

**LITTLE NELLIE
OF
HOLY GOD
The Story of the Life of
a Sainly Irish Child**

by a Priest of the diocese of Cork

PREFACE

I have been asked to write this story of the life of "Little Nellie of Holy God." I have interpreted as a command the expression of a wish coming from such a quarter. Besides, I shall always treasure the memory of the day on which I met that saintly child.

The case of Little Nellie has reached that stage when enthusiasm must be held in check by prudence, and when theory, however devotional, must yield to a calm consideration of the facts. Accordingly, some short time ago, those who had lived in closest intimacy with Little Nellie, were invited to state, clearly and concisely, their recollections of that brief life. A number of attestations were forwarded to Rome, with the assurance that everything therein contained could, if necessary, be testified on oath. Those documents were translated by a Roman priest, Don Ugo Descuffi, and arranged in a brochure entitled: "Nellie Organ-Cennie Biografici." By express permission of the Holy Father, the little book was dedicated to His Holiness Pope Pius X.

The same documents have been placed at my disposal, together with some additional information, for the accuracy of which I have received a similar guarantee.

In view of possible criticism, I wish to draw attention to a point of considerable importance. Owing to her delicate health, little Nellie was an invalid from the day of her admission to the convent School at Sunday's Well. The person most in contact with the child was the resident nurse, Miss Hall, who was a recent convert to Catholicity. She had read very little Catholic literature and was still under instruction. Consequently, the contention that Little Nellie's extraordinary ideas and sayings were all inspired by her nurse, seems to refute itself.

My task has not been a very arduous one, and I shall feel amply rewarded if this pamphlet should, in any slight degree, conduce to a greater devotion to Our Divine Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament of His Love.

Corcagiensis,

Feast of All Saints, 1911.

DECLARATION

In obedience to the Decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that whatever is related in these pages concerning "Little Nellie" does not claim any credence other than that which attaches to purely human authority.

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I

**LITTLE NELLIE ADMITTED TO ST. FINBAR'S
INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL**

Little Nellie of Holy God, as she is now familiarly called, was born in Waterford on the 24th of August, 1903.

The parents of this saintly child were William Organ and Mary Aherne.

The name Organ, more usually written Horgan, is frequently met with in County Waterford. The branch of the family to which William belonged, had been settled for generations in and around the town of Dungarvan. They were humble Catholic folk, whose sole inheritance was that sterling Irish faith which has survived the centuries of Ireland's bitter sorrow.

Mary Aherne was a native of Portlaw, County Waterford. Like her husband, she came of a humble Catholic family, poor in worldly wealth, but rich in those gifts of Heaven, for the lack of which no boons on earth can compensate. Mary was educated at the school of the Sisters of Mercy, Portlaw. One of her teachers still preserves the kindest recollections of the jovial, innocent girl, full of fun and frolic, but straightforward, truthful and devout.

The marriage took place at Portlaw on the 4th of July, 1896, and during the following year they resided in the village, where the husband was employed as laborer. Their married life was marked by many a struggle and privation. Their little household felt the pinch of poverty and the poignancy of domestic sorrow. In October 1897, William, finding it difficult to obtain permanent employment, joined the army, and was attached to the staff of the Royal Garrison Artillery at Waterford. Here they resided for several years.

Already God had blessed them with three children: Thomas, Mary, and David. Their true-hearted Irish mother had labored night and day for the bodily comfort of her offspring, but her greatest solicitude had been to sow in those young minds the seeds of piety and virtue.

Then little Nellie came. A few days after her birth, she was brought to the parish church of Trinity Without, where the precious little soul was regenerated in the saving waters of Baptism.

In 1905, the family removed to Spike, an island-fort situated in Cork Harbor. The mother's health, which had never been robust, now visibly declined. Yet she struggled bravely on, forgetful of her own sufferings in her anxiety for the welfare of her children.

At length, God saw it was enough. It was the year 1907. Little Nellie, not yet four years old, followed the remains of her holy Irish mother to its lowly resting-place.

Deprived of the strengthening aid of his pious wife, William Organ found that he had not the means to provide for the maintenance and education of the children. The parochial clergy came to his assistance and, through their kind offices, each of the little ones was provided with a home in the charitable institutions of the diocese. Thomas was sent to the School of the Brothers of Charity at Upton. David, the younger brother, was sent to the convent school of the Sisters of Mercy, Passage West. It was arranged that Mary and Nellie should be sent to the Industrial School conducted by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, at Sunday's Well.

On the 11th of May, 1907, the two little sisters were brought to the convent. The resident nurse, Miss Hall, was immediately called to report upon the health of the little newcomers. She found that both were suffering from whooping cough, and medical opinion was deemed advisable. The doctor came at once, examined the children, and ordered their removal to the hospital.

The District Ambulance was sent for. Meanwhile, little Nellie had been crying bitterly, as if she were suffering acute physical pain. Her coughing seemed to rack her tiny frame. Nurse, who had remained in attendance on the children, offered her some soothing pastilles. These little Nellie accepted gratefully, smiling in her tears. She insisted on Nurse taking one, then offered some to her sister, and was quite happy with the few that remained.

In a short time, the ambulance arrived and the little patients were conveyed to the District Hospital.

Little Nellie and her sister remained at the hospital for a period of ten weeks. The Sisters of Mercy in charge of the institution and the medical staff treated them with every consideration and on July 20th, they were sent back to Sunday's Well.

Their health had improved, but they still looked thin and delicate. The school children flocked to greet the new arrivals, and Mary and Nellie were soon exchanging with them their childish confidences. At supper hour, they joined their companions in the refectory, and seemed quite happy in their new home. Soon after supper, they were put to bed, Nellie being given a cot in the dormitory of the bigger girls.

On the following day, Sunday, they were brought to the convent Chapel for Mass. It was the feast of St. Mary Magdalen, Patroness of the Order of the Good Shepherd, in whose honor some motets were sung during Mass by the children's choir. When Nellie heard the sound of the organ, she turned, and joining her hands behind her back, riveted her large brown eyes on the organist and listened to the music with rapt attention. The other girls noticed the extraordinary behavior of their little companion, and laughingly discussed it during recreation. All agreed that little Nellie was passionately fond of music.

On the first morning, it was noticed that the child ate very little, and fears for her health were renewed in the minds of the Sisters. After breakfast, Nellie, now dressed in the pretty blue costume of the little pupils, was brought to visit Mother Magdalen, whose feast was being celebrated with great joy by the children and the Community. The little one toddled along the corridor holding her hands outstretched, as if she were afraid of falling. Nurse came to her assistance, and, raising her in her arms, seated her on a window sill that she might rest awhile. She spoke soothingly to the child, and offered her a strawberry. "You take one bite," said Nellie, "an' I'll take annuder."

II

LITTLE NELLIE'S ACT OF CONTRITION

Little Nellie now joined in the daily routine of her young companions. Her winning childish ways soon made her a universal favorite. She seemed besides, to possess some hidden charm; children and Sisters alike were conscious of some secret attraction, the source of which no one could, as yet, divine.

