

## CHAPTER V

**WORLDWIDE DEVELOPMENT****MOTHER ST CLARE**

We have seen the Congregation of Jesus and Mary growing. From its cradle in Lyon we have seen it spread into several dioceses in France and, very early on, into the missions; we have seen its expansion in Europe and in the New World; its establishment in Rome, even before the transfer of the Mother House, completed its universalization. The election of a non-French superior general would reinforce this transition to global level. The world, too, had undergone transformation: we were entering a century of speed; distance existed no longer, only artificial barriers between people impeded communication. Gone were the long, adventurous journeys, like those of the first evangelizing sisters to India; gone the separations without hope of return: it became possible for the leader to visit her furthest- flung outposts. Mother St Clare was to be this leader: an indefatigable traveller, she would be seen for thirty years crossing land and sea – and this activity would only be equalled by her zeal in promoting studies.

She was born to all this. She was English, the sister of a sailor. Her first years were spent by the ocean in the peninsula of Cornwall - which is steeped in legend and where the Celtic spirit lives on – and not far from the fabled Tintagel castle. Having lost father and mother by the age of two, Emily Bray was brought up by her devout Protestant grandparents who would read the Bible and have family prayer together each night: they were Britons of the high Victorian era who were to pass on to Emily an intense patriotism. In Lyon during the Boer War she would suffer in sensing that public opinion was hostile to her country; defeats and victories would draw tears from her. On her death bed she would ask about King George VI whose coronation took place on that day. Boisterous to the point of unruliness, young Emily participated in the life of the rural gentry, listened to her grandfather speaking of gardening or politics and used to devour the old books heaped up in the family attic. Her aunt, Mrs Boase, a convert to Catholicism together with her husband, took her in amongst their numerous children once her brother had gone to sea: she attended a private school and, at the age of twelve, in 1865, embraced the Catholic faith. Bishop Grant, who confirmed her, foretold her religious vocation. Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen she returned to grandmother and then, at her grandmother's death, she returned once more to her aunt. This was no longer in Cornwall but in Suffolk, quite near Ipswich. The chaplain of Ipswich convent, Father Wallace, used to come each month to say Mass and administer the

sacraments. He orientated the budding aspirations of Emily and of one of her cousins towards the religious life. One day, after Mass, he would be responsible for telling the young girl tragic news: the death of her brother, lost at sea.

Shortly afterwards Emily entered the convent; first, under the guidance of Father Wallace, as a boarder to study her vocation and then as a novice: a solitary novitiate, since she made her novitiate in Ipswich instead of going to Fourvière, as did most postulants. However, the annual visitations of Mother St Pothin, then superior general, put her in touch with those who had lived with Mother St Ignatius herself, whose exhortations to study struck Emily very deeply. She availed herself of lessons from Father Wallace, a Greek scholar and Cambridge graduate who was to remain, as long as he lived, her counsellor and friend. She was keenly interested in the shrine of Our Lady of Grace and the Catholic past of Ipswich, sometimes enduring the ill will of a milieu in which hostility to Rome had not been disarmed; and since material resources were precarious, since sewing work had to be done in addition to intellectual work and teaching, it happened that with her frail health she would faint in the mornings... She made her vows in 1876; she remained for more than twenty years in Ipswich, as a religious, as assistant to a French superior who knew no English, then as named superior. She defended her community against wind and tide, sometimes even against the doubts of her superiors; she improved them, prompted them to undertake studies and renewed the library. She was careful to ensure them the protection of the State and, to this end, she built a Catholic elementary school, which attracted supplies and grants. She sent her pupils to London to do the External examinations of the University of London. Another person would have been stopped in her tracks by lack of money: she went on ahead, trusting in God; and always the required sum would arrive in time.

All of this prepared Mother St Clare to modernize the missions in India in the same manner. Prior to this, in 1899, she had become novice mistress in Fourvière; there she had come into contact with her cosmopolitan flock, French, Spanish, Canadian and Italian women. In spite of time spent reading The Imitation of Christ, in spite of knitting and cleaning, she nevertheless found the time irksome, all the more often since her novices were busy in the boarding school and her comparative inaction weighed heavily upon her. But the hour for heavy responsibilities was approaching. It was Mother St Clare who, together with another councillor, was sent to Rome to find out what stance to take facing the Waldeck-Rousseau law. With Mother St Liguori and an auxiliary sister she was to stay put in Lyon after the dispersion, and her presence, in a tiny lodging in Place des Minimes, allowed her to keep a watchful eye there until the Past Pupils had bought back the Mother House. She went to Switzerland to see Madame Parchet, mother of one of the novices, who was running a guest house in the Alps, and entrusted to her the Pension des Dames

in Fourvière; it was during this period of solitude that she celebrated her Silver Jubilee in the chapel of Saint Bruno which had served as the cradle of the Association of Sacred Hearts. A General Councillor In 1901, she was sent out to India by Mother St Cyrille to do the visitation of India on her behalf.

