miracle of the Bees.
1401* Marriage.
1411* Murder of her husband.
1416 Death of her two sons.
1417 Enters Monastery.
1418 The Dry Stick becomes a Vine.
1442 The Gift of the Thorn.
1450 Journey to Rome for the Jubilee.
1453 Last Illness.
1453-1457 Miracles of the Rose and the Fig.
1457 Death.
1626 Opening of the coffin and the Process of Beatification begun.
1682 Second opening of the coffin.
1703 Body is transferred to the hut in garden after earthquake.
1738 Process of Canonisation begun.
1741 Third opening of the coffin.
1745 Body placed in new coffin and old one put under the altar in her cell which had been converted into a chapel in 1595.
1851 Process of Canonisation again taken up.
1855 Process of Canonisation finished.
1899 Three miracles approved for her Canonisation.
1900 Canonised by Leo XIII on the Feast of the Ascension, May 24th.

* Approximate dates.
INTRODUCTION

To that very large portion of the modern world whose horizon is bounded by the laws of molecules, and which recognises no activities beyond those of matter, this life of the renowned mystic of Cascia will seem a legend. And yet it is a reality based on proofs at least as valid as any that exist to support history. With such persons, however, it is not the proofs are at fault. But, because the proofs lead to a conclusion with which they have no sympathy—because they have no faith—they dub as "legend" what has no explanation in their philosophy.

What is here presented to the reader—the historical figure of St. Rita—lives still in the tradition of the people. From the beginning it was recorded in Art and formed the close study of competent persons in many judicial investigations during four centuries and a half. It was the synthesis of these studies Pope Leo XIII and 26 Cardinals gave to the world in the Apostolic Letters of May 24, 1900; and it is on these this Life is based.

There is, however, another, and not a small, part of the modern world, which believes in activities other than material—activities of the free soul of man that, brought into being by
the Gospel of Christ and watered by His grace, come to flower in human lives and can be seen and admired by all, even the unbelieving, though they know nothing of the fruit that the spirit gathers beyond the grave. To such the figure of Rita will appeal with its strong human attractions in the midst of trials not uncommon in everyday life, though not borne with the same heroic fortitude. And they will see in her personal characteristic of love for her Redeemer, and for all whom He loved—even the murderers of her husband—the secret of His special favour and of the continuous homage she has received.

To those who honour her, the life of the heroine will reveal their own lives, in the opportunities they have got, and will always get, of suffering because of love, and of intensifying love through suffering: even though there follow the painful contrast of the want of co-operation with grace. It is with the intention of helping the reader to profit by this spiritual lesson that the author has interpreted—necessarily in a very imperfect way—the thoughts, aspirations, and prayers of "this precious Pearl of Umbria" (Leo XIII) in the many vicissitudes of her life.
SAINT RITA

CHAPTER I

THE SHADOWS OF THE HILLS

The scene of this life story is set in Italy, in Umbria, a provence cut through by the jagged Appenines. High hills, sloping down to plains such as are seen from Assisi, Perugia, Montefalco, Narni, and Todi, are the distinctive features of this lovely land. Brooks in the gorges, where so much beauty is focussed, swell to torrents when they carry down the melting snows and feed the rivers Tiber, Nera, Paglia, Topino, and Velino, or fill the historic Lake Trasimene and the more picturesque Piediluco and Colfiorito.

This home of Nature’s scenic beauty was always a home of Art. Dante sings the praises of Oderisi of Gubbio (Purg. xi. 7); and all the world admires Pinturicchio Nelli, and Perugino, the master of Raphael. Orvieto, with its cathedral, a jewel of Art; Assisi, Perugia, Gubbio, Spoleto, Foligno, and Rieti, will ever attract the traveller in search of the best models of architecture.

Yet the chief attraction of Umbria for the traveller is neither the beauty of Nature nor
the beauty of Art. It is the mystic influence of this Land of Saints. It is not even necessary to be a Catholic to fall a victim to that influence. Anyone who moves about that province and meets and talks with the travellers of different religions he meets from other lands will have no doubt of this subtle influence of Francis and Clare of Assisi, of Benedict of Norcia, of Rita of Cascia, and of Clare of Montefalco on every lover of what is good and noble, heroic and holy in human life. Every town and village holds some artistic record of their lives; and shrines along the roadside tell of many traditions dear to the pious peasants. And so one is well repaid by going on foot or in an humble "carrozzella" among the shadows of those hills.
CHAPTER II

THE TOWN OF EARTHQUAKES

RITA, described by Leo XIII as the "Precious Pearl of Umbria," passed her life in two places not far apart—Cascia and Roccaporrenna.

Going from Spoleto on the light railway to Norcia, the tourist or pilgrim to Cascia, after two hours of varied scenery, leaves the train at Serravalle and takes the auto-bus that in half an hour brings him to his destination. The town comes into view, the last mile of the road showing well as it spreads over the breast of the mountain that rises far above it.

It is first mentioned in the sixth century. The mediæval town was much larger than Cascia to-day; for it embraced seven populous quarters, each having its gate in the fortified wall that encircled it. There were numerous churches and monasteries, of which but few traces remain. That of the Augustinians, now a hospital, crowns the summit of the town—practically the only surviving monument after the earthquake of 1703. Thence came Blessed John Ugolini, O.S.A., and also Blessed Simon
Fidati the famous preacher and litterateur of the 15th century.

This earthquake, to which we shall have to refer again in this history, was preceded by one on August 18, 1586, at 11 p.m.; of such violence, we are told, that the houses on either side of the streets nearly touched, and all the bells of the village rang in the oscillation. The earthquake, however, which seems to have been the most severe was that in 1382, when the whole town and also the surrounding towns were destroyed.

The Convent and Church of St. Rita, as in this history, have had their vicissitudes because of these earthquakes. The original convent, of which only a part still exists, belonged, before St. Rita's time, to Benedictine nuns, and was called Santa Maria Maddalena, which name it kept after it had been given to the Augustinian nuns. It became uninhabitable after the earthquake of January 14, 1703, and the nuns were compelled to live in little timber huts in the garden. Not until King John V of Portugal, in thanksgiving for a great favour obtained through the intercession of St. Rita, built the new wing in 1752, were they enabled to have a permanent abode.

The old church, too, was considered unsafe in 1577, and was pulled down to be replaced by a new one, which was called Blessed Rita's.
This, in its turn, was destroyed in the 1703 earthquake, and the existing church took its place in 1707.

Since St. Rita's death at Santa Maria Maddalena's in 1457, after forty years of cloistered life, Cascia has been sought out by pilgrims, especially in the summer months. It was somewhat inaccessible before the days of railways and motor cars; yet its popularity even then is proved by some documents relating the disappointment of pilgrims after the earthquake, because they could not venerate the saint's body, which the nuns had placed in a wooden hut in the cloister gardens.

Now, however, Cascia is easily approached. For those who desire to remain over night in order to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion, there is a fairly good hotel. Most pilgrims come for a few hours only.
CHAPTER III

THE VILLAGE OF TWENTY HOMES

A FEW miles from Cascia, behind the mountain, is the little village of Roccaporrenena, where Rita was born. It is approached either by a winding and dangerous path around the shoulder of the mountain, or by the road that twists with the Corno River through the gorge. Both are picturesque from late Spring to early Autumn—unforgettable vistas of the Appenines rolling away in distant majesty, while the nearer uplands make a scene of restful beauty.

At the end of the Corno valley is the sad, almost silent hamlet of Roccaporrenena, with its twenty hearths, around which for many centuries the poor peasants rested after toil. There, one hears no sound of anvil, nor sees the smoke of factory. The “zappa” that shuffles up the surface of the soil, the sickle that reaps the scanty supply of corn, the little donkey that plods daily to and from the vineyards—these are the means by which the little industry of the valley is kept alive.

One of the twenty homes was, in the middle
of the 14th century, that of Antonio Mancini and his wife, Amata Ferri, the parents of Rita—peasants like all the others in the village. They went daily in early morning to their little holding up on the hill, bringing with them their frugal meal of home-made bread, a bit of cheese, and dried fruit. Then, as night was falling, they walked back to a warm supper and rest. But they found time to attend daily Mass in the village church at four o'clock in the morning, and returned there again in the evening when called to prayer. Sunday was a special day, with a sermon, singing by children, and the meeting of the Lord in Holy Communion. Rita’s parents were especially devoted to the Passion of Our Lord; it was their book of piety. And as the Cross is the chair from which Christ teaches all virtues, so these two poor peasants had the true wisdom with which they calmed all that threatened to disturb the peace of the village, being called by the villagers “the peace-makers of the Lord.”

In their home there was one joy missing—the presence of a little angel on whom to lavish the pent-up love of their kindly Christian hearts, and whose soul they would fashion and form under the guidance of Him Who had said, “Suffer little children to come unto Me,”—a soul to be one day a trophy of His Passion. So they prayed and hoped. Yet the years were
passing with the desire unfulfilled. The Lord was trying their faith, and at last thought them worthy of what they asked. A little girl was born to them, as were Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist to their respective parents in their advancing years—a heaven-sent gift in answer to prayer. A vision told the mother that the child would be a chosen one of God and that her name would be Marguerita.
CHAPTER IV

THE BEES UPON THE HONEYED FLOWER

IT was in 1381, and local tradition says on the 22nd day of May—the same day that seventy-six years later she saw the unfading light of Heaven—that Rita was born. There was joy in the little village; and after a few days friends and relatives brought the baby to the font at Cascia, there being none at Roccaporrenna. Here she was received into the household of the saints, where she was afterwards welcomed into the society of the angels.

During her infancy a portent that is attested in the early pictures of her life showed that the child was destined for great things in the designs of God. As she was sleeping in the wicker cot bees came and hummed around her face, going in and out of the half-opened mouth. It was a scene as peaceful as any to be seen in the heat of a Summer day around some choice flower. This one was just opening in the garden of the Lord, and the winged creatures came to play around it.