From the beginning, Sister Immaculata, who was in charge of the children's wardrobe, was deeply interested in little Nellie. She set herself to study that little mind and heart, and resolved to watch attentively every development in the character of her protégé. Nellie, she concluded, was an exceptionally intelligent child, affectionate and generous, and yet occasionally inclined to be peevish and self-willed. The little one gave way to frequent excesses of weeping, especially when bidden to sit still. This the Sister interpreted as a desire to have her own way, which she considered it was her duty to correct. Later on, however, it was discovered that Nellie's spinal column was badly curved and that it must have caused her intense pain to remain seated. Nevertheless, the little sufferer did not complain, and frequently, even when she must have been suffering acutely, she endeavored to suppress her tears. It was only when the girl who slept next to Nellie in the dormitory, disclosed the fact that the child frequently wept the whole night through, that it was understood how much the little one must have suffered.

It was now arranged that Nellie should be transferred to the infirmary, where she could receive constant attention. Here she slept more peacefully, and, as a result, was more bright and cheerful in the morning. She was not sent to the refectory for breakfast with the other children, but was given her bowl of bread and milk in the infirmary. She usually

shared her meal with a little black kitten, of which she was very fond, and which fully reciprocated the child's affection.

On the following Saturday, the Sister purchased a pair of light shoes for little Nellie, as the boots worn by the pupils were too hard and heavy for those tiny feet. She also had little pink socks made for her, and on Sunday, Nellie, dressed in white, and wearing her pink socks and the new shoes, looked quite a picture. All were again struck by some secret charm in that delicate countenance, and the deep, luminous glance of those large, brown eyes, revealed an extraordinary strength of character in one so young.

On Monday, Nellie again appeared in the pink socks and dainty shoes, which had won the admiration of her little companions. For some hours, she was quite happy and playful, but then the change came, she grew more and more restless, and finally burst into a paroxysm of tears. Sister tried in vain to soothe her. At last, knowing how fond Nellie was of her new shoes and socks, Sister told her that if she would not be a good child, she would have to take them away from her and make her wear the old ones. This was too much; Nellie wept more bitterly than ever. The shoes and socks were then taken from her and the old ones sent for. Meanwhile, Sister watched her attentively. She saw that the child not only did not resist, but even helped to remove her beloved finery. After a while, she came slowly to Sister and said to her, "Mudder, I'm sorry." This spontaneous expression of regret coming from so young a child, touched Sister's kindly heart. She took the little one in her arms and embraced her affectionately.

During the following days, little Nellie seemed well and happy. Now and then, however, when told by Sister to sit still, the tears would glisten in those baby eyes. The sister, who was not yet aware of the real reason of the previous outburst, rejoiced to see the heroic efforts of the little one to check a natural impulse, which had unwittingly been reprehended as a fault.

One evening, Nellie was in the playground with the other pupils. When the "Angelus" was rung, the children recited the prayer in common and prepared to return indoors for supper. Nellie seemed loath to go. Her little companions bade her hurry, else, else she would not have any supper. Nellie remained obdurate. The others, then, pretending to go away, hid behind a tree and waited to see what would happen. They thought she would be in tears in a moment on finding herself alone. To their surprise, however, the child continued her play, walking up and down a ladder which lay on the ground and singing cheerily the while. At length, they had to leave their hiding place and force her to come to the refectory.

Next day, Nurse reproved her mildly, "You must be a good child, Nellie," she said, "and not keep the children late for supper."

"Dem could go if dey wanted to," answered Nellie, "dem did go an' leab' me all alone."

"But," continued Nurse, "are you sorry for keeping them late?"

"Yes, I am sorry."

"Tell Holy God that you are very sorry."

In an instant Nellie was on her knees, and this was her childish prayer, "Holy God, I am very, very sorry for keeping de girls late for supper, forgib' me, make me a good child, an' bless me an' my mudders."

III

LITTLE NELLIE AND THE HOLY INFANT OF PRAGUE

One morning, during study hour, Nellie, who was again rather restless, was given some large beads to play with. The child put some of them in her mouth, and in moving swallowed them. Those who hurried to her assistance, found that the little one could scarcely breathe. Nurse, who was immediately summoned, carried her out of the class room. On her way, she met a sister, and Nellie threw herself in her arms, but not a cry or a lament escaped her lips. She was brought at once to the Sacred Heart Infirmary, a little cottage standing in the convent grounds which is used principally as an isolation hospital. There they succeeded in extracting the beads.

During the days following this unfortunate accident, little Nellie was very weak. The doctor was again called in, and he subjected the child to a searching examination. His verdict was an alarming one. The bacilli of the dread disease which brought her mother to a premature grave had already seized upon that little body. In a few days, she became still worse, and the doctor pronounced her recovery impossible.

One evening, when the little patient was very weak, she asked for Reverend Mother and Sister Immaculata. Both hastened immediately to the cottage. Nellie was overjoyed to see them, and, when the sister bent over her, she threw her arms around her neck, drew her close to her, and held her for a long time, clasping the crucifix tightly, meanwhile, in her little hands. The position was an awkward one, but the sister knew that the slightest force might injure the health of the little invalid. Only after many entreaties, did Nellie allow her to go. The sister was visibly affected by this demonstration of affection on the part of her little pupil. She afterwards remembered the reproof she had administered to Nellie and the short-lived punishment she had meted out to her. Was this intended as an assurance that the incident had left no bitter sting in the memory of the affectionate child?

While Nellie was still confined to bed in the Sacred Heart Infirmary, a little altar, on which stood a statue of the Holy Infant of Prague, attracted her attention. Nurse explained to her that the statue was an image of Our Lord when He was a child. Immediately Nellie's interest was aroused. Nurse proceeded to narrate the story of the birth of Christ and His great love for us. The child listened with evident enthusiasm, and ever afterwards, she delighted in "De story of Holy God, when He was a little child." When it was suggested to her to join in a novena in honor of the Holy Infant that she might get better, she joyfully assented. At the conclusion of the novena, a certain improvement was apparent, and the little invalid was allowed up for a few hours daily. Nellie was much impressed by this answer to her prayers, and when, shortly afterwards, Nurse became unwell, she called one of the senior girls and said to her, "Go n' bring me Holy God, an' put Him on de chair near me. I want to ask Him to make Mudder better. He made me better you know."

Thus began little Nellie's devotion to the Infant Jesus. Whenever she passed before a statue or picture of the Infant Savior, she stopped and asked for all she most desired. On one occasion, she went to a statue of Our Lady and the

Divine Child, and, touching the globe which He held in His sacred hands, she said: "If You gib' me Your ball, I'll gib You my little shoeses."

"Oh, Nellie," said the Nurse, "you can't get that."

"Him can gib' 'em, if Him likes," answered Nellie confidently.

IV

LITTLE NELLIE'S VISITS TO THE HOUSE OF GOD

When Nellie's health permitted, Nurse occasionally carried her to the garden. On their way thither, they usually paid a visit to the Convent Chapel. Nellie looked forward to these visits. She knew that this was "the House of Holy God," where the people went who wanted to speak to Him.

"One day," writes Reverend Mother, "I happened to meet Nurse bringing her out of the chapel. I stopped and inquired, 'Well, how is Baby today?' In reply the little one threw her arms around my neck. At that moment, I received the impression that there breathed around the child an air of sanctity which I had not noticed before."

Sometimes Nurse would make the Way of the Cross holding Nellie in her arms and the child would fix her earnest, inquiring gaze on the different pictures of the Sacred Passion. Once, when Nurse came to the picture of the Crucifixion, Nellie became very agitated.

"Why am dey doin' dat?" she asked, shuddering.

Nurse explained briefly that "Holy God wished to suffer for our sins."

"But why did Him let 'em hurt Him?" said the child. "Him could stop 'em."