There she found the inspiring memory of Mother St Thérèse who had arrived sixty years previously after a much less comfortable journey; there she met old nuns such as Mere St Lucie, the youngest of the group of 1854 and later Provincial, who had been a nun since before Mother Clare's birth. She admired them but nonetheless lucidly measured what was still lacking. In Bombay, whilst studies were good, formation for teaching left much to be desired. Mother St Clare saw the need for a Training College. And, once she was convinced, she took action. She spoke about this with the authorities in the Punjab, with the Director of Education and the ministry of Education as well as with the Governor. She obtained their approval and their support but not without a struggle. The Training College was to be built in Simla, the Himalayan hill station soon to become the summer capital of India; it would bear the name of St Bede, patron of learning in England. Things moved briskly: at the time when Mother St Clare was summoned to the General Chapter, the building was practically finished and the programme of studies outlined.

Thus, once more, everything prepared the new superior general for her office: a long stay in the same convent in which she had fulfilled almost every imaginable task, a period in the Mother House, critical decisions at serious turns of fate, and to finish, a distant journey which enabled her to experience for herself missionary dilemmas. Her election was the crowning of all these undertakings. But it was also the starting point for an even more intense period of activity which would, for more than a quarter of a century, extend its influence over three continents.

### **Mother St Clare's overflowing activity.**

First she returned to India. She was not a woman to leave a task unfinished. Her journey to Rome would have enabled her to complete her team: she brought back with her three English nuns, among them Mother St Gregory who was to direct the new training college. And, while she was about it, she transferred the provincial house to Simla: Agra was always to remain dear to her for its memories of the heroic era but the cool climate of the mountains made for better work. She was to come back several times to visit the convents of the peninsula, she would experience all the seasons, even in the last years when her heart could hardly withstand the changes of altitude. In this India where so many hatreds were nurtured, she gave an example of total goodness. Muslims, adorers of the one and only God, she sought to help understand the merit they could

acquire through their Ramadan fast; an old street sweeper to whom she had given warm clothes thanked her for this by asking to pour oil into the sanctuary lamp and was thus quietly preparing for his conversion on his death bed.

She went next to America (1904-1905). After the tracks of Mother St Thérèse she found those of Mother St Cyrille. This time the interval is less great: it was only just a little more than a year since the superior general had breathed her last in one of the convents that she had founded in New England. Mother St Clare gave a new impetus to studies: she modernised them, as in India. Thanks to this thrust, Sillery was later to become, in 1924, the first college for secondary studies for women to obtain affiliation with Laval University, which lent its teachers to it and authenticated its diplomas. She visited the other houses in Canada, then those of New York which numbered two at that moment, for a Canadian nun, Mother St Euphémie, had just founded the hostel Our Lady of Peace for young women. Mother St Clare helped these houses with the material difficulties associated with their development; then, after a trip round New England, she went on to Mexico. The Province of Spain actually had two daughter houses there. In 1902 the bishop of Merida in Yucatan, to whom a fervent Catholic, Don Ayala, had bequeathed his fortune for the opening of Catholic schools, had sent a priest to Rome to seek missionaries: Cardinal Vives arranged a meeting for him with Mother St Cyrille, whose missionary heart beat high. She was not afraid of the climate, far from it: 'When soldiers are making an assault on one of the trenches, some fall,' she said, 'that is inevitable, but that does not make the others retreat; on the contrary, they persevere right to the end.' So it was that Mother St Ignace, the Spanish Provincial, went to inaugurate the foundation of Yucatan. She suggested, a short time later, opening another house in Mexico, where the sisters with fever might recover in the healthy air of the high plateaux; in June 1904, a little school was begun there.

Such was the situation at the time when Mother St Clare made her visitation: a difficult apostolate, from the point of view of health, in regions where yellow fever had not yet been overcome, and precarious from a legal point of view, for the anti-clerical laws of Juarez remained in force. The sisters, who were in fact tolerated, could not, however, wear their habit. The President, Porfirio Diaz, had a good Catholic wife who protected them and whom Mother St Clare met; but the day when, after a long dictatorship, the president was overturned, that very protection would count against the Community and against the Church as a whole.