Yet another similar tradition is told by the villagers. Antonio and Amata had gone one
morning, as usual, to the cornfields outside the town. They brought with them the infant in a wicker cradle, as is the custom in Italy, when there is no one at home. While they were reaping, the child was placed in the shade of a tree nearby, for the sun was very warm on this July day. There was a path near the sleeping child, and when a peasant with a wounded hand passed on his way to the village to have it dressed he noticed bees humming near the child. Fearing that they would do her harm, he unconsciously waved his wounded hand to disperse them and then noticed that it was cured.

Those who are privileged to visit Cascia can still see white bees that never sting dwelling in the crevices of the old wall. They come forth from Holy Week to the feast of the Saint in May and for the principal feasts of the Passion. When they return to the crevices after the feasts they cover the aperture with a film, like a thin cotton gauze. It is recorded in the Process of Beatification that Pope Urban VIII had one of these bees taken and brought to Rome where, having marked it with a bit of thread, he let it go and it returned to the cloister wall of Cascia.

Similar portents are recorded in the lives of St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose. They were taken to indicate their future greatness as apostolic preachers; while in the case of
St. Nolasco the comb of honey made by the bees in the palm of his hand betokened his outstanding charity to the poor.

When we understand that God is the Creator of all things, and the Ruler of the Universe, it is easy to comprehend that He can speak to us, not by words alone, but by events. It was thus He traced out in the history of the Jewish people the future dispensations of the New Law in all its details. For this reason it becomes a study of engrossing interest to find the New Testament in the Old—in its liturgy, its laws, and the vicissitudes of its people. In fact, it was this wonderful harmony, coming from God alone, that was the most powerful argument for Augustine, at Milan, to accept the Gospel as sealed with Divine Veracity.

Thus it was that the Lord spoke to the villagers of this, His chosen flower, and their simple Magnificat of praise, "Sia lodato Gesu," rose from their hearts when saluting Amata with little Rita in her arms.
CHAPTER V

THE BUDDING WINGS

RITA was growing to girlhood. They say she was clear-complexioned, with blue eyes of tenderness and depth. At home she was helpful and prompt to obey; a virtue inculcated by her mother, who held up the example of the good Jesus, Who became "obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross." Rita prayed, too, with great seriousness and feeling. She had been told what great things God had done for her, and that He would do more—ever so much more—if only she would ask Him humbly. So she prayed much at home and in the church of San Montano. It was delightful to see her retire to some quiet spot, and become all absorbed in talking to her Lord. And she was so sweet of disposition! She always found something pleasant to say, and for the needy who came to her door there was always a warm welcome.

From her own meagre meal she never failed to put aside a portion for the poor children of her age. She was extremely modest; and, with
a calm, persuasive manner, preferred not to don the gaudy dress worn by the peasant girls of the region. The religious training given by Amata with the assistance of the priest, as well as her devotion to the Passion, were, with the aid of grace, developing in Rita a disposition to silence and recollection. She possessed a premature consciousness of the existence of sin, and what a great evil it is in God's sight. She longed to withdraw from the world, to retire to some lone hermitage as did the Augustinian Religious at Santa Maria del Castellano, Sant' Eufemia in Atino, or Santa Croce in Valle Noce. There among the peaks, she thought, one could talk to God and listen to Him alone.

She put the project before her mother, sure that she would see how reasonable it was, but it was not accepted. "Rita is a good child, thank God; but she is too young." Still, with the instincts of a Christian mother, Amata did not altogether thwart the child's noble ambition. An attic was agreed upon—the remotest part of the house—as the best possible substitute for a high-placed hermit's cell, and Rita converted it into a sanctuary especially commemorative of the Passion. As her thoughts were ever upward she had a window made in the roof through which she could look up to the Father of Light. It was the nearest thing to her
desire; and she was content, since her Mother's wish was for her the will of God. In the attic, before the rude Cross erected on a heap of stones, she took her first flights in contemplation.
CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

ABOUT a year had now passed for Rita, acting alternately as Mary at the feet of Jesus and Martha in the home. The tendency to "choose the better part" was always uppermost, and finally she decided to make known to her parents her desire to enter the Convent of the Augustinian Nuns at Cascia. Probably she had already visited them, and there obtained some spiritual books to satisfy her spiritual hunger. In those days the works of Blessed Simon of Fidati and others, such as the "Golden Legend" and the "Mirror of Penance," were much used.

She was now eighteen, and her decision was well matured. But her parents had other plans. They wished to have her married. With old age and death pressing upon them, they wanted to see her settled in life with a helpmate who would also be a support to them. Rita pleaded her cause sweetly and respectfully, but with great feeling. She had given her heart to Jesus; on earth and in heaven she wished Him alone. If it were pleasing to her good and
loving parents she would enter with the nuns of Santa Maria Maddalena.

For some unknown reason the parents did not give in; making, some say, a touching appeal to her not to abandon them in their declining years; or, as others say, moved by the persistent request of the suitor, Paolo Ferdinando who, if thwarted, might have retaliated severely on both parents and child. Anyway, some strong motive urged Antonio and Amata to have her betrothed.

Rita, of course, viewed their decision as a great trial sent her by the Lord. In the darkness that fell upon her soul her only refuge was the Crucifix. She prayed to Jesus to make known His will. We can imagine her saying: “Thou knowest that I love Thee. And because I do, I want to retire from the world and consecrate my life to Thee. I implore and expect Thy help in this, which seems to be what Thou hast from the beginning put into my heart. And if, O Lord! this be not Thy will, make known to me what I am to do.” And as she prayed, the thought of the obedience of Christ upon the Cross, following not His own but His Father’s will, illumined her mind; and with great force the idea came to her of offering up this great sacrifice of her own will. Her confessor, too, undoubtedly helped her to come to a decision, and assured her that, in the
circumstances, she was following out the will of God.

It is always more easy for a holy person to take up or bear a cross that the Lord has sent; for the consciousness of doing His will makes the burden light. And so it happened that this trial did not sadden or make her sullen with her parents. "The Lord's will be done! He knows that I carry my cross in my heart and I will do all that He has willed for me."
MAKING the best of things is a way most people have to live for some part of their lives. When circumstances, or fate, or whatever people may call it, exact from us a routine of life for which we have no relish, and to change which would only make things worse, we must put up with it. This is only stating the matter from a worldly point of view—a view shown by common sense, with no higher motive than that of our material well-being.

These circumstances were seen in Rita's case; but her motives were different. She had no relish for her state of life. She took it up because the Lord had placed it on her, and it always remained a cross. Her home trials were always multiplying. Her two children, Giangiacomo and Paolo Maria who at first absorbed her time and attention, and usurped her hours of contemplation, later on, became a source of serious worry, because of their waywardness. However, she fulfilled her rôle of Christian mother from a sense of duty, and because it
was part of her sacrifice. She took care to fill the two young minds with the knowledge and love of God, as she had been taught by her own mother, and when they grew big enough she used to lead them by the hand to daily Mass, the edified villagers calling her "the good mother," and "the holy mother.'"

While her duties, for one of her contemplative nature, were a great burden, the added trial of an ill-tempered husband was the most painful portion of the sacrifice. Paolo Ferdinando turned out to be a wicked man; quarrelsome and cruel. In these troublesome days she sought refuge in the silence, the patience, the benevolence, and the love of her crucified Saviour; knowing that the Lord asked this of her; His portion; and she would share it with Him. So, without murmuring, complaint, or resentment, she looked after her husband and her children as if they were the most loving in the world. What heroism in the saints! Nor was this all. Unlike others in such troubles she spoke of him to no one—foregoing this well-known balm of the afflicted. She sought guidance and consolation only from the Lord and His priest in the Sacrament of Penance. With the neighbours all through this time of trouble she was always kindly, and they called her "the woman without bile." She also continued her visits to the poor and the sick of the village, and the
surrounding country. Like her parents, she was an angel of peace, always excusing faults, smoothing out difficulties, and promoting good will.

Hard as it is to explain her parents' insistence on her marriage, it is harder to explain their choice of a husband for such a gentle and saintly girl. It may be that, like so many husbands, he promised well in the beginning. But he must have become degenerate not to have appreciated this jewel of a wife.

In the absence of documents concerning Rita's marriage, it seems easier to unravel the designs of God than those of men, for Rita proved to be the salvation of her husband, by her exemplary life as a Christian wife and mother. Her obedience to the Will of God bespoke a great victory. It came about very simply. One day at some bitter taunt Rita cried. It was as if a lance had pierced her heart. In a flash the whole long-drawn-out tragedy of her life came before Paolo. He fell on his knees and asked her pardon. He was now a changed man. Rita's sacrifice had borne fruit, and brought upon Paolo's soul the grace of the Passion. Of Christ the Centurion said "Thou art truly the Son of God." Of Rita, Paolo must have thought "Thou art a true spouse of the Man of Sorrows."

Rita assured Paolo of her forgiveness and
love—not that there was need of assurance on her part, but she spoke from the fulness of her heart. From that day there was peace in the home: Paolo began a new life; and it would seem that Rita's cross was being lifted. She thanked God fervently, not so much for the consolation He had given her, as for the grace of her husband's conversion. It was a soul gained to Christ, and she considered her sufferings light in comparison. Her sacrifices were well rewarded by Him Who recompenses even a glass of water given in His name.
CHAPTER VIII

AND IT WAS DARK

The ways of the elect on earth alternate with joys and sorrows. God ordains it so. St. Augustine, the Master of the Spiritual Life, remarks it and says that this is the sign by which those who love God know they are His. He never strikes without healing, because He is a God of Mercy. And after the joys of the Mount of Transfiguration He sends the sorrows of Calvary.

In Rita's life there was now peace, prayer, and work. The two boys were about fourteen, and Paolo was in the prime of life. He had laid aside his quarrelsome ways, and went quietly about his affairs as a prudent father and husband. But dark clouds were gathering quickly.