Nurse took the child aside and explained to her, as simply as possible, the goodness of Christ and all He suffered in His Sacred Passion. Nellie listened with deep attention, and when Nurse had finished the story of Calvary, the child burst into tears, exclaiming between her sobs, "Poor Holy God! Poor Holy God!"

Nellie had already grasped the idea that God was present in the Tabernacle. The mystery of the Real Presence seemed to have made a deep impression on her young mind. Once, during a visit to the chapel, she questioned Nurse about it. "Why am Holy God shut up in dat little house?" she asked. Nurse found some difficulty in explaining that He was present there under the Sacramental Species. The child, however, seemed to understand. She was glad that "Holy God was not 'squeezded' in dat little house."

During her walks in the garden with Nurse or one of the sisters, little Nellie manifested her wonderful love of flowers. She used to say that "Holy God was very good to gib' her such lobly flowers." She often plucked daisies in the convent cemetery exactly where the body of the holy child herself rests today. These she would give to sister for the Altar. It may be mentioned that to this day, there is a pretty custom among the school children of plucking daisies for Holy God, after the example of their beloved Nellie.

Once, returning after her walk, she halted before the statue of the Sacred Heart which stands in front of the cottage. She noticed that some of the flowers which surrounded it were fading, others quite dead. "Look at dem dirty flowers," she said, "dem must be taken away."

Long afterwards, when she was so weak that she could not leave her bed, she asked Reverend Mother frequently if "dem dirty flowers" had been removed from the statue of Holy God.

V

LITTLE NELLIE'S INSTINCT CONCERNING THE REAL PRESENCE

The little invalid remained for two months in the Sacred Heart Infirmary. Nurse frequently considered it advisable to pass the night with her, and Nellie's gratitude for this attention was full of childish pathos. "Holy God took my Mudder," she would say, "but He has gib'n me you to be my Mudder." She would put out her tiny hand between the rails of her cot to take that of her 'Mudder,' and she would clasp it affectionately until her little fingers gradually relaxed and the child fell into a fitful sleep.

Meanwhile, as her fragile body was wasting away with the ravages of the disease, her heart and mind were opening to the love of God and the illuminations of His grace.

The little altar of the Holy Infant which stood beside her cot received her greatest care. She frequently asked for fresh flowers, and for oil for the lamp that burned before the statue. One day, the girl who attended to Nellie while Nurse was visiting her other patients, left the child to see to something in another room. Hearing someone move, she re-entered suddenly, not imagining for a moment that Nellie could have left her cot. What was her amazement to see the child, holding a flower in her hand, vainly endeavoring to clamber back to bed!

"Oh, you naughty child!" said the girl, "I'll tell Mother when she comes that you stole a flower."

Nellie did not answer for a moment, but hugged the flower to her breast. Then she quietly remarked that the altar was hers. Later on however, when she was alone with Nurse, she said to her, "Mudder, I'm sorry I took the flower, but I was only talking to Holy God and Him gived me the flower. Him did, Mudder."

Some extraordinary instinct concerning the Real Presence now seemed to develop in this infant mind. This wonderful instinct, discernment or intuition, as it has been differently styled, caused amazement at the time, nor can it be satisfactorily explained except by the subsequent history of "Little Nellie of Holy God."

The girl of whom we have spoken rose early every morning to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion. On one occasion, she rose and dressed at the usual hour, but, either because she did not feel well, or because she did not consider it prudent to leave the little patient alone, she did not go to the chapel but remained in the kitchen of the cottage. When she returned to Nellie, she was astonished to hear her say, "You did not get Holy God today. I'll tell Mudder on you."

The girl thought that perhaps the child had heard her moving about in the kitchen. Accordingly, next time an idea occurred to her to test little Nellie. She went to the door of the cottage, opened the latch, and closed the door again, thus giving the impression, as she thought, that she had really gone to Mass. She then removed her boots, and during

Mass time, moved about as little as possible in the kitchen. She looked quite unconcerned when she returned to Nellie's room. The child, however, fixed her pensive eyes on the girl's countenance, and then, the same reproving words were spoken sadly, "You did not get Holy God today."

"How do you know, lovey," said the girl, "didn't you hear me close the door?"

"No matter," said the child, "I know you didn't get Holy God."

VI A VISIT OF HOLY GOD

Towards the end of September, Nellie had a serious relapse. She was removed from the Sacred Heart cottage to the cheerful little ward known as the "School Infirmary," where the girl in charge received her with much affection.

Nellie ate very little, but suffered keenly from thirst. They tried to induce her to eat, but though she did her best to please, she would sit for hours with her bowl of soup between her hands, vainly endeavoring to swallow a spoonful. Pressed for a reason, she said her throat was painful. The next time the doctor came, he examined the throat, but found nothing wrong.

Some weeks later, Nurse, while washing the little patient's mouth with a disinfecting lotion, discovered that a tooth had become imbedded in the root of the tongue. It was a difficult matter to extract it. When at last they succeeded, and we can imagine what pain it caused, Nellie said triumphantly, "Now, Mudder, didn't I have a sore throat?" They marveled at the patience of the child, who had never complained of the awful torture which she must have endured for weeks.

Meanwhile, her suffering from thirst became extreme. At night, she would call the attendant and ask in her sad, pleading voice, for "a little sup 'o milk." If the girl did not hear her first entreaty, Nellie would not call again, fearing to disturb her rest, but waited patiently until morning. At last, however, the suffering became intolerable and the little one begged of the Nurse to stay near her at night. Nurse readily consented, and had her bed prepared beside Nellie's in the Infirmary. The child superintended these arrangements and insisted on smoothing the sheets with her own little hands, "I don't want any wrinkles in Mudder's bed," she said.

This new arrangement gave Nellie ample opportunities for those little spiritual conversations which the child loved so much. Nurse often found it difficult to frame an answer to Nellie's questions. She confesses that she had frequently to ask for information from the Sisters, and that more than once, the little one's remarks so impressed her that she accepted without further demur certain points of Catholic doctrine and practice concerning which she had found it difficult to overcome her former prejudices.

One morning, Sister Immaculata and Nurse Hall went together to visit the little patient, who had spent a very restless night. It was then that the following extraordinary conversation took place.

"How are you today, darling?" asked Nurse, "I thought that you would have been with Holy God by this time."

"Oh, no!" answered Nellie, "Holy God says I am not good enough to go yet."

"What do you know about Holy God?" said Nurse.

"Him did come an' stand dere," replied the child, pointing to the side of her cot, "and Him did say dat."

Nurse and the sister looked at each other in amazement.

"Where is He, Nellie?" asked the sister.

"Dere," she repeated confidently, pointing to the same spot.

"And what was He like?" asked the sister again.

"Like dat," answered Nellie, crossing her hands on her breast.

Sister and Nurse were naturally astounded at this revelation. Was it a childish fancy or had God favored this little child as He had favored other chosen souls? After much deliberation, they agreed that it would be more prudent not to mention the matter to anyone, unless Nellie herself should speak of it again. We shall see that little Nellie, when on the threshold of eternity, solemnly repeated the story of this visit of Holy God.

VII THE LITTLE SOLDIER OF HOLY GOD

For so young a child, little Nellie had made marvelous progress in religious knowledge. She had learned by heart, the morning and evening prayers, the acts of faith, hope and charity, the principal mysteries of religion, and much of the story of the life of Jesus.

