

## Chapter Seven.

### Queen Beauty of Carmel.

(1850)

Hermann made his way to the Carmelite house in Agen, high on a wooded hill overlooking the town. He arrived there on July 19th, the feast of Elijah, who has special significance for Carmelites. He still needed some dispensations however because of the fact that he was a convert Jew, and it was agreed he should adjourn to Bordeaux and await these. From Bordeaux he wrote to his family telling them all about the Order he was seeking to join and emphasising the fact that it had historic connections with the land of Israel.

At first the Carmelite superior formally refused Hermann's application, and certainly wanted him to wait for a longer period to elapse since his conversion. Hermann however was undaunted and decided he would press the application even if he had to go to Rome to seek the Pope's permission. In point of fact he did not have to do this, as when he arrived in Rome the General Convocation of the Carmelites was just about to meet. Having considered the matter they gave Hermann the go-ahead. So Hermann returned to Bordeaux to commence his training in the Carmelite novitiate. He was given the name 'Brother Augustine-Mary of the Blessed Sacrament.' Novitiate life was certainly a strict regime for Hermann and there were long hours of prayer and various other exercises. During his earlier life Hermann had been in the habit of taking snuff, which was then very much in vogue, as well as smoking tobacco - these he certainly would have forfeited in the Novitiate!

Hermann was given the usual literature employed in formation at that time. So he would have made acquaintance with the Book of the First Monks, an ancient Carmelite document..

It contains this statement:

"Elijah the prophet of God was the first monk.."

(Cfr Vineyard Series Vol 2, Teresian Press, Boars Hill, Oxford.).

(39)

Chapter Four contained some forthright ascetical advice on renouncing self and restraining desires of the flesh:

"Just as he who is crucified can no longer move his limbs at will, or turn around but must remain still where the executioner has nailed him, so must you attach yourself to the cross, renounce yourself and never turn your will for one moment towards selfishness or day-dreaming, but apply it totally where my will has nailed you, so as to spend the time of life which remains to you not following selfish desires but the will of God."

At Christmas Hermann wrote a little carol which he set to music and which in later years became very popular:

"O solitaries of Carmel  
Interrupt your penance  
Intone a joyful Noel  
To the infant Jesus of Carmel".

In a letter to his friend Mother Marie Therese, the foundress of the Reparatrice congregation, Hermann reveals aspects of his personal

devotion, evoking what would, in a few short years, be synonymous with his sister in Carmel, St. Therese of the Child Jesus:  
"In the world during my life as an artist, I never had a childhood, because I was introduced to the life of the salons at the age of twelve. God, in his great goodness has amply made up to me for that during my novitiate, where I rejoice in the joys of spiritual childhood. I am bathed in the milk of consolation and want nothing else but to see God's will done in me and in everyone. Holy communion occupies me totally - either in thanksgiving or in preparation. I prolong these in such a way that my life is a continual communion. This I think is like the joy of heaven. Here we are always in the real presence of the eucharist.... This quiet life appeals to me..."

His friend Sr. Pauline in Paris sent Hermann a hymn from a collection of hymns which she had written and entitled, 'For the love of Jesus Christ'

(40)

Hermann was not allowed as a novice to spend much time in musical composition and he replied:

"The Lord does not want me to compose music for the lovely hymn you sent me. But yesterday after reading it once, I seemed to hear within me the melody for the hymn. As I read on the desire to compose the music grew, and I believe that if I could have read it a second time I would have known it by heart and would have been able to write down the notes."

But then he repeated the fact that there was a ban on him working like this during his year as a novice.

During this novitiate year Hermann had a long visit from his mother who was very perturbed to witness the kind of life he had chosen. It was naturally very traumatic for her as a Jew to see him in what would be for her an unusual garb, complete with sandals and tonsure! It seems that she exerted every pressure on him to leave the order but to no avail. In spite of everything his novitiate year passed peacefully and Hermann made his first profession on the feast of the Holy Rosary October 7th. 1850. (See Appendix, sermon at Peyragude.)

(41)

Sermon preached by Hermann Cohen in 1852 during a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Peyragude. It reveals his feelings in regard to his mother at that time.

"A mother and her son walked along the road of life. They were walking in sadness and wandering through a forest and so they fell asleep. They were awakened by the sound of music, and the son, now happy and glad at once, scanned the far horizon for the source of such sweet sounds. A brilliant light shone round him; in that light he saw a woman radiant with splendour and majesty. There was something divine about her features. Her eyes were fixed on the young traveller in maternal concern.

'Who are you', asked the lost child of Israel, he whom the heavenly melodies and the beautiful voice were rescuing from the sleep of death. Are you the enchantress Rachel who captured the heart of my ancestor Jacob? Or are you Judith whose winning ways were the ruin of Holofernes? Are you Esther who knew how to obtain the salvation of her people through her charm and love.?

'I am the daughter of Yahweh, the mother of the messiah, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the waters on the day of creation and made them fertile by the fire of his love.

I am the woman promised to the world, greeted by the prophets, whose foot would crush the serpent's head. I am the virgin foretold by Isaiah, the virgin who would conceive and bear a child, whose name would be wonderful, God of strength. I am that wisdom of which Solomon speaks. It is through me that kings reign; I rule the world and all created things. The Lord possessed me from the beginning of his ways and has preserved me from the serpent's sting. The true Assuerus said to me in the person of Esther that the law of death affecting my people would not touch me. I am the dove of the Song of Songs, forever beautiful, forever pure, without spot or stain.

I will be your mother, yes, if you wish to love me, come then my child, follow me and I will lead you to eternal happiness. But, my child,

'You must forget your people and your father's house' (Ps. 44)

'I will lead you into solitude and there I will speak to your heart' so come and eat this bread which I have made and drink the wine taken from my blood...

O God, the eucharist, Mary, you are the mother of the eucharist."

