

long and two yards wide at the bottom. Worked into one corner are the name and the date, "Youghal 1911."

- Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters*.

Catherine McAuley

1781-1841

The foundress of the Order of Irish Sisters of Mercy with its more than 1500 convents throughout the world was Catherine McAuley. Gracious of manner with an easy gaiety and, above all, a high seriousness and an impelling motivation to care for and instruct needy girls and women, she had reached middle age when the opportunity for her life's work presented itself. In the beginning she had no special plan, no idea of a formal institution and, very definitely, no intention of having anything at all to do with nuns.

Catherine was born in 1781 in Stormanstown House in County Dublin, one of three children of Catholic parents, James and Elinor Conway McAuley, both of whom were well educated though records do not tell how or where. At their marriage Elinor was 22, James 55, a builder and woodworker who had built up a considerable fortune. He knew and never forgot the tragedies of the Catholic poor. Catherine, not yet two when her father died, could not have remembered his charity to the poor or his gathering in the Catholic children to instruct them in the faith, qualities that nevertheless reappeared in her own character. Pleasure and fashion were more to the talented, extravagant Elinor's taste. She gave up Stormanstown to live in Dublin and although never of her husband's staunch faith, she reared her children Catholic.

When Catherine was 17, her mother died. Her sister Mary and her brother James found a home with Protestant relatives, the Armstrongs, and Catherine went to live with her mother's brother, Owen Conway. That thoroughly Catholic home-life was to end in less than a year in sudden financial ruin to the point of actual want for the Conways. Brief though that interim was it gave her an acquaintance with Father Andrew Lube of Liffey Street, a lasting appreciation of her Catholic religion and a first-hand knowledge of what it meant to be poor.

The Armstrongs offered Catherine a home and although generous and warmhearted in every other way, Mr. Armstrong was a rigid Protestant and he expected all under his roof to share his religious views. Her sister and brother conformed to Protestantism and although it pained Catherine never to yield ground in the home that sheltered her for four years, she never faltered in her convictions, never attended a Protestant service. In this time of ridicule and scorn of her Catholic faith, Catherine sought out the counselling of the Jesuit

Father Thomas Betagh. He instructed her so carefully and so ably cleared up all her questions, she was to live out more than 20 years of bitter Protestant influence unshaken by the taunt of Catholicism, and to be otherwise held in the deepest affection by those with whom she disagreed.

Frequent visitors to the Armstrong home were a childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Callaghan who took a great fancy to Catherine. Many years in India had impaired his wife's health and Mr. Callaghan suggested to Catherine that she come to live with them as a companion to her, an opportunity to provide for herself which Catherine gratefully accepted. Soon after, she went to the country with them to Coolock House with its own grounds of 22 acres in County Dublin. The bitter religious discussions continued ("imagine the insolence of Catholics pressing for religious emancipation") but provided she made no show of "popery" in their home, no display of a crucifix or other religious article in her room, the Callaghans suffered Catherine to go her way and to attend Mass in the village when she could. She found an outlet in the Catholic servants in the household and in the children in Coolock village whom she delighted in instructing.

Little by little the pendulum swung the other way. Catherine had the great happiness of bringing her sister Mary back into the Catholic church and of seeing Mary's five children choose the Catholic religion. Mrs. Callaghan, more impressed by Catherine's silent example than by any words, died a Catholic. Mr. Callaghan, who lived three years longer, was received into the church the night before he died. When his will was read, Catherine found herself sole mistress of Coolock House and a fortune of £25,000. That was in 1822.

Suitors had never been lacking to Catherine nor were they now. For her part she was free to devote all of her energies to the plight of the poor and the needy, to teach needlework, knitting and homecrafts in the Dublin Poor School and to open a shop in which to dispose of the pupils' work to her wealthy friends. She sold Coolock House and such furnishings not needed in her large lay social work building in the planning for the ample Dublin site she purchased on Baggot Street: large airy school rooms, dormitories to provide a home for girls and women, an oratory and some small bedrooms for herself and other resident workers. Always eminently efficient in all she undertook, Catherine studied teaching methods in the Protestant school system in Ireland and travelled to France to further observe and learn from the schools in Paris. Finally on the 24th day of September, 1827, Mary Ann Doyle came to live in the Baggot Street House, school commenced on that day and some women were given a home there. It was the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy.