Her growth in holiness was even more remarkable. She manifested a wonderful devotion to the Passion of Our Divine Lord, and when they exhorted her to unite her sufferings with those of the Redeemer, she seemed to grasp the idea immediately, and was quite prepared to make the heroic sacrifice and to endure the most atrocious suffering without a murmur of complaint. She kept a crucifix beside her bed, and when her sufferings became almost unbearable, she would take it in her little hands, stare at it fixedly, and whisper, "Poor Holy God!"

She prayed frequently during the day, and her earnestness and recollection were most edifying. She prayed for all who were dear to her; the sisters, the Bishop, the nurse, her little companions, and daily that pleading voice was raised to heaven for the welfare of the Church of Christ and His Vicar on earth.

Her recital of the Rosary was particularly edifying. She kissed each bead, and recited each prayer slowly, distinctly, and with a spirit of recollection most remarkable in one so young.

"One evening," writes Reverend Mother, "while I was sitting beside her cot, I said to her, 'shall I talk to you, Baby, or shall I say the Rosary?'"

"Say your rosary, Mudder," she answered.

I had only said a few Hail Marys when I heard her whisper, "Kneel down, Mudder." I paid no attention and continued to the end of the first decade, when she repeated, in quite a determined tone, "Kneel down Mudder," and I had to finish the Rosary on my knees.

The sisters were so impressed with the piety and knowledge of the dear child, that they had begun to entertain the wish that she would receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before God would call her to Himself. Already, prayers had been offered up for that intention, but the matter had not been brought before the notice of the Bishop. What was the sisters' joy then, when, on the eighth of October (1907), Most Rev. Dr. O'Callaghan telephoned to the convent that he was coming at midday to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to little Nellie.

It is believed that this was a special inspiration, as the most extraordinary graces of the life of little Nellie were granted after her reception of this Sacrament.

When she heard that she was to become "a little soldier of Holy God," her happiness knew no bounds. The Sisters deemed it advisable to give the child some further instruction in Christian doctrine, but they were astonished to find that she knew already, as if by intuition, much of what they intended to teach her.

When a sister came to explain the ceremony to her, she listened with rapt attention, and, gradually, as the hour approached, the excess of her joy made her tender limbs tremble.

After the ceremony, she was brought to the parlor to receive another blessing from the Bishop, who was visibly impressed by the piety of the child.

Nurse had prepared a couch in her own room where Nellie was to rest during that happy day. When they brought her there, she greeted her "Mudder" joyfully. "Now," she cried, "I am Holy God's little soldier."

VIII "I WANT HOLY GOD"

On the evening of her confirmation, Nellie had entreated Reverend Mother to allow her to stay in Nurse's room. After hesitating for a while, the Mother had consented, and so the child took up her abode there until God called her to her heavenly home.

The graces received at her confirmation, soon bore remarkable fruit in the mind and heart of our saintly child.

First, and above all, that marvelous instinct, or intuition, regarding the Real Presence, now developed into an earnest conviction, and filled her angelic soul to overflowing with a love of Jesus in the Tabernacle, and an insatiable desire to be united to her God in the loving intimacy of Holy Communion,

Only by degrees did the sisters become aware of this extraordinary development in little Nellie, and then only from the remarks of the child herself, which, though clothed in her childish language, spoke the thoughts and aspirations of the Saints of God.

They were astonished to find that Nellie knew instinctively when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. No one would have spoken of it to the child, nor could any indication of the fact be noticed outside the precincts of the chapel, much less in Nellie's room. and yet, on Exposition days, some holy excitement seemed to thrill that little soul, and she would beg them to bring her to the chapel. "Holy God is not in de lock-up today," she would say, "take me down to Him."

From the silence of the Tabernacle that sweet, mysterious Voice was calling, calling. It found a responsive echo in the soul of our dear child. Often, in a sad tone and with a look that seemed to pierce the veil, she was heard to repeat to herself, "I want Holy God! Oh! I wonder when He will come!" "I want Him to come into my heart. I am longing for Him."

Nurse went down to the chapel every morning that her duties permitted, to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion. Sometimes, seeing little Nellie so weak, she hesitated, deeming it perhaps imprudent to leave the child alone. But Nellie always insisted on her going. "Mudder, go down to Mass," she would say, "an' git Holy God, an' come back to kiss me, den you can go back to the chapel again." After communion, Nurse would return to see Nellie and kiss her. The child received the kiss with religious reverence and then waved her hand as a sign to Nurse to return to the chapel. She did not speak herself, nor would she have Nurse interrupt her thanksgiving.

Reverend Mother visited Nellie every evening. On one occasion, when about to bid the child "goodnight", she was startled by the following request, "Mudder," said little Nellie, "tomorrow morning, when you get Holy God, will you bring Him up to me?" Mother knew not what to answer.

She considered for a moment and then replied, "Tomorrow morning, I shall ask Holy God to be very fond of you and I shall come up to see you after Mass." This reply seemed to satisfy the child.

Later in the evening, she called the Nurse and said to her, "Mudder Francis is goin' to bring me Holy God in de mornin'."

Before day-break, Nellie was awake. She woke the Nurse by calling incessantly, "Mudder! Mudder! please get up an' clean de house, 'cause Holy God is comin' up to me today."

Nurse tried to calm her by saying, "Josephine will be over soon, darling."

Nellie was not satisfied with this, "Joe am late dis mornin'," she replied, "de place will never be ready." Nurse had to get up. Nellie followed her with watchful eyes while she tidied the room. If she stopped a moment, the little voice began again, "Mudder, what are you doin'? De place will never be ready."

As Mass hour drew near, Nellie watched for the coming of Reverend Mother with anxiety, and when she saw her enter without "Holy God", her disappointment was so keen that she wept bitterly.

During the rest of that day, the child scarcely spoke a word. In the evening, she said to Nurse with a heavy sigh, "Mudder, I did think I would hab' had Holy God today."

For several days, she remained preoccupied with this thought and she lay so still and silent that more than once, they thought the end had come. One evening, Nurse came to her bedside and inquired, "Nellie, dear, do you want anything?"

"No, Mudder," she answered, "I was only tinkin' 'bout Holy God." And opening wide her lovely eyes, she looked at Nurse sadly, yet resignedly.

She did not ask again for Holy Communion, but from then on, an extraordinary spirit of recollection seems to have taken possession of the child.

IX

LITTLE NELLIE RECEIVES HOLY GOD

“In response to the request of the Sisters and after considerable reflection, I decided that it would at least be well to question the child and to ascertain if she really desired to receive Holy God, as she so winningly called the Savior. I questioned her accurately and very minutely about Holy Communion and I was firmly convinced that she understood quite well what she so anxiously asked for.” Thus writes a distinguished member of the Jesuit Order.

This good priest was at the time, conducting the annual retreat of the Community and his sage counsel had been solicited with regard to little Nellie. Truly this was a remarkable case and one which required the prudent direction of someone experienced in the guidance of souls. It must be borne in mind that the decree of His Holiness, Pope Pius X, concerning the First Communion of little children, had not yet been published. Before that consoling letter of our Holy Father came, such a case as that of which we write, must naturally have been even a greater wonder than it would seem in these more recent times.

The Jesuit Father, therefore, proceeded with the greatest caution, and not until he had held several conferences with little Nellie, did he feel himself entitled to formulate the decision we have quoted. One of the questions and its reply may be referred to here.