One day in November business took him to Cascia; and the road to be taken at this time of year was the one by the shoulder of the mountain, for in the low-lying Como road there were floods. The daylight had waned early on this November evening when he was returning, and it was already night when Paolo
found himself at the gulley of Collegiaccone—a deep cutting in the cliffs about a mile from Roccaporrenna. Suspecting no harm, he was assailed by three assassins who left him dead with a dagger in his breast, lying across the narrow pathway. It was a time of bandits and of lawlessness, because of the feuds and factions that prevailed; and Paolo, for some reason unknown to us, fell a victim.

Some short time after, a labourer coming home by the same path with a lantern in hand discovered the dead body of Paolo. Soon after, a few kindly women were deputed to break the tragic news to Rita. They found her at home anxious about her husband, later than usual in returning. They hinted at a mishap, an accident; but she half suspected the truth. With the tenderness of her loving heart she broke into tears of sorrow, while she took her two boys to her arms. Agonising were her thoughts. "What if Paolo is dead! He was getting so good! To be taken now from me just as he was making up for the past! Ah! but if he still lives; I will nurse him with all my strength, and redouble my prayers and penances for him, and prepare his soul for judgment."

The party hastened to the scene of the tragedy, Rita and her two boys with them. When they saw that he was dead, all Rita's
thoughts became absorbed in one point—how does he stand with God? How does he stand with God? "Oh Lord! If I only knew he is saved: I will pray and mortify myself and forgive his murderers from my heart, to get him out of Purgatory. Oh! If I only knew he is saved."

In the days and nights of sorrow that followed, Rita continued to do as she promised; and a peace came into her soul that she took to be an inspiration that her Paolo was saved. God gave her an opportunity, too, of knowing and pardoning the assassins; for she even sheltered them in her home, or, rather, one should say He had given her the occasion to practise the high lessons of the Cross on which she had meditated since her childhood. It was this knowledge of sharing sufferings with Christ that gave her the heroic strength to bear them, and even to thank the Lord for every trial.
CHAPTER IX

EJA MATER

The peace that settled down upon Rita's heart was short lived. An intuition of evil came to her from watching her two boys, when she spoke to them of the necessity of forgiveness and of how Christ forgave His executioners and prayed for them. They had evidently fallen under some outside influence, urging them to revenge. The soil was adapted to its growth; for they had inherited their father's impetuosity and choler. One may wonder at such ideas in boys so young—not yet fifteen. But boys are precocious in Italy, and with hot blood and revenge, development is rapid. Rita was tactful with them, and used every argument of religion adding prayers and penances to ask from God that the spirit of pardon would be given to the two souls entrusted to her. But she saw that their hearts were brooding over their father's murder; and she began to think of the possibility of their putting into execution, later on, the wild suggestions that, from their eyes, she knew were even now before them.
With the saints the horror of sin is supreme—it is such a contrast to, and such an outrage on, the God of love and holiness. Anything and everything before sin! Yes, even the death of her two dear boys, rather than such a sin upon their souls! "What if I ask the Lord either to turn them away from such an evil design, or to take them! It means a great sacrifice to a mother's heart. But I have already sacrificed myself, and as they are part of me let them go in the offering if God will accept it! The Madonna, Christ's own Mother, offered Him up, because she knew it would be for remission of sin; and He will know why I ask Him this. Take them, then, O Lord! if in Thy holy and just ways Thou wishest so to save them from stain of sin."

Within the year the boys took sick. The mother—not knowing yet the design of God, whether by illness to change their hearts, or to take them to Himself—having first filled them with the spirit of forgiveness, gave them all the care and attention that only such a loving mother could give. But they died. The Lord had accepted her sacrifice.
CHAPTER X

Alone

All ties were now broken—parents, husband, children—all gone. Rita had no need now to seek to be alone with God in the attic of her mother’s house. Her own home was now in its entirety a Calvary. “The figure of the world passeth away,” she thought; and in miniature it had passed away. She had more time for prayer at home and in the church. She was alone with God and with God’s poor, whom she never neglected to visit and to comfort. One day she met a poor man shivering with the cold in the snow. He appealed to her, and she took off the goat-skin wrap which the peasants wear in the winter, and gave it.

Let us not think that because she was a saint she did not feel sad and lonely in her home at the sight of the vacant places. The saints are human, and feel as we do the bitterness of the chalice of suffering; they drink it because it is God’s holy will.

When a child in her attic sanctuary, Rita used often look across at the rock that rises
nearby like a giant pyramid four hundred feet high. And how she wished a convent or hermitage were there, where she could go and stay to pray and be alone with God! Even now she will go there sometimes by the winding path and pray upon the summit. The Holy Spirit speaks best with the soul in solitude. The good people of Roccaporrenna called it the Rock of St. Rita, and put a cross upon the summit, when she was gone to heaven. A modest chapel now encloses the spot, and the pilgrim is shown the impress of her feet and her knees upon the stony ledge.

It seemed to Rita that as the Lord had broken all her chains He now wished her to achieve her life-long desire to be a nun. She set her heart upon the plan, feeling confident it was inspired by God, and trusting that He would help her. And so she enlisted the favour of her heavenly patrons—St. John the Baptist, given to his mother even as she was; St. Augustine, whose rule guided and inspired the monastic life, and whose hermits lived on all the mountains of Umbria; and St. Nicholas, the Augustinian monk of Tolentino, beyond the mountains, he whose miracles were the talk of every fireside. With God's help and their prayers, she would seek admittance into the house of the Lord.
CHAPTER XI

THROUGH DOORS THAT WERE BARRED

To Cascia, Rita went one day to see the Abbess of the Augustinian nuns at Santa Maria Maddalena. In one sense it was a "via dolorosa," for she was thinking of her Paolo and his dying on this road. But in another way it was a pilgrimage of hope. One thought now possessed her—to get a promise of admission to the monastery. She was prepared to be told that there were others in the town more suitable; but her heart was set on that particular monastery, and she felt it was God Who had planted there such a long-standing wish. "May God guide me what to say and how to act, and may He inspire the Abbess to grant my request. In Him alone I hope, and in my holy patrons." Every breath she took on the way was a prayer and an act of faith and hope.

At the monastery she was admitted to the "parlatorio," or guest room, with the grating, behind which the Mother Abbess appeared. Rita told her tale, already partly known at the convent, and told how, being now alone, she wished to be—what from her childhood she always hoped for—a nun, within the walls of
the monastery. She knew she was unworthy of this great favour, but if admitted, she would be the servant of all.

The Abbess was sympathetic, but said their Rule did not permit the admission of widows, and made some suggestions as to how she might elsewhere be able to carry out her good resolutions. Rita still pleaded about her early vocation for this particular Order, which the marriage forced upon her never destroyed, but the Abbess would not yield.

Rita returned at once to Roccaporrena, depressed, but not despairing. She recalled the words of her Saviour, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you," and she hoped in Him that He would fulfil them for her to the letter. She redoubled her prayers and her penances, and called upon her patrons to help her. Once again full of hope, she wended her way to Cascia to interview the Abbess, explaining that she felt persuaded God wished her to join this monastery, and to that end had inspired her to pray so perseveringly for that grace. But all to no purpose.

Back again at Roccaporrena, that evening some neighbours asked her where she had been, and she answered sadly: "I have been seeking admittance to the House of the Lord, and the door was closed in my face."

It was a time of great trial for the saint.
Like the panting bird, dashing against its prison wall of glass and again renewing the assault, Rita never wearied. She was well schooled in adversity, and she knew the ways of God with her so far, and she had learned never to waver in her trust in Him.

Alone in her little house one night—they say it was the night of the Ascension—when all the villagers slept, she kept watch before her Crucifix. "How long," she said, "O Lord! wilt Thou deny me the fruition of this desire Thou hast planted in my heart since first I learned to love Thee? It is, as Thou knowest, for Thy glory alone I ask this favour—to love Thee as Thou art to be loved, with the whole heart and with the whole mind and with the whole soul. No stag ever desired the fountains of water as I desire Thee, O God! Give me to drink and slake this thirst while on earth, and bring me to Thy House. And you, O holy patrons, most powerful with Jesus, intercede."

She heard a tapping at the door. Who could it be at this hour? She went to the window and looked out, but no one was to be seen. She called and no one answered. She returned to where she was. "Perhaps I was mistaken," she thought. Again she began to pray, but once again she heard the knocks, and then a voice said: "Be quick, Rita; it is now the hour." For the moment she feared some
deception of the Evil One, but the thought gave way to a new, sudden light that flooded her mind and soul. It was the Celestial Spouse that was calling: "Arise, make haste, and come. For Winter is now past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers have appeared in our land. Arise, my love, and come" (Canticle ii).

Rushing to the window she saw outside a halo, in which she discerned the figures of her patrons as she knew them in pictures. She opened the door, and in response to their sign to follow, she obeyed.

Through ravines and over hills they went; the way rough and stony. She began to doubt; but they comforted her, and at last she stood before the huge door of Santa Maria Maddalena: she knew it well. It opened, they entered and went into the little cloister church. Her patrons were no longer to be seen, but she perceived the stalls, the pictures, and the books of devotion in the flickering light of the sanctuary lamp. "Yes, He is here Who called me to His House. Praised be the Name of the Lord forever! My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name." (Luke i, 46-49).
CHAPTER XII

IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

IT was the early hour of Matins in choir. When the Sisters entered they saw a woman praying. It was Rita. The Abbess was the first to ask, "How came you here?" Rita, with a simplicity and candour that were convincing, told what had happened. The huge doors were at once inspected. They were found untouched, well fastened from within as was the custom. They believed her, for she was not a woman to deceive. All rejoiced that God had so favoured her and them. Matins and Lauds were then chanted. The hymn ended with the invocation to Jesus ascended into heaven that, as He is the way, so may He also be the goal of our desires, our joy after tears, and our rest after labour. And Rita with a heart full of thankfulness and peace answered. "Amen."