After this visit to the New World, the superior general went home to the Mother House. This was in order to enlarge it. Already, during the generalate of Mother St Cyrille in 1900, what was as yet nothing but a Procure (a place from which to transact business with the Holy See) had

moved from its first rather noisy premises to a little villa surrounded by a garden, Via dei Mille; and already the sisters, after a deliberately discreet beginning, had experienced the joy of returning to the activities dearest to their hearts: teaching, as well as catechism for children and for adults. They had begun to prepare three little travelling acrobats for First Communion – poor little children that the director of the circus had not even dispensed from their work (somersaults and tightrope dancing) even on the eve of the great day; they had also prepared a travelling salesman, Cosimello, who could scarcely make the sign of the Cross; another young man, Ricardo, (a steward in The Grand Hotel) brought up by the Methodists who had practically made him forget the Catholic faith; they had also taken in some lady boarders and opened a youth club. On the 8th February 1904, with the approval of Mother St Clare who had just left for India, Monsignor Sogorot had brought to Via dei Mille two orphan girls, Enrica and Nanina, under the patronage of the Society for the Preservation of the Faith whose work was to remove poor children from Protestant propaganda; two others, Albina and Quinta Vicari, then a fifth girl, Yola, had soon come to join them.

Catechism, youth club and orphanage: what was lacking so that Rome could become a replica of the first Fourvière in the times of Claudine Thévenet? A boarding school for wealthy young ladies? That's just what's needed: Mother St Clare, with her mind attuned to modern needs, had this inspiration. She knew that, between finishing studies and getting married, many young women had several years at their disposal and it was not good to leave them idle. Rome, its treasures and its history attracted an international elite; why not offer the means of improving their daughters' culture while at the same time preparing them for the freedom of adult life? Thus was born the international finishing school, Stella Viae, on the Via Nomentana. Mother St Clare bought a house left unfinished by an American artist, completed it and furnished it. She had recourse to the best teachers: for Religion, after Father Pègue, a Dominican, came Father Walmesley, an English Jesuit; for Music no less than the famous Signor Sgambati, a member of the Academy of Saint Cecilia and a pupil of Liszt. The other subjects, History and Modern Languages, were taught by the sisters. Pupils came from England, Spain, America and Italy. From amongst these, vocations were not lacking. The college was placed under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and the 15th May, the Feast of Our Lady of the Wayside, was particularly celebrated.

This was not enough. Neither Via dei Mille, nor Stella Viae were suitable for the needs of a Mother House. It was necessary to look for something larger. One day, Mother St Clare, reading the paper, noticed the advertisement of a property for sale in Tor Di Quinto, on the Via Flaminia – fifteen kilometres outside the town. Mother St Liguori and Mother St Henry went to the place, then the superior general herself. Yes, the property was big and could be developed, but what an

area! The other side of Milvio bridge – where Constantine vanquished Maxentius - was beyond the city toll, one of those deprived suburbs in which people from the underworld gather: it was neither town nor country, just enough ‘Roman countryside’ for its fevers to be dreaded and so that the distance to the nearest church, Santa Maria del Populo – two miles away – discouraged the tepid from coming to Mass. ‘You’ll be robbed right and left or murdered in your beds!’ fearful people used to say. But the pioneers were attracted by the jungle. To live in the midst of those to be evangelized, wasn’t this responding, once again, to the example of Mother St Ignatius? Mother St Clare therefore bought it. And once again the venture was begun in labour and poverty; the clearing of the land using pickaxes, the long journey there on foot. Eucalyptus trees were planted to make the place healthier as well as fruit trees and flowers; a hen house was constructed. The largest room became the chapel.

On the 25th June 1907, Monsignor Angeli, the apostolic delegate, came to say Mass there for the first time; the doors were thrown open wide to the people of the neighbourhood: those Italians, negligent, perhaps, and above all neglected but profoundly Christian from birth and who only asked to resume their religious practices. The crowd pressed in, jostling among themselves a little, and their lack of order ruffled Mother St Clare’s British sense of discipline; good people, however, and so numerous that they were stifled in this too cramped a space.

Building would have to be undertaken: as soon as 1908 the generosity of the foreign Provinces made this possible. A little after the General Assembly of 24th October, two days after an audience granted by Pope Pius X, the first stone was laid, on Sunday 8th November, by His Lordship Archbishop Bruchesi of Montreal in the midst of thunder and lightning accompanied by heavy downpour. The Pope had noticed this building on the horizon: learning that it was destined by some foreign nuns for the poor, he sent them a silver chalice, a Paschal candle and a picture of Our Lady of Pompeii, which had hitherto hung above his bed. The consecration of the church of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours was to take place in 1934.

So, how could the people of the area not take to the newcomers? The inn opposite gave them stony looks, even though they had lent the sisters, in their poverty, plates and a cup for the prelate who had come to celebrate the first Mass. But eight days later, a fire broke out at the inn: the flames were leaping high. Without hesitating, Mother St Clare mobilized everyone around her: nuns, domestic personnel and orphans who made a chain, throwing water on the fire, managing to save the tiny children, and even (but not without a struggle) the horse. Finally they got on top of the blaze, with the help of their neighbours, even before the fire brigade arrived. ‘We could

have lost everything’, said one good fellow taking off his hat; ‘let’s thank God and the good sisters too.’