“Tell me, then,” said the priest, “what is Holy Communion?”

“It is Holy God,” answered Nellie. “It is He who makes the nuns and everyone else holy.”

The good Father was at last fully convinced. “With regard to the reception of this Sacrament,” he writes, “Nellie had arrived at the use of reason. I firmly believe that the child was endowed in no ordinary degree with an ardent love of God, with an intense desire to be united to Him in Holy Communion.”

The opinion of the Jesuit Father was conveyed to His Lordship, the Bishop. The latter weighed the matter carefully, and finally consented.

When little Nellie heard the glad tidings, her joy was indescribable. “I will hab’ Holy God in my heart! I will hab’ Holy God in my heart!” Such was the burden of all she said that day.

Night brought her little rest. She could not sleep for joy. She kept Nurse awake all night long, asking if it were not yet time to rise. “The stars are gone, Mudder,” she would say, “‘tis time to get up now.”

The eventful morning dawned, the morning of the sixth of December, 1907. After such a sleepless, restless night, it was feared that the excitement would be too much for the delicate child, and that she would be unable to receive the Blessed Sacrament. but Nellie tried to calm herself. She lay quietly in her cot, and though her little limbs trembled slightly, the threatened illness passed away.

It was the First Friday of the month. A day of holy love and reparation, when, throughout the Universal Church of Christ, sympathetic hearts approach their Hidden God, to tell Him that though all the world forsake Him, they will still prove true.

And this was the destined day when the sweet, mysterious Voice was to speak from the silence of the Tabernacle, bidding them suffer the little child to come to Him, when little Nellie was to welcome Jesus to her angelic soul, to speak to Him heart to heart, to lisp her childish prayers of love and sympathy for Him Whom she called “Poor Holy God.”

The Community Mass had been said and the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon the High Altar. Already the sisters and the school children were assembled in the chapel, praying God thanks for the wondrous favor He was about to bestow upon their saintly little friend. And then they brought her in, that tiny, sickly child, clothed in white, and wearing the wreath and veil of First Communion, and bore her to the altar of her God. A solemn hush fell upon the pious congregation. Even the little children checked the sibilant whisperings of their holy, innocent prayers, lest they should disturb the recollection of that little figure seated there before the sanctuary, silent, motionless, with head bowed low in prayer and adoration. And then, the priest of God came forth, robed in the livery of the Dispensers of His Mysteries and undid the bars that enclosed the “Prisoner of Love.”

“Misereatur Vestri....” and every hand sought brow and breast and shoulder, to form the saving cross of Christ.

“Domine, non sum dignus...” and every head was bowed in adoration. Then they saw the priest approach and little Nellie raise her head....and Holy God had come into her heart! Her yearnings had at last been satisfied. She no longer had to beg in vain.

“The child,” writes the Jesuit Father already referred to, “literally hungered for her God and received Him from my hands in a transport of love.”

The joyous strains of the First Communion hymn arose, sung by the sweet voices of pious little children, who prayed that soon their loving God would bid them also come. Still, she sat there, motionless, insensible to things of earth, in silent, loving conference with the Savior. Her radiant countenance reflecting the Eternal Light that dwelt within her heart.

X

LITTLE NELLIE’S THANKSGIVING

After her First Communion, Nellie was brought back to her little cot in Nurse’s room. All day long, the child maintained that profound calm which is rarely met with except in souls of more than ordinary sanctity. Many of the sisters and her dear companions visited her. They brought her gifts of holy pictures, scapulars, and medals. She thanked them quietly and bade Nurse hang them round her cot. The moment that her visitors were gone, she joined her little hands in prayer and those baby lips were seen to move, whispering her love and gratitude to Holy God.

The sisters now became convinced that they had sought the will of God regarding little Nellie, not a moment too soon. Already, her awful maladies had wrought dreadful havoc on that fragile body. The jaw had been attacked by caries. The odor from the diseased bone had sometimes been unbearable. But now they marveled at the extraordinary change; after Nellie’s Holy Communion, the noisome odor completely disappeared.

On the following Sunday, Nellie again received Holy Communion and the same scene of holy pathos moved the hearts of those who witnessed it. After Benediction, she was enrolled in the Sodality of the Children of Mary. Her deportment during the ceremony was extraordinarily dignified and calm. Her brilliant eyes followed the Chaplain's every movement, while her lips moved continually in silent prayer. At the given signal, she raised her little head and received the ribbon and medal, and holy livery of Mary, with great devotion.

And still, her little body was wasting away with the ravages of phthisis. So weak had she become, that it was decided to administer the Last Solemn Rites. Holy Church had done all it could for this saintly little soul. She had participated largely in the Mysteries of Jesus Christ; she had received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Blessed Eucharist, and Extreme Unction; this little child of four short summers. And now, the final stages of her life of lingering martyrdom seemed to be close at hand. It was even a matter of surprise that she lived for two months longer, and days of torture glided into weeks of agony, till sympathetic hearts would pray that God might take her.

One great consolation cheered the little sufferer and fostered in her heart a patience that was certainly heroic. She was now allowed to "get Poor Holy God." she became almost a daily communicant. At evening, she became absorbed in meditation and when she awoke on the morrow, her thoughts, it would appear, were all of Holy God. She would not speak an unnecessary word before she had welcomed Jesus to her heart. She even asked her Nurse not to speak to her until after Mass.

Unless it were physically impossible, she insisted on being carried to the "House of Holy God." Only when her sufferings were most intense, would the little martyr whisper sadly, "Mudder, I'm too tired to go down to Holy God today." Then, Holy Communion was brought to her in her room, where an altar for the sick could readily be prepared. When she received in the convent chapel, her thanksgiving edified even those consecrated souls who had spent long years in the loving service of their Heavenly Spouse. When the blessed Sacrament was brought to her as she lay in her cot, she received with still greater fervor.

When the priest had gone and the last faint tinkling of the little silver bell had died away in the distance, she sank back upon her couch and became absorbed in prayer. Sometimes, she would ask them to turn her towards the wall, lest the different objects in the room, innocent or holy though they were, might distract her from her one great thought of loving adoration. The thanksgiving frequently lasted for a space of three hours; on one occasion, it lasted until evening.

"I had heard so much about Nellie's preparation for and thanksgiving after Holy Communion," writes Sister Mary of St. Francis de Sales, "and much of what I had heard seemed to me so incredible in one so young, that I determined to judge the matter for myself. Accordingly, I went one morning to her room. When the priest entered, Nellie immediately fixed her eyes with a look of love on the Pyx which he held in his hands, and did not move them from it while he was preparing to administer Holy Communion. Scarcely had she received, when her face underwent a complete transformation. A supernatural expression diffused itself on her countenance, her head fell back on the pillow and she grew pale as death. I could detect no movement in that little body, and I thought for the moment that she had expired. The reason, however, was that she knew so well what the Blessed Sacrament is, and what He was Whom she then received into her heart, that the intensity of love and gratitude overwhelmed her and she became insensible to things of earth."

XI

LITTLE NELLIE'S MARVELOUS PROGRESS IN VIRTUE

The seeds of virtue had been sown in little Nellie's heart by a holy Irish mother. They had been nurtured by the teaching and example of the pious sisters, then God Himself had come, and, warmed by the sunshine of His Presence and bedewed by the waters of His Grace, they blossomed forth into abundant fruit. Patience, humility, obedience, kindness, a purity that was angelic, and a sublime trust in Divine Providence, radiated from her every word and action.

