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978-1-108-02091-6 - An English Carmelite
Catharine Burton
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CHAPTER I.¹*Of the birth, parents, and infancy of Catharine
Burton.*

MRS. CATHARINE BURTON was born at Bayton, near St. Edmund's Bury in Suffolk, on the 4th day of November, in the year 1668. Her father, Mr. Thomas Burton, was descended from a very good family of that name in Yorkshire. Her mother was Mrs. Mary Suttler, only daughter of Mr. Christopher Suttler, of a gentleman's family in Norfolk. Her parents, considering the hardness of the times and their strait circumstances, provided very well for all their children: but their chief care was to bring them up in the fear of God, and leave them heirs of their virtues. They lived together twenty years in great peace and concord, and their whole family was always remarkable for their piety and virtue. Their children used to ascribe their happiness in the frequent blessings they received from God to the piety of their parents, and their father, who lived till his children were grown up, had the satisfaction to see them all (this daughter in particular) correspond perfectly to the care and pains he had taken in their education. Her mother left nine children behind her, four sons and five daughters. She died of her tenth child in the thirty-fifth year of her

[¹ This and the following chapter, written apparently by the Collector, Father Thomas Hunter, are transferred from a later part of the manuscript in order to make the reader acquainted with Catharine Burton before he begins her autobiography.]—ED.

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age, much lamented by her husband, children, and all her neighbourhood, particularly by the poor, to whom she was wonderfully charitable. She was of a sweet agreeable temper, of a tender complexion, and wore herself out with pains and cares of her family and children, nursing them with her own milk. In a word, her life and death were so exemplary, virtuous, and pious, that her confessor was heard to say after her death that he believed her soul went straight to heaven.

Mr. Thomas Burton, after his spouse's death, employed his whole care in bringing up his children virtuously. He animated them not a little by his own example. We find in *Mother Xaveria's Life*, written by herself, several passages in which are expressed his tenderness of devotion, his constant practices of piety in gratitude to Almighty God and St. Xaverius for the cure of his daughter, his great confidence in this Saint. He was fully resolved, after he had settled his affairs, to pass the seas, and enter as a lay-brother among the English Fathers of the Society. He could not do this when his two daughters became religious, because he had been left executor to his son-in-law and trustee for his grandchildren. There was a suit in law commenced in their concerns, and he was told he could neither in charity nor conscience abandon them at that time. He told his daughter Catharine before she went over, that St. Matthew, following the call of our Lord, left the custom-house money, and all things else, as uncertainties, but that they would not permit him to do the same.

He was after this employed near two years and a half in those concerns, writing often to his daughter to recommend them to St. Xaverius, that he might be at liberty to complete his pious designs. His affairs were just finished, and she in daily expectation of seeing him at Antwerp in his journey to his noviceship, when

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it pleased God to call him to Himself. He died of a fever, receiving all the rites of the Church, and was upon his death-bed admitted into the Society, which, though unknown to his daughter, was the reason why she saw him ranked among the religious of the Society in heaven. In her writings she seems to suppose he died in great desolation, for his greater merit. We cannot doubt but he died most happily, if we can give any credit to those supernatural favours she received from God, seeing she there declares that some few months after his death she saw him living among the blessed in heaven, where she could have more free conversation with him and oftener than if he had been in the world.

It may not seem proper to add much of her relations who are yet alive. I shall content myself with saying they do not degenerate from the virtuous examples given by her father, mother, and herself. She has yet living a brother, a priest of the Society of Jesus.² Her youngest sister is now Superior of the most worthy community of the English Carmelites of Hoogstraet. Her eldest sister has been many years professed in the English monastery at Bruges of the holy Order of St. Augustine. Her sister, Anne Burton, *alias* Woolmer, after several years of widowhood, had the happiness of being professed by her own sister, whose life I write, in the monastery of the English Carmelites at Antwerp. One thing I cannot omit, which is much to their satisfaction and comfort, to wit, that Almighty God promised to Venerable Mary Xaveria that He would, in a particular manner protect, favour, and advance her relations on

[² This was Father Christopher Burton, born 1671. He made his Humanities at the Jesuit College at St. Omers, and entered the novitiate at Watten, September 7th, 1693. He served for many years the missions of Formby, Lytham, and others in Lancashire, and died at Watten, July 23rd, 1744.]—ED.

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her account. But then we must observe that this advancement, which she says began in her own time, consisted in this, that she heard they were fallen under several unforeseen crosses and afflictions, which they had suffered with Christian patience and resignation. This, in her language, was to be advanced to new dignities by Almighty God.

