



St. Germaine

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ST. GERMAINE was born in 1579 in the little village of Pibrac in southern France, some ten miles west of the city of Toulouse.

The people of the village were peasants engaged chiefly in farming and sheep raising. The Cousin family to which Germaine belonged was prominent in the Pibrac community. Laurent Cousin was a man of considerable business ability. He owned a large tract of land for farming and herds of sheep. He also operated a small store and held public office.

Laurent Cousin married twice and there were a number of Cousin children. The opinion is that Germaine was the daughter of Laurent, although there is no certainty about this. Her origin remains hidden in obscurity. More probably, though, Germaine was an orphan or and unwanted, abandoned child, whom someone got rid of by placing her, while still very young, in the Cousin home. In any case, Germaine acquired the Cousin name; if not by birth then by virtue of a custom prevalent at the time which gave to the servants the family name of the employer.

From her earliest youth, Germaine was a frail, sickly child. She was afflicted throughout her life with scrofula, a nauseous, distressing disease known at that time as "the King's evil." It was a kind of tubercular condition affecting the glands of the neck, causing them to swell and break out in purulent sores and abscesses.

To add to this, Germaine's right arm and hand were deformed and partly paralyzed. Her frail little body was constantly tormented by illnesses and a prey to all diseases. In spite of her many afflictions, profound charm and sweetness glowed in her face.

Patience under Trial

The mistress of the Cousin home was a hard, cruel woman with a genius for evil. Germaine was the helpless victim upon whom this evil person vented the sadistic and diabolic cruelty which filled her heart. It seems incredible that anyone could have been so savagely heartless toward a weak, sickly little girl as was this mistress or stepmother. She administered brutal beatings to the child almost every day. Germaine tried in every way to please the stepmother, to do her slightest bidding, but to no avail. The heart of this woman remained as stone. It seemed that she possessed an insatiable hatred for the delicate child, and lost no opportunity to vent her feelings by merciless abuse.

Little Germaine, frail and sickly as she was, never attempted to escape or to ward off or to soften the blows she was repeatedly given. She stood before the stepmother, allowing her to spend her fury upon her and then, when her quivering body could no longer support her, Germaine collapsed into a heap of hurting, burning, aching flesh, and was pushed into a corner. Her little face was often swollen out of shape and covered with blood from the brutal blows. Her frail little body was covered with bruises and scars from the violent kicking she was forced to endure from the fiendish woman.

Near-starvation was yet another affliction Germaine had to bear. Her daily ration consisted of a few crusts of moldy black bread. Sometimes she was so hungry that she would eat the morsels left over by the dog or the pigs. Not being permitted to enter the stepmother's home, Germaine slept in the barn amongst a pile of dry leaves or vine twigs. Here it was that she spent her long, cold, lonely nights.

In the Stable

Even in this stable the stepmother gave her no peace. She would make her rise at dawn to care for the sheep. On the coldest mornings, little Germaine could be seen setting out with her flock, a distaff and a supply of wool on her arm, for here too the evil stepmother gave her no rest, but demanded that Germaine spin

while the sheep were grazing. Upon her return home, she found the door closed to her. How she would have loved to sit by the fire or to join in the evening meal with the family; but no, a crust of bread was grudgingly thrown to her from the table.

Even the village folk whom you might have thought would have had pity on her, had nothing but scorn for her. They called her a "bigot," which at that time meant a hypocrite or mentally deficient person.

The children of the village, too young to have learned the ways of hatred, liked to hear Germaine tell them stories about God. They loved her and very often, as she watched the sheep, would crowd around her, eager to hear their lessons in catechism explained to them and learn the goodness and love of God.

Beloved of God

Despised by men, Germaine was beloved of God. The long hours of solitude in the fields or in the barn gave her the time to spend in the closest union and intimacy with God to whom she gave her heart, her all. Although Germaine had no opportunity to attend school to learn to read or write, she nevertheless attended religious instructions every Sunday at the village church. Lovingly and with the deepest reverence she held fast within her heart all that she learned about Our Lord's life and that of His Blessed Mother. Her only books were the rosary that she made from a length of string with knots for beads and the two tree limbs that she fashioned into a small cross. From these she poured forth her soul in prayer to God.

Germaine never complained of the incredible harshness of her life nor did she possess the slightest trace of bitterness or resentment. She showed only love and affection for everyone.

Centered on Church

Germaine's life centered around the village church. It was the only place where she was welcome. She attended daily Mass. To do this, it was necessary to cross the Courbet, a small stream which ordinarily presented no difficulty, but sometimes it became raging torrent, especially after a heavy rain. One day the villagers were astonished to see the rushing waters separate, so as to provide a dry path for her. Talk of this spread throughout the village.