She endured her long and painful illness with extraordinary patience.

"Her fortitude in suffering was heroic," writes his Lordship, the Bishop of Cork. "She was afflicted with many maladies, among them caries of the jawbone. The wound had to be treated with disinfectants every day, which caused the child intense pain. She endured the agony without a complaint or even an exclamation, always clasping the crucifix tightly in her little hands."

The little sufferer sought no human sympathy. "Holy God suffered far more on de cross for me," she said. That was her consolation. Not that she did not experience the struggle when nature combats grace and bodily suffering makes even the holiest souls irritable and impatient. One day, Reverend Mother showed her something; with a gesture of impatience, Nellie bade her go away. Later on, however, she called for the Mother and would not be content until she came. "Mudder, forgib' me, I won't do it anymore," she said, between her sobs and throwing her arms around her neck, she embraced her tenderly. During the remainder of that day, her oft-repeated acts of sorrow and the sad expression of her childish countenance told clearly how she repented that word and gesture of impatience.

She frequently humbled herself before God, and asked Him to pardon her sins and imperfections. One day, Mother Magdalen was holding the little patient in her arms, and, thinking that Nellie had fallen asleep, she said to Nurse, "How happy this child is! She will go straight to heaven, for she never committed a sin." Nellie, startled, raised her head and said, sadly and humbly, "Oh, yes! Mudder, I did; I told a lie once."

She was kind and generous in temporal and spiritual things. Once, a lady who was greatly troubled, came to see the little one. Nellie had not been told of her visitor's affliction. Perhaps she read it on her face, perhaps she knew it by extraordinary discernment, which was characteristic of our saintly child. She spoke to the lady child-like words of holy comfort that were balm to her sorrowing soul, and at parting, made the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water on her forehead, "God bless you and comfort you," she lisped, and little Nellie's prayer was answered almost at that instant.

Sometimes, her kind visitors brought her little delicacies, which she accepted gratefully. She partook of a little in order to show that she appreciated their attention. But when her friends were good, the good things they had brought, were laid aside, to be afterwards shared with others.

She was particularly generous in spiritual things. She prayed for all her dear ones, and offered her Holy Communion for their intentions. The sick, the sorrowing, poor sinners, the needs of Holy Church, and its venerable head, all these were frequently mentioned in her prayers.

Her love of purity displayed itself especially in her preparation for receiving the Bread of Angels. Everything should be spotlessly white when 'Holy God' was to come to visit her; her garments, the counterpane, even the flowers on her little altar of the sick. On one occasion, she said she could not receive Holy Communion unless they let her have her snow-white little gown. Sister Mary of St. Ursula, who had charge of Nellie's laundry, told her she should be satisfied this once with a colored flannel one, but the child insisted, "No, I want de white one; I can't get Holy God in dis dress." Finally, they were able to satisfy her wishes and little Nellie joyfully exclaimed, "Now I am able to get Holy God."

Her abiding trust in Providence was most remarkable. In Holy God, she lived and moved and had her being. This was the world of Holy God and nothing happened that was not His Will. "Baby," said Sister Mary of St. Francis de Sales one day, "when you go to Holy God, tell Him Mother Francis wants some money to pay her debts."

Nellie's answer was one of sublime confidence in the Divine Goodness, "Holy God knows it," she said, "an' dat's enough."

XII MIDNIGHT COMMUNION

It was Christmastide, the children's festival time, and in school and convent, the red-berried holly and the bright emblazoned scroll wished all a "Merry Christmas."

In the forenoon of Christmas Eve, Nellie was brought to the chapel to see the crib. She was delighted with the different figures and kissed the statue of the Divine Infant with reverence and love. Returning to her room, she insisted on having a crib of her own. They found her a statue of the Holy Child and arranged a little crib on the table beside her cot. Nellie superintended the arrangements and sent Nurse's assistant to get some straw "to make a bed for Holy God." The girl returned and announced that she could not find any. "Dar's plenty down in the farmyard," said Nellie, and the girl had to go back to renew her search. Finally, the straw was found, and Nellie, aided by Nurse, prepared 'the bed for Holy God'. Then the statue of the Infant Savior was laid in the crib, holding a little branch of holly in its hand.

Nellie tried to rest early in the night, but long before midnight, she was awake making her acts of preparation for Communion. When the bell for Mass pealed forth on the midnight air, they carried her again to the altar of God.

The First Mass had already been said, and now the second was begun. It was a scene of prayer and love and adoration, white-robed sisters, and little children crowned with soft white veils, and over all, a solemn hush that spoke the peace of God. And there was that tiny figure in its accustomed place before the sanctuary. Her pallid, wasted face foretold this was to be her last Christmas-tide on earth, yet it was radiant with holiness and love, for was she not to 'get' her Holy God on this night when He first came down to dwell among His children? Now her head was bowed in prayer, now she raised her eyes and followed wistfully, each movement and each gesture of God's minister.

"Gloria in Excelsis Deo"...paean of the angelic choirs of old, heralding the coming of the long-expected Savior. At the Offertory, the solemn prayerful silence was broken by the harmonious song of His own little ones, "Adeste Fideles", they sang with holy joy, "Come and adore your Lord." Then silence once again, save for the words of the liturgy that floated down from God's own altar that was soon to be His Crib.

"Sanctus! Sanctus! Sanctus!" A sigh that spoke of welling hearts, a low, murmured welcome to hail the coming of the King of Kings. Then silence, deep and solemn once again, save for the half-checked sob that told of tearful eyes and throbbing breasts.

Now the Elevation, the tinkling of the bell, the rustling of bowed heads, the muttered prayer of welcome! welcome! for He had come among them, their Friend, their Savior, and their God. Another peal of song, "Ergo qui natus", "To Thee, Who art born today. To Thee, O Jesus, be praise and glory." "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata Mundi", O innocent Lamb of God, born into this world that Thou might'st live our life and die Thy cruel death; a Victim for our sins, have mercy on us, grant us Thy holy peace."

"Domine non sum dignus," "O Lord, I am not worthy," and every head was bowed in humble adoration.

Now they draw near to Him, His faithful ones, who know His voice and answer to His fond appeal. Finally, the Sanctuary gates are opened wide and Jesus of Bethlehem, borne in the hands of His anointed servant, comes forth to little Nellie of Holy God to give her this, His Christmas gift, His Eucharist, His own dear Self. Nellie's face, before so pale and haggard, was glowing now. Her eyes were bright with some strange, unwonted brilliancy, staring fixedly at the Tabernacle, as if they penetrated the secrets of His hidden Life. "If ever anyone was in ecstasy," declared Sister Mary of St. Pius, who knelt next to the child, "Nellie certainly was then."

When the priest had left the altar, Nellie was carried back to her little cot. But now she could not rest. She called her Nurse and said to her, "Today is Holy God's birthday. Dis is de day He came on earth to save us from sin, so light de candles, Mudder, please." When they had lighted all the tiny colored candles which surrounded her little crib, Nellie's joy expressed itself in tears. When she regained her calm, she sang several hymns. Her child-like pronunciation rendered them all the more touching. She began with the following, which was her favorite hymn:

"Hark, hark, my soul, angelic sounds are swelling,
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore.
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling,
Of that new life where sin shall be no more.

Sweet angel voices, singing through the night,
To welcome pilgrims to the Land of Light.

Onward we go, for still we hear them singing..