An accidental but revealing act of charity; thousands of more permanent ways of practising such charity were found. Not only in religious ceremonies when the community drew back to leave room for the crowd and in the catechism classes for children and for adults.

There was, from the end of the first month, a child-minding class in which little girls of six or seven were accepted, given something to do, amused and instructed.

There was a dispensary, for there was no chemist’s in the area, and doctors cost dear. Mothers came seeking advice about their babies, workmen came to be treated for their minor accidents. Mother St Henri did some injections to be of service, the rumour spread and other patients sought the same help, so much so that a designated nurse, Sr St Darie, had to be appointed. Later she went on to take an exam which would legalise her work.

There was also a Sodality of Christian Mothers, a devout association for sure, but also the meeting place for these hard working women who, up to then, had scarcely experienced any leisure except for exchanging gossip at the public fountain, and who were to be so proud of walking in the processions, bearing their torches and sporting their green insignia beneath the banner of St Monica.

In 1913 there was an Association of First Communicants – the Pagetti (the Pages of the Blessed Sacrament) – and in 1915, an Association of the Children of Mary.

There was, too, a people’s canteen in collaboration with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Warm clothing was given to the poor around Christmas or the Kings: all the houses of the Congregation sent parcels to contribute to this.

Thus moral progress and well-being went hand in hand with spiritual up building. Little by little the most deprived of the area regained their human dignity, long before the expansion of the capital swallowed them up. And shouldn’t the later developments be mentioned even now: the hostel founded in 1918, gathering together children between the ages of three and six to teach them by the Montessori Method, and the Nido (Day Nursery) for infants of aged one to three, founded in 1928, thanks to the generosity of Countess Elia.

**The Storm passing over Spain. Foundations in Ireland and Argentina.**

1918 and 1928: we have anticipated; we have crossed the milestone which marked the First World War, that

chasm into which the bourgeois security of the twentieth century disappeared for ever. Mother St Clare's modernity had marvellously adapted the Congregation in advance. And the few years before had been particularly fruitful. Buffeting winds had given warning of a storm. Spain, which would escape this twice but experience in the meantime its own storm, gave warning rumblings from 1909. Mother St Liguori, assistant general, who had gone there a little earlier, had been struck by the people's unrest; having fallen ill on her return, she would dream, in her delirium, of persecution and fires. These visions turned out to be a reality. The anarchists overthrew Barcelona; the convent of San Andr es was set on fire; the working girls that it had nurtured, helpless to save it, at least protected the nuns by decking them out in shawls and guiding them to a place of safety. Mother St Clare braved the danger. In secular clothing, accompanied by a Spanish sister, she went to be with her daughters who might have need of her; at the station she saw three unknown ladies coming to meet her, who made her get into a car and only then identified themselves as nuns in disguise. They took her to the convent in Caspe Street – the Provincial House in San Gervasio having been evacuated - ; here soldiers had a garrison in the parlour, and the Blessed Sacrament had been transferred to the top floor, from which it was possible to escape if necessary across the neighbouring terraces.

The danger did not last: and it had the outcome of that of 1848 in Fourviere; from the novices sent to safety in the North, a new foundation came about – as formerly had happened in Rodez – in Azpeitia, in the heart of the Basque country, right near to the area St Ignatius came from.

In 1911 Mother St Clare returned to America. Here she sent some sisters to train at the Catholic University of Washington, very recently founded.

Sad not to see any garden around her New York house, she bought another in the country between the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains, as a place of rest for the sisters who were weary or convalescent; this was the house of Highland Mills. She brought back with her to Rome a young American who would later become, in 1931, the first Mother Provincial of the new Province of New York.

In 1912, she was again in India for the third time; there she found Mother St Lucie, still active in mind but with difficulty getting about, and she gave her an assistant to help her, Mother St Dorothy (Mother St Lucie did not die until 1917). Building works and repairs were undertaken, and a new foundation in Ambala, in the Punjab. Simla became an archdiocese under the care of

the Capuchins, old friends of Jesus and Mary. Mother St Clare went from one place to the other with her portable typewriter which, during the crossing, would attract around her the sailors and the stewards.