In the little village of Roccaporrena there was excitement. Where was Rita? Her door was open, nothing had been removed, there was every sign of a hasty exit. Perhaps she was in the church? But no. Perhaps in the
house of some neighbour or on the rock? But no one had seen her. The day wore on, and she was nowhere to be found. In the evening some villagers returned from Cascia announced the glad tidings, for the Sisters in their jubilation at the signal favour conferred on their monastery, had spread the news. And then they recalled the incidents of Rita's childhood—the bees at her cradle, the reaper cured, and all her prayers and sufferings, and they, too, praised God—"Sia lodato Gesu. We have now a saint to help us."

Rita was very humble in all this excitement within and without the monastery. "It was all the wisdom of the Lord," she said. She had prayed as He inspired her, and He crowned His own gift of grace.
CHAPTER XIII

ON THE LADDER OF JACOB

THERE is usually a year before a Religious makes the three vows of Poverty, Obedience, and Chastity. The initial ceremony is called Reception, when the aspirant receives the habit of the Order and begins the Novitiate. During this period of probation, the Novice becomes acquainted with the mode of life, and learns the end of the religious state. The Superiors, on their part, learn the dispositions of the Novice, and at the end of the year both are in a position to judge if there is a vocation to the religious life in that Order.

The will of God was clearly shown in Rita's entering: she was received as a Novice. She tried to make herself as worthy as possible of the great dignity to which she was aspiring— that of a sworn and accepted Spouse of Christ till death. There were meditations, Office, and spiritual reading, during which she tried never to be distracted. There were duties in the sacristy, the kitchen, the refectory, and the laundry, which she performed with care and willingness. There were mortifications from
differences of temperaments. These she offered to God for her sins. There were also worries and doubts about her duties to God and to the Sisters and the Superiors. Were these duties done as they should be? These thoughts she made known to her confessor, and got his advice and encouragement. Thus the Novitiate passed and the day of Profession came near.

She is to take the three vows until death—against the three lusts that are ever sweeping men headlong to spiritual ruin. She is to serve the Lord all her life, call on Him for salvation, and unite herself more and more to Him by love. This she had done all through life; but the cares of the world had interfered. Now she is setting the world aside; her soul is soaring to Him, unweighted by domestic duties and family ties.

The Profession ceremony over, she received the congratulations of the community, overjoyed at having such a gift from God. She then wished to be alone to thank the Lord for this long hoped-for favour. She fell into an ecstasy, and saw a ladder—the ladder of Jacob—with its foot upon the earth and its summit reaching up to heaven. She saw the Almighty waiting and beckoning to her to ascend, and she understood that, since it leads to God's embrace, it is the ladder of love: for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, of the Three
Divine Persons, is the union of lover and beloved, and it is by acts of love that Rita is to ascend to God. "The more you love, the more you ascend," says St. Augustine.

The ecstasy was witnessed by the Sisters, and Rita was worried lest it should become known outside the monastery. She besought them to say nothing of it; that it was to be set down to the goodness of God, and not to her own worth. The Sisters, edified by Rita's humility, made known her great holiness, so that God might be glorified, and good might be done to religion.

It was, therefore, inevitable that her name for holiness should grow amongst the people. The monastery became like the pool of Bethsaida, the centre for the afflicted and all went away content if they had a word with Rita, and the promise of her prayers. It would have been more to Rita's liking to hide herself away in her contemplative life; but God willed it otherwise.
CHAPTER XIV

DRINKING THE CHALICE

WE have now come to the rapid ascent of Rita on the ladder of perfection, and it is well to pause and consider why she, in common with all the saints, and especially the great mystics made so much of penance.

We have first to reflect there would be no place at all for penance if there were no sin in the world. There would be love, adoration, and thankfulness towards the Creator, but nothing of expiation would enter into private religion or public worship.

It is, therefore, a co-relative of sin, for it is the will to undo any offence to God by sorrowfully withdrawing it and by making restitution in willing suffering for unlawful yielding to created things. Essentially it is an act of justice towards God, Who has been offended. So necessary is it that He will never forgive an offence without genuine contrition, although, as far as restitution is concerned, it may be made sometimes by other than one's own sufferings.

Therefore, the more one considers the malice
of sin and the goodness and holiness of God against Whom it is an outrage, the more will be one’s spirit of penance. It is this clearer perception of the holiness of God Whom they have so often offended, and His bounty, which they have so often felt, that gives the saints their ready turning to a life of reparation. Their constant, heartfelt sorrow for their transgressions—their sense of confusion and humiliation before God: their fear of falling again: their prayers, their watchfulness, and their distrust of self—all come from one thought—the malice of sin.

There is another angle, too, from which they look at the need of penance. It is the same angle that we get from the Incarnation—Christ expiating the sins of the world and offering Himself a Victim to appease the anger of God. In that spiritual immolation He unites all members of His mystic body, making it not more effective, but more full and wide, taking in the whole Church. This is what St. Paul calls filling up what is wanting in the sufferings of Christ. From this flows the ardent desire of the saints to suffer with Christ, to be filled with His spirit of love and expiation.

And it was this suffering with Christ that gave them such joy in pain. For they knew it was His will that they should suffer as He did, and so enter into their glory. And they
saw in the sufferings He sent them a sign of His love.

Even from the point of view of personally making up for their own faults—slight though they were in the case of many—they never thought of their penances long enough or hard enough. Carrying out God’s justice on themselves, they thought life too short to make up for any sin. Remembering also their nothingness without the grace of Christ, they knew they were as “a brand snatched from the burning” and that however hard their penances, they were nothing to what would have been their lot were it not for the grace of God. From this followed their heroic patience, their joyful acceptance of trials, sickness, humiliation, and failures; their faithfulness in doing trying and painful duties; their fastings and mortifications. And since they were always urged by the atoning spirit of Christ, they did vicarious penances for the souls in Purgatory and for poor sinners on earth. These are the useful thoughts to keep in mind when reading of the severe penances of the saints; this explains the law of suffering that is everywhere inculcated in the New Testament for all those who would lead a holy life.
CHAPTER XV

THE ONLY BOOK: CHRIST CRUCIFIED

RITA prayed her Lord for strength on the arduous climb He had pointed out; she knew it meant likening herself to the Crucified. He is the Way, and His way is Love—love for men and love for the Heavenly Father. Love takes in, as He tells us, all the Commandments, but it takes in all the virtues too. No virtue is real unless it is guided by and filled by the love of God. And, therefore, he who offers his whole life in the love and service of God thereby puts a supernatural character on every act he does.

If, then, as St. Augustine says, we rise to God by love, the more we love the more we rise, and every act of virtue we do under love's influence is a step upward on the ladder of perfection.

Rita so loved her Lord that she strove to be like Him, and so fulfil the great wish of His Heart. This was the source of the penitential life by which she climbed with her Saviour to perfection. All her thoughts, words and deeds seemed to have their root in, or have to do with,
the Passion. It took her at least fifteen days to think over its outstanding points, and often, beginning some point at sundown, she was interrupted only by the sunrise and the recurring duties of the day. Not infrequently she was found in the morning worn out by sorrow and tears, and sometimes raised in ecstasy.

Thinking of Christ, Who, being rich, became poor for our sakes, she lived as poorly as might be. Her little cell was the smallest and most uncomfortable in the monastery, with only one small window near the ceiling. She allowed herself no bed—only the floor, or a plank; later, when she had to yield somewhat in this, it was only a rough mattress on the floor. In the corner she put a heap of stones and in them set a cross; nearby was a simple imitation of the Saviour's tomb. Now she was a hermit, officially accepted and approved by Jesus and encouraged on her way, not like the far-off days in her mother's attic.

Her penances, always severe, even from her girlhood, were now becoming heroic. The food, always scant and rough, she mixed with a bitter plant found nearby. All during Lent she took nothing but a little bread each day. She did likewise every Friday, Saturday, the vigils of the Feasts of Our Lord, Our Lady, the Apostles and the Saints of the Order. As a consequence
she was reduced to skin and bone, and when some of the Sisters asked her how she could live on so little, she answered: "I have an unseen food that sustains me; I find it in the Sacred Wounds of Jesus."

Her clothes were interwoven with thorns; she frequently scourged herself for the souls in Purgatory, the benefactors of the Order, and for the conversion of sinners. We are told in the Process of Beatification that she was often tormented by the devil. The duty of guarding the gift of life was put before her, and the discipline was ever torn from her hands, but she regained it, and put the tempter to flight.

The witnesses for the Beatification spoke of her heroic practice of the Theological Virtues. So keen was her appreciation of the gift of Faith that she prayed that God would, by His grace, spread more and more His Kingdom on earth and bring all to accept His Gospel. She was living in troublesome times—times of anti-Popes and schisms; and with true instinct she knew that all these troubles came from not accepting the Rule of Faith. It is only when the whole plan of Providence is revealed that we shall know how much worse the Church might have been but for the ardent prayers of the saints such as Rita turning aside the wrath of God. It is consoling to know that, now in heaven, they are even more powerful
with God, if men would only beg their intercession with Christ.

Her hope was always so unshaken and serene that even in the midst of her trials—and we know that God gave her a goodly share—her brow was never clouded, her heart never troubled. She knew that the mists would clear away, that the sun of God’s love and bounty would again appear.

Her love for God was so vehement that she was often rapt in ecstasy. It was wonderful to listen to her words of wisdom when she spoke of God and His attributes—a wisdom undoubtedly gained from an enlightening oneness with God.