‘Come, weary souls, for Jesus bids you come’,
And through the dark its echoes sweetly ringing,
The music of the Gospel leads us home.

Sweet angel voices, singing through the night,
To welcome pilgrims to the Land of Light.

Rest comes at length, though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past,
All journeys end in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart’s true home, will come at last.

Sweet angel voices, singing through the night,
To welcome pilgrims to the Land of Light.

Angels, sing on, your faithful watches keeping,
Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above,
While we toil on, and soothe ourselves with weeping,
Till life’s long night shall break in endless love.

Sweet angel voices, singing through the night,
To welcome pilgrims to the Land of Light.

XIII THE WORLD OF HOLY GOD

The New Year had begun, rung in by peals of joyous bells. The children heard those New Year chimes, and built their castles in the air. The warm, bright sunshine of their youthful optimism, opened up the vista of a life of endless joy and happiness.

But, upstairs, in the room where little Nellie lay, the sound of merry joybells sank into a death-knell. The dreadful malady of consumption was hastening to conclude its work of devastation. The jawbone was disintegrating, and soon several little pieces came away. Those who tended her, marveled that the child still lived. The little food she took was, of itself, insufficient to sustain her, even if it were retained. That tender body was practically without earthly nutriment. The saintly child seemed to live on the Blessed Eucharist alone.

While others wept at the pathetic sight, little Nellie was happy and resigned. “Why are you crying, Mudder?” she said, one day to the Superioress, “you should be glad dat I am goin’ to Holy God.” Death was for Nellie, merely the removing of the veil that hid His visible Presence. This was the world of Holy God. She realized the Invisible Presence in His creation.

She looked through the window of the sick-room and admired the clouds, which she called, ‘the friends and angels of Holy God.’ She heard the merry laughter of her little friends at play and she was glad that ‘Holy God’s children’ were so happy.

She loved the flowers of Holy God. She could not suffer them to place artificial flowers on her altar. “Take dem away,” she said, “dey are too stiff for Holy God. I want Holy God’s own flowers.”

Nurse answered softly, “You will soon be one of Holy God’s own flowers yourself, Nellie. You will soon bloom in Holy God’s garden up in Heaven.”

“What will you ask for me then?” asked a sister who was present.

“I will ask Him to send you flowers,” answered the child.

“Yes, Nellie,” said the sister, “ask Him to send me some of His own flowers; to send me souls.”

Little Nellie, now a flower in the heavenly garden, has fulfilled her promise and continues to send those ‘flowers of Holy God’ which the sister most desired.

Her silent communings with God became daily longer and more frequent. She often asked them to leave her room, as she wished to speak to Holy God. Sometimes, they asked her if she were not lonely or afraid during their absence, but the answer was always the same, “Oh, no! I was talkin’ to Holy God.” If they questioned her further, she would answer, “Holy God says I muss not speak ob dese tings.”

Occasionally, however, she spoke after these conferences with Holy God, and then like one inspired.

She had been asked to pray for the recovery of a well-known Jesuit Father who was unable to come to Cork because of a serious illness. “Holy God is very fond of Pader -----,” she said, a few days later. “He will get better, but He will never see me.” Her words proved true.

They had asked her to pray for the recovery of two invalid sisters. Of one, she said that Holy God would cure her, because she had a lot of work to do for Him; of the other, she said that Holy God would make her better, but He would not cure her. These predictions also were fully realized.

She had been asked to offer Holy Communion for Nurse’s brother, but she refused, “I can’t, I can’t” she answered earnestly. Later in the day, she called her Nurse and said to her, “Mudder, Lattie (Sister Immaculata) says I ought to gib’ my Communion for your brudder, but I can’t. Holy God says I muss gib’ it to Mudder Frances.”

Shortly after Christmas, she had been enrolled in the Apostleship of Prayer. The meaning of the Association had been explained to her. She seemed to grasp it fully and redoubled her prayers for the Pope. “My own Holy Pader” she called him; for the needs of the Church and for sinners. On that occasion, Reverend Mother showed her a picture of the Sacred Heart. The child examined it closely, “Dat is not de way I saw Holy God,” she said.

“How did you see Him?” asked the Mother.

“Dis way,” answered Nellie, crossing her hands on her breast as on the occasion when she spoke of her vision to Sister Immaculata and Nurse Hall. The Mother was astonished; she had not heard of this ‘visit of Holy God’ before. She spoke to the sister and Nurse and they gave thanks to God. Their lips were opened now and they disclosed their treasured secret.

All who visited little Nellie were struck by her extraordinary sanctity. In the presence of that child, they felt they stood upon the confines of the supernatural.

The confessor to the community visited the sick room one day and spoke with the little invalid. When he rose to take his leave, Nellie asked his blessing. The priest, who was deeply impressed by their conversation, said, “It is not I should bless you, but you must bless me.” Nellie took the holy water font, and moistening her finger, made the Sign of the Cross on the forehead of the humble, pious priest, “God bless you, Pader,” she said fervently.

Her extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Eucharist became every day more marked. Her hunger for the Bread of Angels was insatiable.

One night, she kept Nurse awake by continually calling out, “I want Holy God, I want Holy God. Will it soon be morning, Mudder?”

“Try to sleep, dear,” answered Nurse. “Father will not be here for a long while yet.”

“Go an’ call him, an’ tell him I want Holy God. Does he lib’ in de garden, Mudder?”

“No, Nellie, he is very far away, down in the city, I could not get him now.”

At last morning came and the little one’s holy craving could be satisfied.

This was the occasion to which we have already referred, when Nellie’s thanksgiving lasted until evening. I shall let an eyewitness speak of this extraordinary occurrence:

“When I visited her about a quarter to five in the evening, she was lying quite still in her little cot, turned towards the window. I had heard of her strange condition during the day and was very curious to see her. I bent over her and as I did so, Nellie turned suddenly round and said, ‘Oh, Mudder, I’m so happy. I’ve been talking to Holy God.’ Her voice trembled with delight; her face previously so dusky with the ravages of disease, was now white as milk. Her cheeks glowed (I can best express what I mean by saying) ‘as a smiling peach.’ Her large eyes shone with such brilliancy that one could not help thinking, ‘These eyes have seen God.’ Her smile cannot be described, because it was of heaven and around the bed was the distinct aroma of incense.

XIV

LITTLE NELLIE’S HEROIC SUFFERING SHE “FLIES” TO HOLY GOD

During the month of January, the little patient lingered on, enduring her sufferings with heroic fortitude. She was going to Holy God; that one thought sustained her. It was as when one willingly endures the petty worries of a voyage, knowing that when he touches port, he will hear the voice and grasp the hand of a loving friend or parent. Yes, she was going to Holy God. They told her that the more patiently she would bear her sufferings, the nearer she would hereafter be to Holy God. “But, Mudder,” said the holy child, “I will fly to Him.”

Yes, she was going to Holy God. It was as if He stood outside the door of the sick room and she was waiting patiently, confidently, until she would hear Him say the word, “Come, now, My child, come now.”

She would go to Him on His own day, she said. She would wear her First Communion dress, she would go in Nurse’s arms, and they should make a dress for Nurse.

She was going to Holy God. The thought of her suffering was lost in the anticipation of the joy that was at hand. And this was a child of four years old! Truly, ‘the weak things of the world God hath made that He may confound the strong.’