Catherine continued in the belief that only a lay organization, unenclosed and unhampered, could reach out to urchins in back lanes and alleys, to

convicts in penitentiaries, to outcasts in houses of correction. At the same time she and her little community were living an austere life of prayer after the manner of a house of strict observance. She provided a chapel and obtained a chaplain for daily Mass. She chose a simple uniform mode of dress and, not surprisingly, the House she had built looked for all the world like a convent.

Inevitably, Catherine's pattern of social welfare led to a new religious Congregation. Already a tried and seasoned "Superior" though she was, she entered upon a novitiate into the religious life as the humblest of postulants in Nano Nagle's Dublin Presentation Convent. Choosing not to rank herself and her two companions with patrons so exalted as Teresa, Clare and Angela, Catherine asked leave to decline the names so proposed for them and to be permitted to retain their own baptismal names with the addition of the name of Mary. Catherine McAuley's Order of Sisters of Mercy received formal sanction from Rome in 1835.

With plans laid for many others before her death in 1841, Catherine McAuley had founded ten houses in Ireland and one abroad in the Bermondsey district in London, over which she placed Mother Clare Moore from her Cork foundation. A 1955 survey of her Sisters of Mercy lists 198 convents in Ireland; in England, Wales and Islands, 108; Scotland, 7; South Africa, 5; New Zealand, 46; Australia, 252; South America, 12; Central America and West Indies, 6; Newfoundland, 14; United States of America, 861.

Mother Mary Francis Warde of the Carlow Sisters of Mercy came to Pittsburgh with seven Sisters, one of them a postulant, in 1843. Between that year and her death in 1883, Mother Warde opened 23 American foundations. In 1846, at the invitation of Chicago's first Bishop, Irish born William Quarter, the Mercy postulant, now Mother Mary Agnes O'Brien, opened the first permanent religious house in Illinois.

Catherine McAuley's nuns made up 20 of Florence Nightingale's nursing force of 38 in the Crimean war in 1854. On the way out, Mother Clare Moore and four Sisters from the Bermondsey Convent met Miss Nightingale in Paris in October. Fifteen Sisters from Dublin, Cork, Charleville and Kinsale under Mother Francis Bridgman of Kinsale joined them at the front in December. Two of the Sisters were victims of cholera. Sisters of Mercy archives preserve a letter of farewell from Florence Nightingale written to Mother Clare Moore then returned to England broken in health after the war had ended but leaving behind her the other Sisters until the troops could be brought home. Florence Nightingale, justly acclaimed the world over, concludes her letter to Mother Clare Moore "You were far above me in fitness for the general superintendency in worldly talent of administration, and far more in the spiritual qualities which God values in a Superior; my being

placed over you was my misfortune, not my fault. What you have done for the work no one can ever say. I do not presume to give you any other tribute but my tears. But I should be glad that the Bishop of Southwark should know, and Dr. Manning, that you were valued here as you deserve, and that the gratitude of the army is yours."

Belief in Catherine McAuley's sanctity began long before her death and after it her Sisters treasured with the greatest reverence her books, her letters, her clothes, her chair. Many of them sought her intercession with God — and smiled at what they believed to be the Reverend Mother's plan, to obtain the favor but in such a way no credit would seem to go to *her* prayer. When it was first discussed during the lifetime of her contemporaries, among friends of the Order to send an appeal to Rome to have their Foundress declared Venerable, several were of the opinion she would use her power in heaven to prevent it. Beginning in 1953, the cause for Sanctification of Catherine McAuley is now in progress.

Savage, *Catherine McAuley*.

Mary Aikenhead

1787-1858

All her life Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity, would be admonished "It's never been done before" and her answer was always "That's no reason why it shouldn't be done now." Her motto for herself and for her Congregation was *Caritas Christi urget nos* — the love of Christ draws us onward.

Mary's father, David Aikenhead, was a Cork doctor of staunch Scottish Protestant descent, a man sympathetic to many of Ireland's grave problems but not to the Catholic faith. At the time of his marriage to a "dangerous papist," gentle Mary Stackpole, it was clearly understood that any children born to that union were to be brought up Protestant. However, when the first of three daughters, Mary, Ann and Margaret, was still a baby, Mrs. Aikenhead persuaded the doctor their too frail child needed good country air and so it happened that Mary was given into the care of the papist O'Rorkes just outside Cork. Mary lived in their home for six years, going to Mass with them; saying the rosary at night, one of the family except for her nicer clothing and the handsome couple who came in a smart carriage to see her or take her home for a visit.

On her return to Cork six year old Mary was placed in a school suitable for a life in society. The doctor decided it was time his daughter accompanied him to church. For a while she forgot the Catholic chapel and the rosary. To