



Blood Transfusion, XVII Century

There is nothing drastic in the modern treatment for
**ASTHMAS, BRONCHITIS, CATARRH, HAY FEVER,
ANTRUM, AND SINUS TROUBLES, TONSILITIS,
COUGHS, COLDS, 'FLU, ETC.**

All of these are akin—in so far as they are accompanied
by inflamed capillaries of the mucous membrane.

Modern Magic

ASPAXADRENE

is an atomized Inhalant—It "touches the spot," so
relieves in seconds (not years); absolutely harmless.
Same spray, same liquid—babies and adults; no dieting
—sleep anywhere—cause, history, immaterial; takes the
strain from the heart by "easing the breathing."

Sole Proprietor, Discoverer and Dispenser,

A. H. CRUNDALL, Qualified Chemist

Box 58, Prahran, Victoria, Australia.

"Old Boy" C.B.C., St. Kilda, Parade, Ballarat;
Past Pupil Windsor Convent.

The Advocate Press, 143-151 a'Beckett St., Melb.

The Australian Catholic Truth Society Record.
November 30, 1951. (No. 432.)

B. 69

Box A31

St. Maria Goretti

*Why
print such
not*

*Why not
and otherwise*

1079

The Australian Catholic Truth Society,
143-151 a'Beckett Street, Melbourne.

Registered at the G.P.O. Melbourne, for transmission by post
as a periodical.

Marietta The Martyr

Saint Maria Goretti
(1890-1902)

New and Enlarged Edition.