During her stay in India, she learnt that Mother St Stanislaus, superior of Willesden, had obtained from Monsignor Naughton authorization to establish a Jesus and Mary house in his diocese in Ireland. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September some sisters left England for Errew, between Balina and Crossmolina, where an imposing but dilapidated stone building had been bought; it was badly situated for a school, as was to be seen later. They fitted it out, however, well enough to satisfy Mother St Clare, when, on her return she went to visit it with Mother St Dorothy, who had come with her from India. This was not by any means the first time that she had overseen a development in the Province of her birth: from 1907 she had authorised the founding of a school in Felixstowe, a seaside resort on the English coast, a holiday house, too, for the sisters from Ipswich and Willesden, as was Highland Mills for those from the New York houses. Ireland, itself, was to see its houses prosper, first by transferring that of Errew to Gortnor Abbey in Crossmolina and then by spreading out to Galway.

Next it was the archbishop of Buenos Aires who asked Spain for some sisters for a Domestic Science college established by the Society of St Vincent de Paul and under the protection of the president, Mrs Uriburu. They were trained first in Belgium and arrived in Argentina at the beginning of 1913; other social works were to follow. Mother St Clare, from afar, took a keen interest in developments there but the war and then old age would prevent her visiting them in person and she delegated Mother St Ignatius to do so.

Then it was in Montreux which, thanks to a large sum of money which had been confiscated from Fourviere but recovered in her own name by one of the French sisters, that Villa Miramonte was acquired. It was in an ideal setting, framed by Lake Geneva. The Château de Chillon and the Alps: a very spacious dwelling, half for lady boarders and half finishing school, which Mother St Clare took pleasure in planning and which was already filled with students and boarders from all over the world, when the first big guns of war emptied it all of a sudden.

### **How Mother St Clare lived in the war years of 1914 – 1918**

At the time when war broke out, Mother St Clare was in England. What was Italy going to do, a member of the triple alliance? What would happen to Stella Viae, seen as an English school, if Rome were to align itself with Berlin? Would it be best for the superior general to go there as soon as possible? Events quickly informed her decision, and she decided to stay in Ipswich, which

was at greater risk. During this time, she was unaware that on the other side of the world her daughters in Mexico were enduring, at the very same time, the counter attacks of the revolution; they had to leave the capital with the utmost haste, from where, lodged in Vera Cruz under bombardment, in an old building without doors or windows, they learnt of the world cataclysm and the fact that the Provincial of Spain, reached by cable, wanted them to travel to New York, but with no boats available, they were to remain stranded in Havana. They were to open a hostel there which they would soon leave, but which was revived in 1949. Once again a time of ordeal cast far and wide seeds destined to fructify.

As for England, on its East coast above all, it was almost the front line, with its troubles and dangers: military requisitions (it was necessary to cede to them the house of Felixstowe, situated as it was at a strategic height, and transfer the occupants elsewhere); foreign pupils were sent home, there were nightly air raid warnings about planes coming over or zeppelins: a bomb even fell into the play area of the boarding school, making a deep crater. How many times the sisters would have to wake their girls in the night and make them go down to spend long hours in the shelter. In this atmosphere Mother St Clare felt at ease: her patriotism was roused; she prayed and made the sisters pray; she instituted, in chapel, a chain of prayer in which sisters and novices would replace each other in turn, a practice that has since become common. She offered her services, wanted to transform the elementary school into a hospital; then, as there was no need, she lent a room and kitchen to a regiment for its recreation times and she received Belgian refugees; nothing could diminish her activity.

It was it was in the midst of war, in 1917, that she founded in Thornton Hall, in Buckinghamshire, a finishing school with horticultural and domestic sections; there had been such a school since 1909 in Saffron Walden near Cambridge, but the war, in England more than anywhere else, oriented women towards open air work, and thus it was that this Thornton manor, in a hamlet and without communications, seemed to be appropriate for the needs of the times. In addition, Mother St Clare loved solitude and loved working the land and so she was in her element; everything had to be prepared, the ground as well as souls, in this corner of the countryside in which Catholicism was unknown. And to set the ball rolling, she began by taking in - on condition that he gave up drink- an old drunken groom who was weeping in the corner of the stables because the former proprietor had given him the sack. He was to attach himself to Mother St Clare and to die four years later, having been baptised.

Don't think for a moment that the difficulties of travelling kept her in one place: she would cross the sea to visit Ireland; she was to go three times to Rome, France and Switzerland. It happened

that during the war she was delayed in Boulogne and used the opportunity to visit the wounded in hospital: she was to act as an interpreter for a military nurse, who knew no German and was caring for a man from Bavaria with fractured jaws. This enabled him to seek a priest and notify his family. Another time she crossed the Channel from Newhaven to Dieppe in a crowded boat in which about a hundred American Knights of St Columba were doing their best to find seats for the ladies; she continued to Paris, seated on her luggage, in the corridor of a third class carriage which was equally bursting at the seams, arrived too late to eat, wandered hither and thither looking for somewhere to stay, which she ended up by finding with the Sisters of Hope. Then she set off again to look for some coupons with which to buy bread and she obtained these at the station thanks to a kind benefactress. From her visit to Our Lady of Victories full of the faithful, and from the courtesy of the French customs men, she was able to see, nevertheless, that the moral climate had changed and that anticlericalism had lost its virulence,

