

LIFE OF JEANNE MANCE.

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It was at the time when the fresh winds of Eastertide presage spiritual renewal that God broke his long silence toward Jeanne Mance. It had lasted fifteen years, and in mid-April, 1640, she was thirty-four years old.

François Dollier de Casson, her contemporary and first biographer writes: "In the town of Langres, in the year 1640, about the middle of April, Jeanne Mance heard a canon of that place speak of New France with great zeal, and praised our Lord extremely that he had shown his will to call both sexes to service there. Moreover this same canon added that recently a person of quality, Madame de la Pelleterie, had led Ursuline sisters to that place, that Madame Deguillon had founded a community of Lady Hospitallers there, and finally that there were many signs that God wished particular honour to be done him in these regions. *These were the words which made the first impression influencing Mademoiselle Mance towards that country.*"

This canon was in actual fact a near relation of Jeanne Mance, her cousin-germain Messire Nicolas Dolebeau, since about 1630 Chaplain of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and a Doctor of the Sorbonne.

(Jeanne prays for guidance and receives the call to service.)

The breath of the Spirit had passed over her brow in blinding reality. Gone her former anxiety, no more did she feel anguish, doubt or gnawing perplexity. Everything was radiantly clear defined. God, joy that was hers, had given her a sign, beautifully, simply, of what he desired of her. *She must, cost what it might, join the band of faithful and hard-working women who had gone there, over the seas, beneath the blue Canadian sky, to turn the hearts of numberless heathens to God.*

(But doubts again began to assail her, in particular of her own bodily fitness for such a task.)

And so Jeanne Mance presented herself to her spiritual adviser, doubtless weary of inner conflict, but also fearing spiritual error and wishing to spare herself further uncertainty. She could no longer hide this call that had come to her. We do not know who her confessor was, probably a Jesuit, almost certainly, considering the nicety and exactitude with which he counselled her in his final judgment upon her divine call.

No, nothing, nothing whatsoever obliged Jeanne to set out for far countries there to brave the heroic dangers of the most blessed of quests . . . she must not doubt it, her frail physical condition should tell her that if she ignored it, she would be disillusioned and thwarted."

Jeanne took refuge in silence and solitude. She prayed. Only, and this is reassuring, she no longer prayed or meditated alone.

But such elementary precautions were useless. "Her native land was to her a prison house," writes Dollier de Casson with his picturesque charm. "Her heart was on thorns which, when she wished to disclose them to her spiritual director so that he might extract them, proved so abundant and sharp, and this both before and after his well-meant efforts, that he lost hope of ever finding an end of them."

Pentecost was near at hand. Her confessor counselled her to make an offering to the Holy Spirit of all these aspirations of hers, admittedly admirable ones, which were becoming more and more importunate and increasingly destructive of her will-power.

The answer came clearly and his decision was imparted with the needful firmness of phrase. "Go, Mademoiselle,

go to Canada, I give you your permission," her confessor ordered Jeanne. It was decided that she should depart for Paris on the Wednesday after Pentecost, that she should address herself to Father Charles Lalemant who was charged with the arrangements for Canada; and that for the direction of her spiritual affairs she should attempt to obtain that of the Rector of the Jesuit College, which stood conveniently near to the place where she was to lodge.

JEANNE GOES TO PARIS.

(Jeanne's family, amazed at her expressed intention of visiting Paris, at first remonstrate with her. Then, in face of her determination, they give way, persuaded that she is merely desirous of visiting her favourite relatives, the Dolebeau's, for Jeanne has told them nothing of her inner thoughts.)

It was on the last morning of May that Jeanne Mance set out from Langres. A weary, an exhausting journey lay ahead of her, by coach or on horseback, probably involving changing from one to the other, as she knew.

The journey must have lasted three weeks, perhaps a month. "Time did not matter" when on a journey. She passed through the whole length of Champagne. She journeyed from citadel to walled town, through little townships and by way of great cities. Did she stay for Troyes with its multitude of churches? Doubtless she halted at Rheims, and delighted in the white walls and towers of the town of kings.

Then, although they were as yet but "forty leagues nigh," in the flatness of the landscape the nearness of Paris began to make itself felt. Soon they spied the towers of Notre Dame, those friendly digits gracefully pointing to far horizons.

Paris at last! They descended in the very heart of the city, and on their very arrival were at once enveloped in the atmosphere of Paris the admired and celebrated. How bustling it seemed, how deep toned, muddy, evil smelling! . . . Had there not been a soft assonance in the innumerable tinkling church bells ringing through the nimble June air, the first arrival in the mighty city would have deafened "each and every." You could not help but look around at all the world coming and going, hastening, some to good works and virtuous errands; others, a mere rustle of silk and lace, of mingled banter and gaiety, to the refined distractions of a life of pleasure; others still, in square coifs and billowing robes, to the cares of public office; and finally passing by with an air of purpose, artisans, merchants and others going soberly about their lawful business.

(Jeanne is sympathetically received by her relations of the Dolebeau family, when she tells them of her plans. She obtains many introductions to important people, but at first without any practical results. She is set on meeting Father Jean-Baptiste, Rector of the Jesuit novitiate, whom the Society of Jesus considered, then as now, "one of its most eminent masters".)

In the meantime she makes the acquaintance of Madame de Ville-Savin, of whom François de Sales, canonised Bishop of Geneva, had said "He estimated the piety of this person as being of very great significance."

Jeanne Mance found the society of this lady highly agreeable. She liked her open, charitable nature, ignorant of all guile. Madame de Ville-Savin smilingly acknowledged the near approach of her sixty-fourth birthday, and owned to being well content withal. It was from Saint François de Sales that this woman, famed for her good works, had self-confessedly learned "to serve God with Gallic frankness, that is to say with simplicity and a whole heart, and without scruple."

Thanks to the intervention of this lovable great lady, Jeanne Mance found herself in the presence of Father Saint-Jure.

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