Her grandfather Mr. Henry Burton, noted for his grave and virtuous behaviour, who died afterwards in prison, into which he was cast on account of his religion, was always particularly fond of his granddaughter, and used frequently several expressions in her commendation, as if he had foreseen what she would come to. She was observed from her childhood to be of a mild temper, tractable and obedient, without showing any impatience or uneasiness, even when she was chidden or found fault with, and this though she were otherwise observed to have a pretty high spirit. She was remarkable for her piety and devotion from her tender years, and I have had several instances from her brother and sisters of her attention and fervour in her prayers, at an age when children are scarce sensible of their duty.

I need add nothing more in this place, but refer the reader to the many passages he will find in her life. He will meet there examples of her consummate virtue, in her long exercise of patience during the seven years of her sickness, the heroic acts of resignation and patience which she learned from God Himself, without the help of any master or book to instruct her, which shows sufficiently the spirit by which she was led; and though according to the common course of Providence, Almighty God would have us led and directed one by another, yet He seemed designedly to have let her remain in this mistake—that she was not even to acquaint her director with the extraordinary favours wrought in her—that we

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might see the sweet, efficacious, and secure conduct of Divine grace when God finds a soul which without reserve abandons herself to it, and by a faithful compliance with all that is demanded of her, puts no stop to its powerful attractions.

As to what she endured in her long sickness, I think it necessary to repeat what is said in the short remarks on her Life. These violent convulsions, the dislocation of her joints, the violent tortures she suffered by the forcible stretching out of her body, those other unusual symptoms of which mention is made in the relation she gives of her illness, may seem to some persons incredible and exaggerated, and I must own I have never seen and do not remember to have heard of anybody who suffered so much, and in so many different ways, in any natural distemper. When I first heard the account from her own mouth, above twenty years ago, it struck me as much as it can now strike or surprise the reader. To satisfy myself and others who may come to hear this, I took the pains to copy out all that ever she said of her sufferings during these seven years. I sent the relation of it into Suffolk, the place where she was so ill, and I had it back again, attested by several, both Catholics and Protestants, who had been eye-witnesses of what she there relates. I know moreover that she was told when she left England, by some who had been with her all the time of her illness, that she need never apprehend exaggerating in anything she could say of her sickness, nor have any scruple on that account, because she could never represent it worse than it was, nor ever express to the full what she endured.

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CHAPTER II.

*Of her settling among the English Teresians
at Antwerp.*

THE Monastery of the English Teresian nuns at Antwerp was founded under the protection of St. Joseph and St. Anne in the year of our Lord 1619, thirty-seven years after the death of St. Teresa. It was founded by the piety and liberality of the Lady Mary Lovel, daughter to the Right Honourable Lord Roper, Baron of Teynham.¹ In the writings of the foundation I find these following passages.

This virtuous lady understood by revelation that the Queen of Heaven required that she should found a monastery, of an order most devoted to her service, upon which her director, a priest of the Society of Jesus, advised her to address herself to the Rev. Father Thomas of Jesus, Provincial of the Carmes. At the beginning he was unwilling to give in to the lady's proposals, hence this affair seemed dropped for a whole year, till at last he was severely reprehended by our Blessed Lady in his morning prayer for opposing the designs of heaven, so much conducing to the glory of God. This he owned afterwards to the first Prioress of the convent, and withal assured her he had received several commissions from the Blessed Virgin relating to the concerns of that house.

[¹ She was the widow of Sir Robert Lovel. Her sister was Elisabeth Vaux, the friend of Father Gerard.]—ED.

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In effect, he immediately condescended to what the Lady Lovel had proposed, and was instrumental in obtaining a licence from the Infanta Clara Isabella Eugenia, to found a monastery in any part of her dominions. He pitched upon a place in the town of Antwerp, which very place had been before showed and marked out in a vision to the Venerable Mother Anne of the Ascension, who was chosen the first Prioress. His Holiness was observed to give more than usual marks of satisfaction. The Infanta favoured it much, and the city of Antwerp willingly concurred in it. In pulling down some walls for building the house, they found a large and beautiful image of our Blessed Lady, which is still exposed in their house, where several are persuaded they have received many favours through her intercession.