**Mother St Clare and the development of her Congregation. The Cameos. Final journeying.**

On the 11 November 1918 the nightmare came to a halt – thought to be a definitive one. And straight away the fearless traveller regained contact with her daughters across the sea. She only waited to get back to America for the steamers to finish taking back the combatants: she caught a slow Spanish boat from Barcelona but where the presence of a chaplain allowed her to hear Mass. In America she found a Province whose prosperity was a reflection of that of the nation; a new house had just been founded in Goffstown, near Manchester (New Hampshire), whilst in Canada, spilling over from the Province of Quebec, two more had been opened, one in Lamèque, amongst the fishermen of New Brunswick, the other three days journey distant, in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. She would have to content herself with visiting those of Quebec, for a General Chapter, postponed because of the hostilities, called her back in the autumn. Re-elected once again, she visited France and Spain in 1920, then in March 1921, she left for India.

This Province of the Congregation had also grown larger: new schools in Bombay, a house in Delhi, the purchase of the one that the Adventists gave up in Mussoorie and which it was desired to make a joint day and boarding school, missionary work, medical care, catechism classes, baptisms on the point of death that Mother St Clothilda administered in the villages close to Delhi to which she went in a bullock cart.

But India was simmering with unrest: it was the time when Gandhi was gaining more followers, without his non-violence being able to eliminate brutal reactions. His order to boycott England is particularly to be remembered. The visit of the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII,

provoked tumultuous manifestations: riots broke out during his journey to Bombay. The nuns who went to welcome him narrowly missed being stoned; they had to abandon their special trams and return home by quiet roads, whilst Mother St Clare, who had come by car with a few others, was obliged to take refuge in a private house and then above a police station. This was a shock for her British patriotism, and did not remembrance of the Sepoys' uprising give reason for disquiet? Happily this disquiet was without foundation: Mother St Clare would have needed much more to be worried about her health. On her return journey she suffered from gastritis to such an extent that it was thought she would die before reaching her destination; and she was becoming subject to fainting fits, which became more and more frequent in her old age, without slowing down her activity.

In 1922, she went to Germany: this was to take charge of a students' and young working girls' hostel in Dresden, The Sidonienheim. A short time later there was in addition a day school for girls which dated back to the eighteenth century, the Josephinenstift; founded by the queen of Saxony, the work remained under the protection of the Catholic dynasty which reigned over this protestant country and which had, very recently, given to the Company of Jesus a royal prince, Father George of Saxony. Princess Mathilda, the sister of the king deposed in 1919, wanted to add on to the existing foundations a retreat house for women. And once more she asked the Jesus and Mary sisters to take charge of it. Sisters of German origin were brought back from the different Provinces and soon they would have a novitiate of their own.

Moreover, Mother St Clare had in mind to expand the Congregation even more; wouldn't this also mean responding to the desires of the Holy Father when he encouraged the growth of indigenous clergy and wouldn't it also be a response to the way the world was evolving, putting an end to supervision from Europe? The Provinces multiplied. Previously there had been only four: those of the Mother House, Spain, India and Canada. The United States would be detached from Canada; 1921 Argentina would be separated from Spain; in 1925 England would be canonically established as a Province, and then Ireland in 1926. Thus the organisation of the Congregation was expanding out into the world. The houses which were springing up were the result, more often than in the past, of on-the-spot initiatives. Instead of a local society which was thrusting out roots to far off places, now it was a question of a hierarchically organised body, whose diverse branches drew life from where they were and yet remained closely in touch with the whole. In their midst Mother St Clare was to remain the living bond between them right until the end.

In 1924, she once again toured Europe and North America: in Canada she found an enlarged Sillery, and among the young sisters she was able to meet a truly great mystic, as yet unknown but a short time later revealed by her posthumous journal, Mother St Cécile of Rome.