Another strange thing they noticed about Germaine was her

power over the wolves. Never did the wolves molest Germaine's sheep. When she started for Mass in the village, she would strike her distaff in the ground; the sheep would huddle around it and remain there. Not one of them wandered off.

It is related, too, that one evening several of the villagers who were passing heard a heavenly melody rising from the stable where Germaine slept. As they drew nearer they saw Germaine rapt in ecstasy. The villagers fled in awe.

The most celebrated incident in Germaine's life occurred one wintry day shortly before her death. As Germaine drove her flock down the road, her stepmother followed her, yelling and screaming that Germaine had stolen some bread and concealed it in her apron. With threats she demanded that Germaine unfold her apron, and as she did so, a torrent of fragrant roses burst forth.

One morning early in the summer of 1601, Germaine failed to rise at her accustomed hour. The sheep in the stable were bleating. Someone from the Cousin home went to the stable to call her. There was no response. She was found in her bed of dry leaves and twigs. Sometime during the night, she had died, alone and unattended by this world, but very much wanted and loved in heaven.

An Angelic Escort

On the night of Germaine's death, two monks travelling from Toulouse lost their way in the forest. They sought shelter for the night in the ruins of an ancient castle nearby. At midnight they were awakened by a wide beam of bright light which extended from the sky to the earth. The whole sky was alive with melody. The monks saw resplendent beings descend to the barn and then another figure was added to the group, one who was adorned with flowers and was escorted and borne aloft by the group.

The next morning, when the monks reached the village, they inquired if anyone had died during the night. They were told that the girl Germaine had been found dead in the stable early that morning.

The stepmother and the Cousin children hurried to the barn as soon as they heard of Germaine's death. Weeping and sobbing, they moved the girl's body to their home. Germaine was given a new dress for her burial, something she had never received during the twenty-two years of her life.

The whole village flocked to the Cousin home to see Germaine.

"She was a saint," they said. All were astonished by her lovely appearance, transformed in death. A heavenly joy and serenity glowed in her face. She looked wondrously beautiful. In accordance with the custom of the day, Germaine's body was interred in the village church, the only home she had ever known and the only place she found happiness. Her body was placed in a grave under the flagstone floor of the church, opposite the pulpit, without marker or inscription.

Miracles after Death

In 1644, a distant relative of Germaine had died and she requested to be buried in the Cousin grave next to Germaine. The two men assigned to prepare the gravesite removed several of the floor flagstones. Upon lifting the first stone that were amazed to find the body of a beautiful young girl in the state of perfect preservation. Her skin was soft and smooth as that of a living person. The pick used by the workmen struck the girl's nose and the wound bled. The workmen were astonished and speechless. The news spread throughout the village.

From the time of the discovery of Germaine's body, devotion to her spread throughout the neighboring villages and gradually to all of France.

Miracle after miracle occurred to those who invoked her aid. The first of these miracles took place shortly after the body was discovered. Madame Marie de Clement-Gras, a wealthy woman of the Pibrac village, was cured of a sudden illness, along with her infant son. When Madame de Clement-Gras had seen the body of Germaine laid out in the church where it was placed after its discovery, she ordered it removed because it was annoying and distressing. Immediately, she was stricken with an unexplainable illness and her infant son refused to nurse from his mother or to take any form of nourishment.

Her husband, realizing that this sudden illness may have been due to the disrespect his wife paid to Germaine's body, admonished her about this and she agreed. Madame de Clement-Gras humbly begged Germaine's pardon and implored her intercession with God. That evening Germaine appeared to her and assured her that her prayers would be answered. The next morning she was cured. Madame and her entire household visited the village church to pay

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respect to the body of the saint. In gratitude, Madame provided a lead casket in which St. Germaine's body was reverently enclosed and buried in the sacristy on the church.

Many more details and miracles could be written regarding St. Germaine. Of special note is the fact that during the French Revolution in 1793, Germaine's body was desecrated by the evil men. They were immediately punished and only when they implored Germaine's forgiveness were they cured.

Canonization

At first Pope Gregory XVI would not read Germaine's cause when it was presented to him, but one day, having read of her heroic virtues, he declared her venerable. Germaine was beatified by Pope Gregory XVI's successor, Pope Pius IX, in 1854. She was canonized by him in 1867.

Let us learn from St. Germaine to offer up our sufferings in silence and to thank God for the opportunities to suffer a little for His sake. ●