

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
AN EVENING AT "LES BUISSONNETS" – FIRST CONFESSION AND SUNDAYS

Papa! Papa! the lamp is lit!" called Therese one evening, and a voice answered from the belvedere:

"Coming, little Queen!"

There was the sound of a chair moving, and a door opening, and Monsieur Martin's step was heard on the stairs. It was getting near Christmas-time, and a bright fire was crackling merrily on the hearth. As soon as her father had taken his usual place beside it, Therese clambered on to his knee. Marie sat at the round table with a book, Pauline took her embroidery and Leonie her tapestry-frame, whilst Celine settled herself on a low chair to look at the pictures in a big album. Then Marie began to read aloud Dom Gueranger's "Liturgical Year," a book which explains, season by season, all the beautiful mysteries of our Faith. This more serious reading was followed by some passages from another book of a lighter description, and then began an animated conversation. The talk naturally turned on Midnight Mass, and Therese asked:

"Papa, have you remembered the Yule log?" When her father answered, "Yes," she continued eagerly:

"Is it very big?" Monsieur Martin got up and went out. A moment later he came in almost staggering under the weight of the huge log.

"Now are you satisfied, little Queen?" he said, laying it at her feet.

"Oh yes, Papa!" cried Therese, clapping her hands delightedly.

"Our fire, at any rate, won't go out on Christmas night, and the Holy Child will find it burning beautifully when He comes! I'll put my shoes in the fireplace on this side, and Celine's on that! Oh, when will it be here? It's so long coming!"

The others laughed at their little sister's childish glee, and her father looked at her lovingly. Because Therese was absolutely unspoilt, the smallest things gave her pleasure. How she enjoyed those winter evenings! With what delight she watched the red apples roasting in the fire, and the chestnuts cooking in embers! As they ate them, they sang old Breton lads and Christmas carols, calling on the Christ Child come, or thanking Him for His gracious coming. They were never at a loss for some fresh form of amusement, and these simple pleasures were among the sweetest joys of home life.

After a merry evening, they said night prayers together, and Therese, kneeling beside her father, had only to look at him to learn how the Saints pray. Then good-nights were said,

and the "little Queen" received a last kiss from her "darling King." While Pauline was putting her to bed, she invariably asked:

"Have I been good today? Is Our Lord pleased with me? Is Our Lady pleased with me? Will then angels stay with me?" The answer was always "Yes," otherwise she would have cried all night.

The time came for Therese to prepare for her first Confession. Pauline had taught her that the priest takes the place of God, and that we must hide nothing from him. So she confessed her little faults with perfect truthfulness. It would have been the same if she had committed bigger ones. As she was too small for the priest to see her if she knelt in the confessional, she stood at his knee. She came out full of joy at the thought that her soul had been made whiter than snow. The priest had told her to love Our Lady very much, and she determined to try to do so.

As soon as she left the church, she stopped under a street-lamp, took out her rosary, which had been blessed, and, turning it over and over, examined it attentively.

"What are you doing, darling?" asked Pauline.

"I am looking to see what a blessed rosary is like." From this time Therese always went to Confession before all the great Feasts of the Church, to make her soul whiter and whiter.

She loved every Feast as it came round, but the one she loved best, and for which she prepared herself most gently, was Corpus Christi. She could not yet receive Lord, for then children did not make their First Communion when they were very small, as the Holy Father allows them to do now. She would look longingly at the white Host which the priest carried in the procession, and which he put on beautiful altars covered with flowers and lights. Therese, dressed in white, and wearing a wreath of roses, eagerly awaited her turn to throw her flowers. She would come quite close up to Our Lord, and she was never happier than when she thought she saw her fragrant petals kiss the golden monstrance.

The great Feasts did not come often, but every week brought a day which Therese loved dearly—Sunday, God's own Feast. She thought Sunday a delightful day, though in certain respects it was a solemn one.

In the morning they all went to High Mass, and at the sermon, their seats being far from the pulpit, they moved into the nave. Sometimes it was difficult to find a place, because of the crowd. But everyone gladly made room for little Therese and her father. Monsieur Guerin, her uncle, who sat in the church warden's bench, was delighted to see the picture they made coming up the aisle. He called Therese his "little Sunbeam." It never occurred to the child herself that people were looking at them; her whole attention was riveted on the preacher. The first sermon she really understood was one on the Passion; it made a deep impression on her, though she was only five and a half.

The meals at "Les Buissonnets" on Sundays were usually very plain, so that the maids might be free to go to church. However, Pauline always gave Therese a treat by bringing her a cup of chocolate in bed.

If there was a fair in the town, Therese would go out with her father and sisters, but however gay the music of the merry-go-rounds, and however attractive the brightly colored balloons, and the twirling "windmills," Monsieur Martin made it a rule never to buy anything on Sunday. In fact, to avoid making others work, he never travelled on that day unless absolutely obliged to do so. Sunday passed all too quickly, and Therese enjoyed every moment of it till the evening. But after Compline, a sad feeling came over her. She thought of tomorrow, when everyday life would begin again, with lessons and work, and she wished that it could always be Sunday, as she imagined it must be in Heaven. What added to this sadness was that they could not all be together, because the elder girls had to take it in turns to spend evening with their cousins. Therese, too, was invited sometimes, and on the way home she loved to look up at the twinkling stars. There was one bright cluster which she looked for particularly, because she saw in it a resemblance to the letter T.

"Look, Papa," she would say to her father, "my name is written in Heaven!"

Then she would tell him to lead her, and without looking where she was going she would throw back her head and gaze unweariedly at the starry skies.