Re-elected in 1925, much to her disappointment – she judged herself to be too old - , the seventy year old was to continue her journeying. Canada gave her Mother St Thérèse for assistant, who had until then been Provincial: in 1928 she would leave again for a last visit to India, a little too late to preside in person at the twenty-fifth anniversary of St Bede's College, her first foundation. She found some gaps there: Mother St Dorothy had died, and the Provincial, Mother St Gregory, was seriously ill. She found in addition some improvements: the Delhi school had been transferred to New Delhi to a beautiful building under construction. She went through all the houses, except those in the mountains, Murree and Mussoorie, closed during the winter; she spend Christmas in Simla, where snow was threatening. This journey she accomplished at the cost of heroic energy. Her heart condition prevented her from walking and she went about in a wheelchair. On her departure from Rome for Marseille she had been afflicted with a stubborn attack of bronchitis; in Bombay she suffered a series of fainting fits. On her return, she seemed so frail that a priest, travelling on the same boat, took with him the holy oils so as to anoint her on the voyage, if necessary... The embarkation defies description: to climb the gangway to the steamer, a long staircase had to be taken, with two sharp bends, and a swaying ramp; all along this walkway, much higher than the safety rail, four porters heaved her on an armless chair, on top of poles resting on their shoulders; to see her thus jolted about over the abyss, the officers and passengers held their breath, the Mothers who accompanied her on the transporter bridge were sick with worry; but she kept her cool, through her self-mastery, even if it meant remaining henceforth haunted by a phobia for slopes and jerking...

One last voyage to Spain, the following autumn, and we come to the end of her visits round. However, in spite of all this, she did not neglect the Mother House. The school grew larger; re-opened in 1922 after a four-year break, it grew with the population which poured into this suburb. In 1926, Mother St Clare had a new building put up with two floors which, ten years later would already seem too small. There were apostolic works for all age groups, a workshop for the young women; the Nido for the babies, and, for the men, who had long taken part in the annual missions, the apostolate of retreats for workers. The superior general did not forget her daughters; she pitied their having to stay in town during the stifling heat of the Roman summer. On learning that her building contractor, the one who built the church and school, ruined by his son, had declared himself bankrupt and was unable to make any legal contract, she judged the occasion propitious for a good action, and confided to the poor devil the care of looking for a country

house. He found a piece of land close to the sea, at St Marinella near Civita Vecchia, and, in a few months erected the dreamt-of country house. Then Mother St Clare thought about the dead who were interred in the public cemetery; in order to make them more easily remembered in prayer, she had a monument put up in the gardens on which their names would be engraved.

She had care for other dead sisters: and no-one more than she did more to piece together the early history of the Congregation. The silence surrounding the memory of Mother St Ignatius surprised her. When she was a novice, she had asked after the foundress and they had contented themselves simply with giving her name. Was this coldness? Was it not rather an exaggerated respect for the humility that Claudine Thévenet used to practise, and her desire to efface herself? Almost a century later, whatever the reason, such an interdiction was no longer reasonable. Consequently Mother St Clare, once superior general, set about looking for the rare documents which remained from the early days. She prepared a history of the Congregation; she published, in the midst of the war, Cameos, written by three young nuns, with the last chapter by herself, 'Aims and Ideals'. In 1921, she had the joy of regaining the house of Fourvière, kept since 1901 by the Old Girls Association, of taking back the school and of transforming the room where Mother St Ignatius died into an oratory. She promoted devotion towards her, which spread throughout Canada; on the occasion of her visit she participated in the first solemn celebration by Sillery of the feast of St Ignatius. She collected writings and witness statements, compiled a Life, had prayers said for the beatification of the foundress, and in 1925 named a Spanish nun, Mother Eufemia, as introductrice of the Cause to the Curia in Rome; without Mother St Clare and with the indefatigable zeal of the one she had thus designated, the present work would not have been born.

Her old age had many joys: the centenary of the Congregation in 1923; her own golden jubilee in 1926 and an audience with Pius XI; finally in 1937 she received Queen Helena of Italy in a visit to the Nido. She had bereavements too, and saw some of her most faithful companions disappear. Despite her valiant approach to life, infirmities laid her low: wasn't she, after all, nearing eighty years old? At the general chapter of May 1931, they dared not bypass her desire to retire; she would no longer have to shed tears at seeing herself re-elected, as last time; some voted for her, in spite of everything, and she shook her head as a sign of refusal when she heard her name, but the majority acquiesced and designated Mother St Borgia. And there would be again the moving ceremony of the kissing her hand in which the former superior general rendered homage to her successor whilst she, for her part, asked the blessing of the outgoing superior, as she left. It was decided that on her death she would receive the same prayers as if she were still in office; 'Now you are our grandmother general', exclaimed one of the French nuns playfully...

### **Mother St Clare, provincial superior in England. Her death.**

She was to live for several years yet. And her retirement did not mean no activity. She became Provincial of the two Provinces of England and Ireland. On the eve of the elections, the members of the Workmen's league came to present her with an illuminated parchment expressing their gratitude; the following day she presented Mother St Borgia to Pius XI; then, after a holiday in Montreux, she travelled home to her native land. The Congregation there had prospered: the houses of Ipswich, Willesden and Thornton were blooming; their youngest house, that of Leigh, was stagnating; this would have to be closed so as not to keep teachers there unnecessarily. Catholicism in general had also made progress: in the town of Ipswich, where the arrival of the nuns had unleashed so much hostility, there were now two parishes, and the Knights of St Columba who were active and full of zeal were looking for a premises; Mother St Clare ceded a bit of land to them and allowed them the use of the whole terrain on their annual retreat day; in the evening, from her window, she participated in the procession, and could hear the preacher who had come from London.