Her strength was failing day by day. The end was close at hand. On Thursday, the 30th of January, a sister came to see her. She knew that the little life was nearly spent, and so she spoke of what was dearest to her heart. “Nellie,” she said, “when you go to Holy God, will you ask Him to take me too? I am longing for heaven.”

The child looked searchingly at the sister, her wonderful eyes seemed to glow with some preternatural light, and then she answered, solemnly, “Holy God can’t take you, Mudder, till you are better and do what He wants you to do.”

On that same day, she sang several little hymns, then, calling Nurse, she said to her, “Tell me, Mudder, how do you feel today?”

“Very well, Nellie,” answered Nurse.

“But tell me,” continued Nellie, “do you feel you are nearing Holy God? I do.”

The rosary tickets for the month of February were distributed by lot among the children and Nellie, in turn, drew hers. It proved to be that of the Feast of the Purification, which was to fall upon the following Sunday. The child had said that she would ‘fly’ to God on His own day, that was next Sunday then, to be the day of our little angel’s flight to Heaven? On Friday, she was so weak that it was thought she had already passed away, but again she rallied slightly. She passed an agonizing night. During the following day, the little sufferer hung between life and death.

Sunday morning came. A solemn stillness reigned within the school and convent. The serious reports that now and then were brought from the sick room and the memory of the child’s foreboding impressed the minds of all. All day, the agony was heart-rending to behold. Several Sisters came in turn to kneel in prayer around the little cot. Three remained, witnesses of the saintly death of this child of Holy God. Towards three o’clock, the little sufferer became quite calm and she remained motionless for about an hour. Her eyes were fixed on something which she seemed to see at the foot of her bed. “There was an extraordinary look in those lovely eyes,” a sister said, “It was not the sightless, glazed expression of the dying.” Then she moved. Her eyes now filled with tears, it seemed with tears of joy. She tried to rise and draw near to that ‘something’ on which she gazed so longingly, and then she smiled. From the movement of her lips, she seemed to speak with someone, and raising her eyes, she followed with a look of supernatural love that ‘something’ which seemed now to hover above her head. Presently, with the ecstatic smile of

one who 'has found Him Whom her soul loveth and will not let Him go,' little Nellie 'fled' to Holy God, and a new and wonderful white flower bloomed in the nurseries of Paradise.

It was four o'clock on Sunday, February 2, 1908, the Feast of the Purification of Mary and of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple. Nellie was then four years, five months and eight days old.

XV THE GRAVE OF LITTLE NELLIE

"Little Nellie is dead!" The sad news passed in mournful whispers through school and convent, leaving a void within the hearts of all. And yet, why grieve? Was she not now enjoying the Beatific Vision? Was not the veil removed? Did she not now see Him face-to-face, that Holy God, Whose Hidden Presence she had loved so much on earth?

They laid her on the cot which had been her cross, clothed in her First Communion dress and wearing the wreath and veil and her dainty little shoes. Around the bed were placed the pictures, medals and other objects of piety which she had loved so much in life. All these are precious relics now.

In the morning, the little coffin was carried to the chapel and laid in the children's choir. Then, after the Requiem Mass, the sisters and the pupils came to bid a last farewell. They touched the little hand with rosaries and medals and reverently kissed the body that had housed a soul so dear to God.

In the evening, the little cortege wended its way almost unnoticed in those busy, bustling streets to the public cemetery across the valley of the Lee. The mourners were few, Nellie's sister, Mary, who is still a pupil at St. Finbar's school, the Nurse, Sister Teresa (a' Touriere), and some of the pupils.

All who had known her intimately in life, believed that little Nellie was now a saint of God. They felt she did not need their prayers. They rather prayed to her to intercede for them before the great White Throne.

As the story of the remarkable life of that holy child spread among the public, the little grave in St. Joseph's Cemetery, gradually became a shrine, and rumor had it that those who went there to pray, found peace and consolation.

It was now sought to have the holy remains transferred to the Convent Cemetery at Sunday's Well. Exactly a year and a week after little Nellie's death, the grave was opened to see if such transference could, with safety, be accomplished. There were present at the disinterment, a well-known priest, the Nurse and two other reliable witnesses. To the great astonishment of all (for it must be borne in mind that the child had died of phthisis) the body was found intact, except for a small cavity in the right jaw, which corresponded with the bone which had been destroyed by caries while the little one was still alive. The fingers were quite flexible and the hair had grown a little. The dress, the wreath and veil of First Communion with which she had been buried as she desired, were still intact. The silver medal of the saintly Child of Mary was bright as if it had been recently polished. Everything, in fine, was found to be exactly as it was on the day of little Nellie's death.

The permission of the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical, have been obtained. The body was transferred from the public cemetery to that of the Good Shepherd Convent, where it was piously laid on the eighth of September, 1909. It was a gloomy day with clouded sky, yet, scarcely had the interment begun, when the sun burst through the clouds that shrouded it and from some distant tower, a clear-toned bell kept tolling sweetly as the last sod fell upon the grave of "Little Nellie of Holy God."

The grave is visited by groups of pious persons, who ask that little Nellie may plead for them before the Throne of the All-powerful God. The blind, the deaf, the lame, those in suffering or in sorrow, seek health and comfort at this peaceful holy shrine.

It is confidently asserted that many wonders have been wrought already through the intercession of the saintly child. Of these, as yet, we may not speak. The ecclesiastical authorities are already engaged on the proper investigation of individual cases, and in due course, the results of such inquiries will be made public.

A short time ago, the writer of this little sketch visited the grave of Little Nellie. The day was sinking to its rest behind the western hills whence Finn Barr came to found his grand old city. To the east, the shades of evening were rising above the waters of Lough Mahon, and from below, there rose upon the still air, those fitful sounds that speak of declining day and of rest for the toilers of the town.

Here in the convent grounds, all was holy quiet. Broken now and then by the merry ring of childish laughter. Yes, these were her little friends and there is where she played with them; those 'children of Holy God.' This is the garden where she plucked the 'flowers for Holy God.' A sister and her little helpers are trimming a border of sweet violets; those were Nellie's favorite flowers.

Now we are in the cemetery and yonder is little Nellie's grave. Around it is a group of pious pilgrims, old and young, rich and poor. A youthful priest, whose pallid features tell of some painful malady, is seated there. He cannot kneel or stand. He prays it may be given to him to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice but once more, then welcome be the will of God.

And who is that poor, young girl, whose face is radiant with happiness, that happiness which attracts your gaze and bids you come to hear her tale of joy?

She told me her story, that guileless, happy, grateful child.....

The great, good God be thanked for all. Thank God for Little Nellie.

APPENDIX I LETTER OF HIS LORDSHIP THE BISHOP OF CORK ADDRESSED TO DON UGO DESCUFFI

Cork,

13th November, 1910

(Official Translation)

To the beloved children of the School of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Cork, with sincerest congratulations on the sentiments expressed in their pious address of true love for Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, with the warmest thanks for their prayers for the Holy Catholic Church and for Us, and with the wish that they may always keep as good as their companion, Nellie, who was called to heaven while still a little child, where she is praying for them, for the comfort of their families, for the Sisters, their dear mistresses, for their Superiors, and especially, for their very venerable Bishop, to all of whom We earnestly impart the Apostolic Blessing.

The Vatican, Nov. 24th, 1910
Pius

P.P.X

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The above information about Little Nellie of Holy God is available on cassette tapes from Holy Family Publication Ministries. See the AUDIO tab and what is available on cassette tapes for other details.

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