It must be said also that her love for the Mother of Jesus was deep, especially as Our Lady of Dolours. How could it be otherwise when she was contemplating the scenes of Calvary? After the Crucified, no figure so moved the feeling of the mystic as the Mother of Sorrows at the foot of the Cross. To those who came to ask prayers or consult her, she always advised a prayer to the Mother of Sorrows, saying with confidence, “You will obtain what you ask.”
CHAPTER XVI

THE VICTORY OF OBEEDIENCE

THERE is a wonderful thing told in the Process of her Beatification that gives an insight into the spirituality and humility of the Servant of God. While still a Novice, she was ordered by the Superior to water every day a piece of dry stick thrust into the ground of the courtyard. A strange order—a fruitless, monotonous and humiliating task. But for Rita it was to obey, since the voice of the Superior was the voice of God. Day after day the watering-can was filled, and emptied round the stick. Who can enter into her high raised thoughts as she performed this act of obedience? She would gladly do anything the Lord wished; for He had done much for her. He had daily and hourly watered and nurtured her resolutions by His grace; and she trusted He would bring them to fruit on her Profession day.

The year of watering was not yet completed when, behold! with the Spring, tiny buds appeared upon the barren wood; they grew larger, and bloomed into a vine-tree. God's
hand was there. Obedience was rewarded with victory, the victory of life over death!

To the present day the pilgrim to Cascia who goes within the cloister can see a vine in the courtyard that tradition, local and historical, points out as the miraculous vine of St. Rita. It is a fine, sturdy, and rich bearing plant with every sign of great age. It spreads its branches right and left and forms a "pergola." There are no human means taken or artificial industry employed to keep it strong and healthy. It is left to itself. For centuries it has lived in surroundings unpropitious to its growth; and this is a testimony to the tradition.

Yearly some of the precious fruit is sent to the Holy Father and the Cardinals, while, with the rest, wine is made for the Mass.
CHAPTER XVII

A THORN FROM THE CROWN

WHEN Rita had been twenty-five years professed something happened that is rare—in fact, unique—in the history of the saints—the miraculous thrusting of a thorn into her forehead, from which she suffered unspeakably for the remaining fifteen years of her life. It was the Lent of 1442, and San Giacomo della Marca, the great Franciscan preacher, was giving a course of sermons in the Church of Sta. Maria at Cascia. Nowhere was the preacher more needed. The Fraticelli, Franciscans that had seceded from the Order under pretext of severity and reform, had made Umbria a special scene of their activities. When Pope Celestine V united them with his own monks, they got great influence, but Boniface VIII, who succeeded him, disunited them, and they became hostile. They blamed not only the Order from which they had separated, but also the Holy See and the Church herself. So serious became their opposition and their activities that Pope John XXII had to take serious steps against them. In the Papal
States they incited the Ghibellines against priests, nuns, convents, and churches. There was destruction everywhere, as we can see from the Bull of Boniface IX, giving absolution to the Cascia territory.

Although San Giacomo della Marca had come to preach after these happenings, the evil effects were still there. It is always so; many young men keep away from the Sacraments, harbouring bitterness and revenge. Years pass. They grow old and remain aloof from the Church, and a spiritual awakening is needed.

Giacomo della Marca had come to do this. No one was better fitted for the task. During his long life of ninety years (1389-1479) there were fifteen Popes. And from the time of his ordination, or soon after, they all used him in delicate and difficult missions during a most disturbed time in the history of the Church. It was he who aroused Hungary and the country adjacent, to a Crusade against the Turks. It was he who went through Italy healing the wounds of rebellion and schism.

The whole countryside came to hear this saint and orator. The Sisters of Sta. Maria Maddalena went in turn as their duties allowed, for as yet enclosure laws were not so rigid as they are to-day. Rita was there on Holy Thursday when della Marca preached the Passion sermon; the spiritual triumph of the
whole course, by which he brought compunction to every heart and tears to every eye. A murmured prayer for pardon rose from the lips of the multitude as the preacher ended. Rita went back to the monastery very much moved. She was well versed in every phase of the Passion; but to-night the living word, winged with God's grace, was unusually full of meaning. It was a saint preaching to a saint, and both were enlightened on the high mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

When she went into her cell the little Calvary seemed to be more real than ever. But on a night like this she must needs go to the Oratory to pray. There, one wall was painted with a fresco depicting Calvary in bright colours, and the flicker of the light seemed to give the figures life and motion. She looked up at the agonised face of the Saviour with the rough crown of thorns on His head. As she gazed, she prayed. We know not what she said, but she must in an outburst of love have asked Him to let her share His sufferings, for a beam of light went forth from the crown to the forehead of the saint, and through the beam, like an arrow, shot a thorn that pierced her forehead bone. She fell, prostrate with pain, and she would have died, worn out with the fasts and vigils of Lent, were it not that God reserved for her yet greater merit and greater sufferings.
The Sisters, finding her on the floor, asked what had happened. She answered humbly, telling them of the great gift God had given her. They took her to her cell, this bleeding victim of love and pain—pain asked for and joyfully borne because of the great love infused and nurtured in the heights of contemplation.
CHAPTER XVIII

A JUBILEE WITHOUT A THORN

POPE Nicholas V declared a Jubilee for the year 1450. It called forth world-wide interest, after the thirty-nine year schism, which, though ended in 1417, had left its fatal marks in every order of society. With the coming of Nicholas V, the Catholic world began to hope for peace with its blessings. All eyes were turned towards Rome. This was to be a Jubilee of the Church's unity, as well as the opening of her treasury for sinners and the suffering souls.

There were special reasons why the people of Umbria should flock to the centre of Christianity: the Pope was their temporal ruler. As there had been ill-advised rebellions there, it was fitting that Umbria should be well represented in paying homage to the Holy Father. Then there was the attraction of the Canonisation of the great preacher, Bernardine of Sienna, dead only six years and known to all. As for the spiritual advantages, were they
not all explained to them last year by della Marca in his preachings through the provinces? Nor were human attractions of little weight for many. Who had not heard of Rome and its splendours—palaces, churches, domes, fountains, and antiquities, pagan and Christian? And to see the great ceremonies in St. Peter's—the Bishops, Cardinals, the Pope borne in his "sedia" through the cheering multitudes to the melody of silver trumpets! To see the people of every nation coming in procession, singing their hymns! "It must be a bit of heaven," said the simple peasants as they made their plans.

The Sisters of Sta. Maria Maddalena had also decided to go. Nuns from all parts of Italy were going. The historians of that Jubilee describe their processions through the country and afterwards in the Eternal City. It was inspiring. In modern times the outward showing forth of faith is suffering from the shock of the Reformation, and the cold, materialistic setting of human society. The Faith, at least in its public expression, is hampered by human respect and false social standards. But side by side with schism and religious disobedience, the simple faith of the multitudes in the time of St. Rita spoke out and showed itself, thanks to the general acceptance of Catholicity, and to the leadership of great
men like St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. John Capistran, and San Giacomo della Marca.

Rita, sharing the common wish of the Community, came to the Mother Abbess for permission. But she was told that because of the sore on her forehead, she could not come out in public. For the past eight years the sore had been so putrid and loathsome that she had to keep to her cell. This fact the Abbess urged in confirmation of her decision.

Rita's wish to go to Rome was great; and, thinking in her religious way that the wish had been put into her soul by God, she addressed herself to Him for guidance and help. There is nothing, perhaps, so touching in all her life as the submission, generosity, oneness and trust which she now showed towards her Saviour. "Lord," she said, "Thou knowest Thou hast given me this pain and this loathsome mark as a sign of Thy love for me, Thy most unworthy spouse. To me it is a treasured gift beyond all price, because by it I can suffer with Thee. But now if this desire to go to Rome be in accordance with Thy Holy Will, I beseech Thee to leave me the pain and take away the sore, so that I can suffer in silence, without being a trouble to others."

Her prayer was heard. The wound healed perfectly, her face became younger, and she showed no signs of having suffered. The Mother
Abbess, seeing in this the hand of God, gave Rita permission to join in the pilgrimage and all the Sisters rejoiced.

The distance between Cascia and Rome can be gauged from the fact that a fast motor-car takes between four and five hours. Such a pilgrimage on foot was a serious undertaking for Rita in her sixty-ninth year. True, in the Holy Year of 1925, some old persons, even older than Rita, walked from Central Europe to Rome, but such are rare. Humanly speaking, even this relatively short journey from Cascia was a great undertaking for one worn out by penances and confined to her cell for the past eight years. But her trust in God and the knowledge that it was His will, kept her up.

Being the senior of the Sisters to go to Rome, she was put in charge of the little group. Anyone accustomed to the manner of making these pilgrimages, still in vogue in the country parts of Italy, where often a whole week is employed in going to Loreto or Genazzano, can understand the way the pious Sisters passed the time; leisurely and gravely walking in procession, sometimes praying, sometimes singing, with halts at the wayside shrines, and with simple religious functions. Visits were made to the churches they passed. At a monastery some simple food was taken—a bit of bread and cheese, a fruit if it could be had. There
were kindly invitations from convents and pious families to share some repast or to rest their weary feet. Money had been given them when they set out, sufficient for their frugal needs; but, at the first ford they crossed, Rita threw it into the river, preferring that the Lord should be their provider. The other Sisters began to chide her for tempting God. But she knew better. It is they who do His will at all costs who can count most upon His unfailing help.

Finally the gates of Rome were reached. Their first thought was to go to St. Peter's and visit the tombs of the Apostles. With Rita at their head, they walked up the steps, holding aloft their banner. Historians tell us that Rita was pointed out as the wonderful mystic of Cascia. But for such things Rita had neither eyes nor ears. Her thoughts were with the need of doing penance to make herself less unworthy in the eyes of God and to help the poor souls in these days of special expiation. Yet all the while she was being spoken of; and her companions heard many things that made them thank God for such a saint. It is said by some historians that she had a special interview with the Vicar of Christ. Had he inspiration from the Lord, he would have known that she was one of the five whom he saw that year who would be afterwards raised to the altar—San
Diego of Cadiz, St. Catherine of Bologna, St. John of Capistrano, and San Giacomo della Marca. He would also have seen in a vision another great Jubilee, that of Leo XIII, in 1900, when Rita, who now kneels for his blessing, would be proclaimed a saint in heaven—her next and eternal Jubilee without a thorn.
CHAPTER XIX

NEARING THE SUMMIT

AFTER Rita’s return from Rome she began to have a greater desire for heaven—to be dissolved and be with Christ. The splendour and the loftiness of the great feasts at St. Peter’s had given her the idea. The opening of the Holy Door in a Jubilee Year is, to some, the most impressive thing on earth. Then there is the ceremony of Canonisation—who can forget such scenes? They seem to give wings to the soul and lift it beyond the earth.