She travelled each year to Ireland in spite of the fatigue involved; she would regularly visit all the houses, spending the summer in Ipswich and Felixstowe and the winter in Thornton where the climate was warmer. She embellished the gardens and greenhouses: when it was necessary to dig an artesian well, she was one of the first on the site so as to attach a medal to the scaffolding and to recite the Our Father with the workmen. Although Protestants, they had confidence in her prayers and, each day, until the successful achievement of the works, she renewed her visit, taking with her a flask of hot tea especially for them.

This was not the only intervention of this kind she made: she came back to a British Isles beset by lack of work. The Prince of Wales addressed an urgent appeal to the nation, asking that little strips of gardens be given to those out of work where they could cultivate vegetables; Mother St Clare contributed money, then, moved to impatience by the slowness of its administration, she divided a well-tended piece of land belonging to the convent into seventeen plots and hired it free to worthy workers, whether Catholic or not, who could thus busy themselves there; they gained prizes in the horticultural exhibition in which a special section was reserved for them, and often, as if the convent land brought luck, they ended up by finding a job which allowed them to leave room for others.

Hers was astonishing activity. For, with all this, she pursued her work as an educator. She reorganised the novitiate programme, - six months of general development, a year of religious training - ; she sent the Young Professed to do work experience in the schools, she urged on other enterprises, encouraged constructive criticism, and never tired of taking an interest in the technical formation of bursars, infirmarians and cooks, enabling them to attend conferences or demonstrations. For two consecutive years she called together the teachers from the different schools for summer courses in which they discussed their experiences and heard lectures by quality speakers.

Relaxation was not neglected, and Mother St Clare was at the heart of this: she knew how to savour the God-given beauty of Nature, did the rounds of the garden each day, saw how the flowers were growing and scolded the gardeners when she saw a broken paving stone or a clump of nettles which revealed slackness but in her dealings with them she had a very great care for social justice, and a great way of doing good to them morally without indiscrete proselytising. Like St Francis of Assisi, she would gather the birds around her, for whom she always had a bag of crumbs; she would meditate on the trust a dog had in its master, an attitude that a man should have for his Creator. She might easily have said, with the author of *The Book of San Michele*: ‘A dog cannot conceal its intentions, it cannot deceive or lie, because it cannot speak. Dogs are saints’... In any case, a statement along these lines would not have displeased her.

However, her health was failing. For years she had had to lie down because of her weak heart. She was no longer able to open a window for herself or poke the fire; she was growing deaf; her eyes gave her great pain, and, instead of scanning a page with a glance, she had to rely on some to read for her. Most of her old companions were dead; she would worry herself sick over the Congregation of which she no longer had control; her increasing sensitivity made her dramatize in her mind the least incidents. Nevertheless, she controlled herself with admirable patience. Visitors who saw her in bed might believe she was tranquilly serene whilst in fact she was feeling herself to be under torture. Twice she recovered from double pneumonia, in Rome in December 1929, then in the spring of 1933: but this did not stop her. When she was summoned to the General Chapter of 1937, she set out on the very day of her eighty-third birthday. It was a more painful journey than ever; her wheel chair could not negotiate the train corridors; she fainted several times on the way. Despite her fatigue, she was to take part in all the Chapter meetings and in the preparatory novena to the elections. God gave her this opportunity to recall for the last time her life’s work: she met the delegates from all the Provinces, particularly those from Spain driven out by the civil war. She saw the Mother House again, her dear league of workmen, the Children of Mary, the little children in the Nido, and a host of poor people who came to greet

their old neighbour. She spoke out once again, emphasizing that the young nuns should be made to study. On the day of the election she caught cold: nevertheless, she insisted on participating the following day at the commemoration of the centenary of Mother St Ignatius and the day after she was still dragging herself to the Mass of the Ascension. The next day, the first Friday of the month, after Mass, having received a final visitor, the Archduchess Immaculata of Hapsburg, she took to her bed, utterly worn out. The doctor diagnosed a third bout of pneumonia and she was received the Last Rites; before this she dictated in a whisper a message to be read during Extreme Unction, - an act of humility and contrition asking pardon of her sisters for the pain she might have caused them and for her bad example. She asked that acts of love be recited; she worried that the taxi for the priest who came to her should be paid; she died at three o'clock on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1937, in this Mother House in which she had worked and in which her reputation of holiness was so well established that an unknown woman, hearing speak of her death, came to ask for her relics.