I give to the public these passages as I find them upon record in the authentic writings of this foundation. I am at the same time sensible, in the age in which we live, that these things will find little credit, particularly with those who give themselves the liberty of treating all as imaginations and dreams which does not suit with their own notions. As to my own part, the character of the persons here mentioned serves not a little to plead for the credibility of the facts. Father Thomas of Jesus was a man of known learning and sanctity; he has distinguished himself by his admirable books of mystical divinity, and is mentioned with great commendation in several rules relating to the holy Order of which he was Provincial. Mother Anne of the Ascension lived and died in opinion of sanctity, and the Lady Lovel, much commended for her piety, was so convinced of the truth of the facts, that she not only gave all she had towards the foundation of the house, but spent the remainder of her days in embellishing several rich ornaments of their church, which are admired to this day, as monuments of

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her liberality and good will towards this family. Without pretending at present to refute what objections may be made, I shall only add, for the satisfaction and comfort of those whom God calls daily to succeed in this worthy community, and for the edification of others who may light on these papers, that the eminent virtues of persons, who since the first foundation have always flourished and do still flourish in this holy family, are a standing proof that this establishment was much to the honour and glory of Almighty God. I hope a short digression here will not appear foreign to my subject; it will verify the truth of what Mother Xaveria learned herself from our Blessed Lady, that she owed a great deal to this Queen of Heaven for having called her to her *own house*. It will further show that as God designed to raise her to a great degree of sanctity, He had prepared for her a place where she should find great encouragement from the heroical examples of those who had gone before her.

The five who first settled in this house had been trained up and instructed by the companions of St. Teresa. Among these the Venerable Mother Anne of the Ascension, *alias* Worsley, was chosen Prioress. Almighty God ordered the Venerable Mother Anne of St. Bartholomew, the most beloved disciple of St. Teresa, to bring her to Antwerp, where it was revealed she was to do Him great service. She lived and died in great opinion of sanctity; her life was truly wonderful, as appears by the supernatural favours and graces she received from heaven, and her death was precious in the sight of God, which the angels themselves solemnized even upon earth by repeating concerts of music, which were heard several times, particularly at the moment of her happy departure out of this life. She governed the family twenty-five years, and settled religious observance according to the primitive spirit of their holy Mother, St. Teresa, upon so solid a foundation that

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there is reason to hope it will never decay. I do not add this without grounds.

I have by me a catalogue of those who succeeded her, as well in the practice of her virtues, as in superiority, during the most part of one hundred years. I can safely affirm, according to the accounts I have, that they were all so eminent for piety, that a religious community might justly glory in any one of them, as their virtue was truly solid in the faithful discharge of the trust God had reposed in them; it was not confined to their own souls, and whilst they laboured by the duty of their charge to maintain the spirit of their Order in an exact compliance with religious discipline, they had the satisfaction to see as many imitators of their virtue as they had religious who obeyed their Order. The seventh in this rank of superiors was the Venerable Mother Margaret of the Angels, whose sanctity heaven itself seems to approve in the incorruption of her body. This treasure God has been pleased to discover in the close of the first century after this foundation, for His own glory and the commendation of this virtuous community, of which more shall be said in its proper place.

We have seen in our days, that the same spirit of piety with which this house was founded continues still in this happy family. The life I have written of the Venerable Mother Mary Xaveria of the Angels will be a standing proof of what I say. I have had an opportunity of inquiring into their conduct whilst I was employed in collecting these memories: this, with all the personal knowledge I had of that family when I resided at Antwerp, makes me with confidence assure them, in the Scripture praise, that they are the *children of saints*; and for their comfort I can justly add that they have not degenerated from the noble thoughts of their virtuous ancestors. There is reason to hope they

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will transmit to posterity the spirit of devotion and prayer (which is the spirit of their Order), the spirit of love and charity, of fervour and zeal, and the like, which they have received from their worthy founders.

I find a character of this virtuous community among the papers of their first Superior, who gave the habit to fifty English ladies, and what she said of them in her time, may justly be applied to them since her death. 'The regular observance of this monastery has been a powerful persuasion to several English ladies of distinction to leave parents and all things else, and to enter this land of Carmel, where they live in a rigorous observance of their rule, and so perfect charity, that they resemble the first Christians, having one heart and one soul, every one pursuing their duty with all possible application: so obedient, that they need but the least sign of the Superior to make them fly to the execution of the hardest matters: so exact to silence and recollection, that in many years not one word has been spoken by anybody in times appointed for silence; so eager and emulous to out-do each other in virtue, that things most repugnant to sense, by continual self-denial, become easy and pleasant; most addicted to prayer and duties of the choir,' and the rest.

Though they are not accustomed to train up young ladies, under their conduct, by which their number may be supplied, yet Providence has always taken care to provide them, and often times by extraordinary means. The call of Mother Xaveria seems to have been something very singular. In the year 1693, they lost one of their religious, a person of exemplary life, and a great client of St. Francis Xaverius. The community upon her death joined in the ten Fridays' devotion in honour of St. Xaverius, to beg, by his intercession, a novice who might worthily supply her place, and to this end