When she thought of Bernardine of Sienna, so familiar to them all, now in glory, she longed to have her exile ended. “But only,” she said always in her heart—“only if the Lord thinks I am crucified enough.”

In the designs of God for this great masterpiece of Grace she was yet to bear her crucifixion. The sore in her forehead reopened and became so repulsive that she was again forced to keep to her cell. But she was full of joy; for the same loving hand that had taken
the thorn away had now put it back again. "In this He is greatly glorified," she thought, "for all can see His hand. Yes, it is He; He alone is mighty, to Him be all praise."

And how pleased she was to be abandoned! She was tasting in a small way His abandonment on the Cross, and it was sweet to suffer when He willed it. A mysterious malady also came. The doctors could not diagnose, and, of course, could not cure. Such a thing has happened to other saints. Sent by God, and baffling cure, it tries them, and in this school of trial raises them to greater heights of perfection. In this last illness, which lasted four years, she was radiant with joy, though suffering. Especially when receiving Holy Communion, an ecstatic joy was always to be seen. Who can tell the love, the enlightening and the peace of those meetings with her Saviour. Like St. Paul, she would say it is not given to man to speak them—short times of reward for her heroic fidelity and generous love.

The best Catholics find it hard enough to bear patiently the trials of life, which God has sent them. But to ask God for them, to rejoice when the trials are sent, and to keep smiling through sorrow and pain—this is the heroism we have before us in the little cell on the Umbrian hills—a heroism drawn from Christ's Cross, ever the dowry of the Church, His Spouse.
The Sisters were in great distress to see her in such suffering without being able to give her any relief. Seeing their distress, she assured them her suffering was to be but short: and, though she had caused them much trouble by her sicknesses, nevertheless, God in His great love would reward them. Further, she assured them that when she came before the Heavenly Throne her Sisters and her monastery would have a special place in her prayers.

That the summit of the ladder was nearly reached, more convincing even than the signs of failing strength were the joy and ecstasy with which she received Holy Communion; for, being the Sacrament in which the soul is united with the Body and Blood of Christ, and in which is signified the union with God by love, it was evident that the daily Communion was ripening this chosen soul for the consummation of her union with God in heaven. The love that was born of faith and fed by Divine hope was now nearing the point marked out for Rita by God; soon it would have its realisation when, the veil being rent, she would see Him face to face.

Her ecstatic love and contemplation did not leave her absorbed in self and aloof from others. Many sought admission to the monastery to ask her prayers and to speak to her. With all she was gentle and thoughtful, sending them
away with words of comfort and often with assurance that their request would be granted. In this she was like her Lord upon the Cross, Who thought of John and of His own afflicted Mother, Who spoke words of hope to the thief, and Who interceded for His murderers.
CHAPTER XX

THE ROSE UPON THE FROZEN TREE

ONE day in mid-Winter, a few months before she died, Rita was visited by a relative from Roccaporrena. When they had talked a while in their own simple way, and her visitor was about to leave, she asked Rita if she could do anything for her. "Yes," she replied, "may I trouble you to bring me the rose you will find blooming in my little garden at Roccaporrena?" The woman wondered: "A rose at this time when everything is frozen!" In her mind she thought that Rita might be wandering a little, and so the Sisters thought who were standing by. But they nodded in acquiescence, and the woman left for home. When she looked upon the garden with the trees fantastically festooned with icicles and snow, she was astonished to behold one solitary branch of rose-bush all green and leafy. High upon it there was a full-blown rose, and the air was full of its scent. She went back at the first opportunity to Cascia and brought the trophy to Rita's cell. The saint took it
graciously and thanked God for all the things He had made.

We do not know why she asked for this flower. Perhaps like St. Francis and St. Catherine of Sienna, she had that close communion with the beautiful things of the Lord’s creation which simple souls enjoy; and she knew that He would not deny her the sight of a red rose, the symbol of His Passion. Whatever her motive, He gave it a miraculous sanction. All tradition in painting and poetry witness to the truth of the happening; in the cloister there is still the rose-bush that has been taken from the garden of Roccaporrena.

In reading this, our thoughts go back to the early days of Rita’s infancy soon after her Baptism at Sta. Maria. Her soul was then a fragrant flower of Springtime, and God spoke to the villagers of the sweetness of that flower by making the bees hum and play around it.

Now it is Winter time. Rita’s frame is bereft of strength and comeliness. The rigid blasts of penances and suffering have sapped her vitality, but she is still the same fragrant flower of virtue in her Winter of suffering—the rose upon the frozen tree.

Some time later, the same relative visiting Rita, again asked if there were anything she wished. The saint answered: “Bring me the fig you will find in my garden.”
woman did not doubt. In the garden she found the fig tree all barren and bare, but one branch was covered with green leaves, and bore a large fig dripping honey. She plucked and brought it to the saint, who thanked the Lord for His gifts. Rita knew from the Word of God that it is not in mid-Winter, but "when the Summer is nigh" that the fig-tree puts out its leaves; it is only at harvest time the honeyed fruit is fit to pick. But she knows that her Summer is nigh and the harvest of her long life is about to be gathered. Again she thanked the Lord for all His gifts.
CHAPTER XXI

BUT ONE MORE STEP AND THEN—

THE Winter had passed, the Spring of 1457 had come; May, the month of many happenings in Rita’s life, was well on. One day an unusual light filled the room. The saint looked in its direction and threw out her arms. The Abbess asked her what she had seen, and she answered that Jesus and His Holy Mother had appeared to her, saying that she was to pass to heaven after three days. What joy at last! During a long life she had prepared and sighed for heaven, and now it is at hand.

She received the Sacraments and prayed with the Sisters. They were sad at the thought of the parting, but she cheerfully encouraged them. She asked their pardon for her faults and for all the trouble she had given them for forty years.

Then Rita called upon her three patrons—St. John the Baptist, model and preacher of penance; St. Augustine, the high teacher of the mystic life, and St. Nicholas of Tolentine, who was made worthy to die to the strains of angelic songs. May they be with her now as
she comes up from the valley of life to the House of the Lord on the Eternal Hills, on this dark night of death, as they had been with her that night forty years ago. And they came! With them she passed from the shadows to the light. It was 3 a.m. on the morning of Saturday, May 22, 1457, when Rita saw the dawn of heaven and entered into the joy of her Lord.
CHAPTER XXII

THE SEAL OF HEAVEN

As soon as the saint had breathed her last, the Sisters went to the convent chapel to sing the "Te Deum." Neither Requiem nor De Profundis for Rita! She had flown straight to heaven. A wonderful light filled the cell. The bells in Cascia and in the country round rang out joyfully as if for a marriage feast. No human hand was ringing them, yet they kept on. The people were awakened. It was long before the hour for Matins and early Mass. Some shuddered, thinking it might mean an earthquake. But, no; there was no quaking in the earth and the bells were ringing lustily. Then they knew that it was Rita's death which the Lord was tolling forth, her joyful going from earth to heaven.

As early as it was allowed, the town-folk came to the monastery to see the "Beata Rita," as they began to call her in their prayers. The whole monastery was filled with a wonderful scent. Going to the cell where Rita was laid out they found that here was the source of the wonder. And Rita! They hardly knew her!
Her face was beautiful, and the wound in her forehead, once so repulsive, was now like a ruby. There was her little Calvary in the corner, and the imitation of an open tomb. There were also the instruments of her suffering—the Sisters changed nothing—the discipline and the rough clothes interwoven with thorns. “Praised be the Lord,” they said; “these are things of the past, and Rita is happy.”

Then the poor relative from Roccaporrena, who in the Winter had brought the fig and the rose from the garden, tried in an outburst of grief and love to embrace the reclining figure, and suddenly, her withered arm was cured. Soon after came Cecco Barbaro, well known in the art of wood-carving, to give his advice in the making of a coffin. His hands were stiff from arthritis. “If I had the use of my hands,” said he, “I should do it myself.” And he was cured forthwith.

Soon the monastery was visited by people from all the surrounding country. Even before the days of post, telephone and telegraph, news travelled fast from town to town. It was communicated by persons from field to field and on the roads, and seemed to be carried on the wind. Three days afterwards a blind man was led into Cascia from Colgiacone, where Rita’s husband was murdered, and he received his sight. The same day from Forcella was brought
an aged woman, Lucrezia Ser Paoli, worn out from many maladies. She returned quite cured of them all. Before the end of May, a child stone deaf was cured; and another who had been dumb from birth received her speech.

There was no haste to take away the body. The heavenly scent still pervaded the cell and monastery. People still came to pray, and went away with some good gift from Beata Rita. The Sisters wished her to remain there always. And as the authorities were convinced that the seal of sanctity was on her, the body was allowed to be kept for the veneration of the faithful. The now nimble hands of Cecco worked on a massive, noble coffin; or rather two—the outer one of chestnut and handsomely carved. When it was complete, the body of the saint was laid within it in the Oratory where she had received the thorn. There it remained until the making of the rigorous laws of enclosure on May 20, 1574, when a change was made to enable the public to venerate her relics in the public church.
CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOMAGE OF EARTH

The honour given by the Church to those who have died as saints is of two kinds: Canonisation and Beatification. For a Beatified the honour is bounded by a special place—a city, diocese, or province, and its particular nature is specified—such as permission to celebrate the feast day, to have a Mass or Office, to venerate a picture of the Blessed in a church, or to carry the relics in procession.

For the Canonised it is quite otherwise. They are enrolled in the Calendar of the saints, and all are obliged to accept them as such. For Canonisation is a definition of the Church and a precept. They are invoked in the public prayers. Temples and altars may be erected to their memory. In their honour Masses are solemnly celebrated and a yearly feast held. Their pictures are shown with an aureola, and their relics publicly venerated.

Beatification is preparatory; Canonisation is a final act of the Church. The former is merely permission for a cult, the latter is a precept. Beatification is limited, Canonisation is universal.
Since the Church is not inspired as to whether the Servant of God is in heaven or not, it must proceed by observation and investigation to find out the seal of heaven. For this, different rules have been followed by the Church. In the earlier ages, when the faithful had a keen insight into religious things and a lively faith, their feeling as to heroic sanctity was taken into consideration by the ecclesiastical authority. It usually happened that Providence guided the people by outward signs and proofs. The Bishop then allowed a certain cult to one who died with overwhelming evidence of heroic virtue. This was equal to Beatification. If the fame of the servant of God had gone beyond the limits of the place where he died, the Holy See gave permission for a specified cult in a particular place. When this had spread to the whole Church, and was sanctioned, it was equal to Canonisation, which is an act of the Church’s supreme authority.

New rules were brought in by the later Popes, and Beatification was reserved to the Holy See, and was to be the conclusion of a special judicial process. For Canonisation also very strict conditions were laid down; and they make it a lengthy, searching and laborious affair.

From these general remarks we can understand the meaning of many things as to the
honour given to St. Rita up to the time of the
Decrees of her Beatification by Urban VIII
in 1628—one hundred and seventy-one years
after her death.

To begin with, she was not buried, but
exposed to the veneration of the faithful in
the Oratory where she received the thorn. At
the official opening of the coffin in 1626, over
two hundred votive offerings were found, which
showed there was a cult to her from the very
beginning. From writings of 1485 and later, we
find that the civil authorities of Cascia had a
law by which they were bound to contribute
to the Monastery of Blessed Rita and to assist
personally at the celebrations of her feast to
implore God’s aid for the well-being of the
State.

During the month of May, the towns round
about, each on a fixed day, used to send a
pilgrimage to Cascia. These were called “I
ceri di Beata Rita.” The custom still holds of
keeping the doors of the church open every
night in May until 10.30 so that the people
coming in late from the fields may pay a visit
to the shrine. With the consent of the Bishop
a church was built in the town in 1577 “out
of devotion to Blessed Rita.” In 1595 her body
was exposed to veneration in the public church.
After the earthquake of 1599 the people, with
the Bishop’s sanction, made, in her honour, a
penitential pilgrimage on the Sunday preceding the feast. In 1614 Paul V gave permission to the Governor of Cascia to spend 150 scudi for a standard of Blessed Rita to be borne in procession with her relics.

Finally, in 1626, the Process of Beatification was opened at Spoleto and was completed in 1627. Then Urban VIII allowed an Office and Mass for Blessed Rita in the diocese. Afterwards it was extended to the Duchy of Modena at the request of Duke Cesare D’Este. The next year it was extended to all the churches of the Augustinian Order. Immediately the devotion spread to Spain, Portugal, South America, the Philippines, East Indies, China, and Japan—Countries where the Spanish and Portuguese Augustinians had many missions.

On July the 16th the Decree of Beatification was promulgated with great solemnity at St. Augustine’s in Rome, where a magnificent chapel was given the new Beata. At Roccaporrenna the house where she had lived with her two sons was turned, in 1629, into a chapel by Cardinal Fausti Poli, who had been Maggioromo of Urban VIII. In 1655 the Church of St. Biagio, at the foot of the steps of Aracoeli in Rome, was dedicated to Blessed Rita with permission of Alexander VII. It has now, unfortunately, been pulled down to give space around the vulgar Victor Emmanuel Monument.
Three years later a Confraternity was established in that church under the title of "The Sacred Thorn of Our Lord and of Blessed Rita." After the destruction of the church it was transferred to the Church of the "Vergini." In 1724 Benedict XIII gave special permission for a temple in her honour in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Steps were now being taken for her Canonisation. In 1738 Clement XII began a new process in accordance with the Decree of Urban VIII regarding her miracles and virtues as a preliminary to her Canonisation. For a hundred years the Process remained suspended; but in 1851 Pius IX, who had been Archbishop of Spoleto, wrote to the Bishop of Norcia and ordered it to be reopened. This was completed in 1855 and confirmed by Pius in the following year. Because of the troubled times for the Papacy, the Canonisation was delayed. It was reserved for Leo XIII to declare her virtues heroic in 1897, and celebrate her Canonisation on the Feast of the Ascension, 1900.

Now it is well known that two miracles, and sometimes three, after the Beatification, are required for the Canonisation. There was one—the wonderful scent from the relics all through the centuries. About this we shall speak later on. There was also another—the instantaneous cure of Cosimo Pelligrini, of the Province of Bari, on May 22, 1877. He had acute and
dangerous gastro-enteritis, with complications. The third was Elizabeth Bergamini, of Terni, who took small-pox and became altogether blind. Having an aunt in the convent of Cascia, she was sent there in the hope that St. Rita would cure her. The child was in great pain, made worse by the use of a lotion. Although this was distressing to the child, it had to be applied, because the running from the eyes was corroding the nose and cheeks. One day—it was the month of September, 1833—they brought the child to the coffin of the saint and her eyes were touched with a silver rod that had previously been touched to the saint's forehead. The running immediately ceased.

The same morning the Sisters were in the courtyard of the convent separating the good grain from the bad in order to make the little breads of St. Rita. Elizabeth sat down beside one of the Sisters, and began to separate the corn like the others, but, being blind, she put the bad among the good corn already separated. They told her to stop and be quiet, but the mistress out of kindness gave her some for herself to work with. Then Elizabeth said that she could see. She showed some grains, and asked if they were to be classed with the good. She had recovered her sight! The local doctor and the Roman specialist declared it a miracle. The latter ends his study of the case with these
words: "I have to say that the cure had been instantaneous, perfect, and lasting; which could not be done either by science or the force of Nature. It was impossible except by miracle: the inexplicable sign which the Omnipotent God allows to be worked out by His servants, and in this case by Blessed Rita of Cascia. This I declare on oath."

It will be noted that four hundred and forty-four years passed from the date of the saint's death until her Canonisation. One has the right to ask, why such a long delay for this renowned Servant of God.

In the first place, Pope Urban VIII brought in a new and very lengthy method of investigation for Canonisation, involving great expense. This kept back Rita's case; because as the earthquake of 1703 had made the Sisters abandon the monastery and live in huts in the garden, large sums of money were collected for building a new convent.

Besides, there were troubles innumerable for the Holy See, and these were directly responsible for many delays. A notable set-back was the imprisonment of the Pope in France during the Napoleonic persecutions of the Papacy. Finally, it was through the personal interest taken in the cause by Pius IX, formerly Archbishop of Spoleto, that it was taken up again.
The full explanation, however, must be sought in a special Providence of God. We have seen His Hand many times in Rita’s life, and it can be seen unmistakably in her high mission after death. For from the very day she died people were attracted to her by the uncommon holiness of her life, and it was by this that she became known and venerated at all times and in so many places until the Church gave to her the highest honour. But meanwhile the Saint responded to her clients’ prayers by such powerful intercession and obtained such numerous and extraordinary favours that she became known as the Saint of the Impossible and of Hopeless Cases. When at length, after nearly five centuries, her glorification was proclaimed, the greatest miracle which drew its force from the long period of time during which it had continued (from the night of May 22, 1457) was the perfume from her relics.

This miracle brings out the great virtues of the Saint and their acceptance in the sight of God, Who has put this unbroken seal upon them. It holds up to the world the virtues that are always powerful before God—Divine love, ennobled and purified by suffering; heroic patience, upheld and strengthened by love. This lesson, so needful at all times, is markedly so in this century. Suffering there is in abundance, as there always was and always will
be. But the one real remedy is forgotten in the modern world—to accept suffering, at least with patience and in expiation for our sins, and to live in the peace of mind begotten by this patience, because in suffering, as in every evil, God will not let us be tempted above our strength. Instead, men now turn to every unlawful means to escape suffering—robbery, deceit, murder, and even suicide. So widespread, indeed, is this last crime that in some countries the Government has forbidden the papers to publish the suicides, lest the example and suggestion should be acted on.

The Governments themselves in many countries stand in need of the lessons of Rita’s life. They seek every remedy to lighten the sorrow of the multitude and neglect the only one that counts. They never implore God’s help publicly, and, as we know, they do not hesitate to rob the Church in order to help their own empty pockets. The ancient Statutes of Cascia offer in this matter an example and a reproof to our modern States. After having given a list of the churches and monasteries to which certain annual sums were voted for the Liturgical services, it continues: “That God in His clemency might look with favour upon our offerings and vouchsafe to preserve the territory, people and rulers of Cascia, and keep them prosperous and safe from all evil,
we set aside from the public funds, for the love of God, the aforesaid sums to be given for wax for the yearly festivals mentioned. We order that the Governor and Consuls go in person to the said feasts reverently and with public ceremony, that they assist at Mass, and take an oath to observe this Statute.”

The great lessons of Rita’s life, which Providence so conspicuously made known to the world in the year 1900, have not been lost, as we know from the number of her clients in every part of the world. Even in the Pacific Islands her statue is to be found in the little wicker churches. If the history of souls were known, we should see the real rich harvest gathered from Rita’s sowing of “love through suffering,” which to her and to God is the greatest and most welcome homage of earth.
CHAPTER XXIV

LIFE IN DEATH

WE have now to tell of a series of wonderful events which have taken place in the coffin where Rita's body lies. As they rest altogether on human witness, we give the authority on which they are based.

In 1626—that is, a hundred and sixty-nine years after her death—the coffin was opened by a commission consisting of the delegate of the Archbishop of Spoleto and eight others, including a doctor and a public official who was to draw up the record. They found the body "as perfect as if she had died that day." The flesh was white and perfectly intact, without any mark of corruption.

A like investigation was made in 1637, when the report reads: "After a hundred and eighty years, not only is there no part missing of the sacred body, not even at the extremities, but the clear colour of the countenance still remains, so that it seems to be that of one sleeping and not dead."
More extraordinary still, is the examination made on May 16, 1682. The perfect state of the body was apparent, and the eyes were open as well. An extract from the report will be found interesting: “In the Name of God, Amen. On Saturday, the sixteenth of May, 1682, in the church formerly called Sta. Maria Maddalena and now called Beata Rita, we, the undersigned, of the territory of Cascia, Diocese of Spoleto, under oath and in the presence of the Notary-and Episcopal Chancellor of the district of Cascia, bear witness that now the body of Blessed Rita is free of any sign or mark of corruption. It is white in colour, and the eyes are open—especially the left, which is more open than the other. The lips are slightly open, so that one can see the white teeth. And we witness that several times we saw the body raise itself from its ordinary position to the top of the grating that is over the coffin in which the body rests. This happens especially when she performs a miracle and on her feast as is recorded the first time in 1628, when her Beatification was being celebrated, of which there is an authentic record made at the request of Signor Giuseppe Benanati, a native of Montefalco.” Here follow the signatures of the Vice-Governor of Cascia and nine others, ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries, to which is appended the testimony of the notary public.
that they are all persons worthy of trust. This
seal bears the date May 28, 1682, to which is
added the consular seal and certificate on
May 31.

In this report, drawn up by the Narrator of
Miracles for the Canonisation, there is a full
account of the extraordinary happenings coming
down to the present times. He goes on to say
"Many persons questioned in the first Process
begun in 1626, and in the following ones of
1739, 1851, and one in our own days, in that of
1893, depose to have seen the body of Blessed
Rita change its position, while others relate the
fact on the testimony of eye-witnesses."

"Some say that they saw her turn her head
towards the congregation; others that they
saw her breathing. Some, again, assert that
the body raised itself to the grating, covering
the coffin, or that she turned on her side and
settled her limbs accordingly. Many also depose
that they saw the clothes disturbed in con­
sequence of the change of position, and rustling
was heard at the same time within the coffin."
The latest occurrence of this kind said to have
taken place was in August, 1926—which drew
many pilgrims to the shrine.

Well authenticated as these extraordinary
happenings are, the Church did not accept them
as miracles for her Canonisation. The Church
selects what has unmistakably the seal of God
upon it, something that is not possible with Nature. In fact, the conservation of a body is not in itself a proof of the sanctity of the person; it may be due to natural causes. Only when in a particular case the conservation cannot be set down to Nature, and when other corroborative signs go with it, can it be taken to have any weight. The length of time during which Rita's body showed no decay was remarkable. We have written evidence that it was still perfect in 1704—after four hundred and fifty years. This fact, together with other wonders, was of value for the Beatification.

The ways of God are many and wonderful. In 1741 the body was found much decayed, owing, no doubt, to the time after the earthquake of 1703, when it had to be kept in a wooden hut, exposed to the extreme heat and damp. Then other wonders began, as we have seen, to be associated with the saint's body. These undoubtedly show the interest she takes in the poor people among whom she worked and prayed: for they are taken as a forewarning of danger and an invitation to prayer and penance. This was so in the earthquake of 1703, often mentioned here, which was preceded some days before by the signs we have just been considering.

Taking the preservation of the body for four hundred and fifty years in conjunction with the
remarkable happenings that go on to the present day, Rita can claim in a high degree the first resurrection of the saints described in the Apocalypse:—“And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection” (Apoc. xx. 4-5).
CHAPTER XXV

THE PERENNIAL MIRACLE

The first of the miracles admitted for St. Rita's Canonisation is worthy of note in that it does not consist in any particular act, such as a sudden cure, but in a frequent occurring of a miraculous event from the night she died until the present time. The reader will recall that the people who visited the monastery and the cell of the saint in the early morning of May 22nd, 1457, were astonished at the heavenly fragrance that filled the whole place. And their astonishment was the greater seeing that for fifteen years Rita not only suffered from the pain of the miraculous thorn, but was obliged on account of its loath-someness, to keep away from the common duties and to lead a life of contemplative isolation. But no sooner had she breathed her last and completed the sacrifice than her Lord showed His appreciation of her patient suffering by glorifying in this manner the mortal frame that had become so repulsive.

The same thing had been noticed after the death of other saints; but in Rita's case there
is this first difference, that it recurs at different times all through the centuries. We have an authoritative and official record of it in the document of 1682 quoted in the preceding chapter. The witness says: "We testify on oath to having felt many times a heavenly fragrance without being able to describe it. Sometimes it is felt outside the church. This phenomenon is all the more remarkable because the body was not embalmed but placed in the coffin as it was."

The report of the miracle before the Congregation has the following:—

"Witnesses almost unanimously testified, and the people as well, that the body of the Blessed Rita emitted a most pleasing scent. No one can describe it, but all admit that it is heavenly. It is felt outside the church and monastery, and is felt more as one comes near. It is spread even to the farthest part of the cloister. This could not be produced from aromas put in the body, because such were not found. Nor does it come from flowers nearby, since there is nothing about which the Sisters are more on their guard than the bringing in of anything that might cause suspicion. The intensity, the extraordinary diffusion, and the frequent recurrence of this fragrance, claim more serious attention than the perfume alleged to be felt at times near relics and holy things generally."
Here follows a scientific remark on the phenomenon, and the report concludes:—

"For three reasons, and for a hundred others resulting from the Process which carry moral certainty, I do not hesitate to conclude that the perfume emanating from the body of the Blessed Rita is supernatural and to be set down to a true miracle."

After the exhaustive study of this rare phenomenon, the Church declared the first of the three miracles to be the "perfume that emanates from the body of Blessed Rita, especially when at her invocation there is some miracle performed, and which becomes wondrously diffused."

Besides the persisting of the miracle through the centuries, the way the sweet scent is spread is most remarkable. The church and monastery are large, yet, as we have seen, the perfume is diffused even into the open. Moreover, it comes, in particular places in the town, when a person or family receives a grace through the intercession of the saint.

The following experience of a pilgrim to the Shrine a few years ago describes accurately this miracle as it falls under the frequent notice of some of St. Rita's clients:—

"It was the first Saturday of the month of July, 1928, when I left Rome to spend the
week-end at Cascia in order to get to know for the first time the Shrine and the country round. After a short stay at Spoleto I went on by the light railway to Serravalle, to which I got in the early afternoon. The half-hour to Cascia was to be spent in an auto-bus, which stood waiting. As the weather was intensely hot, a rapid glance at the auto foretold a trying half-hour, for it could not comfortably take even half the passengers bound for Cascia. They were not pilgrims this time, but mostly young men, peasants with sickles and bundles on their way to the uplands to mow the late corn. Foreseeing the inconvenience, I was the first to get into the bus, and hastily tried to open some of the windows, but they seemed to be fixed. As there was a very small one open, I hastily took the seat beside it and kept my face to the open space. The mowers crowded in until the official number of the passengers indicated on the enamel tablet was more than doubled. It was a case for resignation and thankfulness that things were not worse. On flew the auto. The peasants were pitched and jolted, and took the whole situation as a good joke. They laughed and poked fun at one another—all except one—a man of over forty, a workman like the rest, but with a very honest, placid face. He was pre-occupied about the impressions I, a 'forestiere' (foreigner) might get of these
young men, for after scarcely five minutes on the road he asked me not to be disdified—they were merely youngsters. When I assured him I admired their good humour and their sallies he became more communicative. The half-hour was nearly up when we swung suddenly into an open space, and to the right, a mile away, was Cascia, spread out on the breast of the mountain. 'There's Cascia,' said the good-natured companion, and as he said the words a most beautiful fragrance came through the little window, passed and repassed. 'Wild flowers and meadows,' I thought. 'But then it is so subtle and beautiful—could it be the fragrance of St. Rita? So far away? Yes, once I heard it is sometimes felt on coming in sight of the town. But we shall see by comparison if we are favoured at the coffin.'

'In no time the auto was in the Piazza. I was met by the confessor of the nuns who expected me. That evening we paid a visit to the church, and St. Rita's altar, and arranged for my Mass on the following morning. There was no fragrance round the church or at the coffin, but as I was staying on until Monday, I did not lose hope. Next morning, I said Mass at St. Rita's altar, behind which is the body. There were present only two or three nuns from the hospital and about twenty lay people, men and women who had come a distance in motor-
cars—some from the Piedmont. During the Mass, up to and even after the Consecration, there was no fragrance, and it looked as if there was to be no opportunity of looking into what happened the evening before. But at the beginning of the Pater Noster subtle wavelets of exquisite perfume kept passing the nostrils, never tarrying more than three or four seconds; but while they lasted they were intense, distinct, and exquisite. It continued so until the Communion, and it was the same scent as that at the open window.

"Being accustomed to sift evidence, I said nothing to anybody of my experience. I wanted to compare notes with others, or, rather, hear first if others had any such experience. When I was taking my cup of coffee, the priest I was staying with, and whom I had not yet seen that morning, for he was busy hearing confessions, came to me and said eagerly: 'Did you find the "profumo" this morning?' To which I answered in a tone of assumed ignorance and incredulity. 'When?' And he said: 'From the Pater Noster to the Communion, and all at your Mass felt it.' I replied, 'So did I, and it was not the first time.' 'How?' said he; 'I was with you all yesterday evening and there was none.' 'Yes,' I said, 'down the road a mile away, but then I did not know it was the "profumo" till I compared it this
morning.' 'Then,' said he, 'you got Rita's welcome.'"

And so, dear reader, this miracle goes on, and with it, let us hope, the other miracle of grace that makes us feel the spiritual fragrance of Rita's virtues and practise them, each in his own degree, according to the measure of Christ's giving.