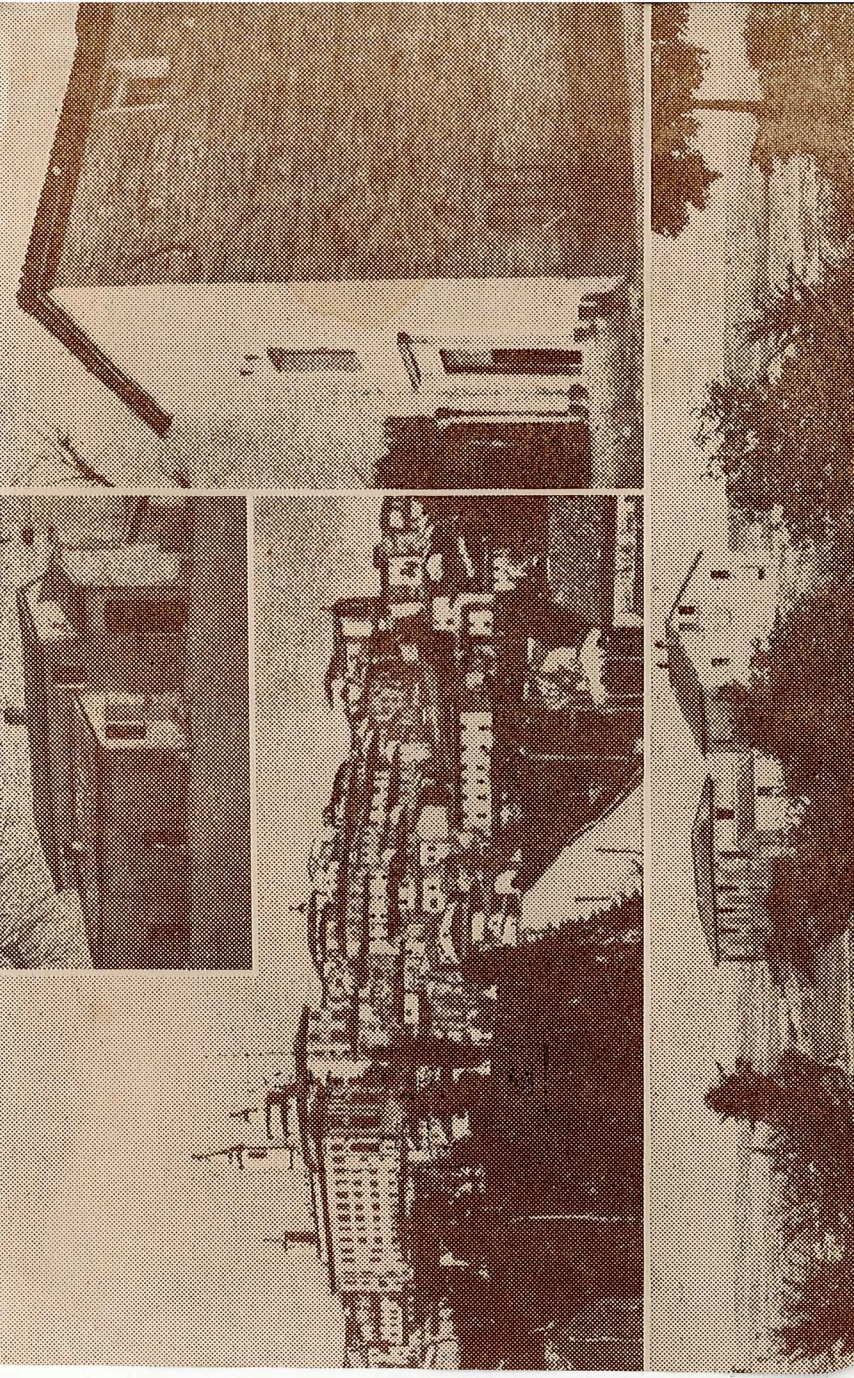
By

REV. OSMUND THORPE, C.P.

**MOORE COLLEGE
LIBRARY**

The Australian Catholic Truth Society,
143-151 a'Beckett St., Melbourne, and
C.U.S.A. House, 175 Elizabeth St., Sydney

Top left: Corinaldo, where Marietta was born. Inset: The house where she was born. Top right: The church where she first went to Mass. Below: Ferriere and the house (on left) where she lived and in which she was martyred.



Marietta the Martyr

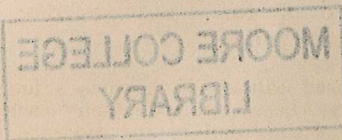
(I)

This is the life story of a young, unspoilt country girl whose wonderful heroism the whole Church now admires and venerates. Padre Aurelio, C.P., from whose biography of this girl most of the details set down in the following pages have been taken, calls her "a flower from the fields," but undoubtedly she was a flower whose delicate beauty was not fully recognized until the knife of her murderer had made her death inevitable.

Her name was Maria Teresa Goretti. Her parents and her friends called her Marietta or sometimes Mariettina. She was born on October 16th, 1890, at Corinaldo, in Italy. Her home was a very humble cottage. It stood alone, far from its neighbours. Everything about it suggested a continual struggle against poverty. Her father, Luigi Goretti, was a farm labourer who never had money enough to buy even the smallest of farms, and whose earnings were so meagre that they scarcely supported the family. Her mother, Assunta, had very often to work in the fields by the side of her husband.

Though the Gorettis were certainly poor from a worldly point of view, they were, it seems, very rich in other ways. They possessed many virtues often lacking in those whose lives are passed in pleasanter circumstances. They never quite forgot eternity and by good works stored up for themselves day by day, a treasure of heavenly merits.

Note: In this revised edition all the details found in Padre Aurelio's work have been retained, their accuracy having been tested by an examination of the evidence in the processes of the Saint's beatification and canonization. Other details from these processes have been inserted. This pamphlet therefore may be said to contain pretty well all the important facts of Marietta's life and martyrdom.



Marietta, the third of seven children, was baptized within twenty-four hours or so after her birth, and the innocence with which she was then clothed, she retained unsullied by serious sin all the days of her life. From her earliest years she was taught by word and example to walk in the path of virtue. She learnt to value prayer and self-sacrifice. As an Italian she almost instinctively loved Our Lady, but this instinctive love soon developed into a singular appreciation of the Rosary.

At no time of her life did Marietta receive any education in the ordinary sense of the term. For one reason or another, chiefly because in the beginning she lived out in the country, she never went to school. Though she attended catechism classes after Mass on Sundays, it is doubtful if she ever learnt to read; certainly she never learnt to write. It was not the fault of her parents. They themselves were uneducated and could not share with her what they did not possess.

(II)

When Marietta was six she made her first confession and received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Not long afterwards her parents decided that something would have to be done to bring more money into the house. The family had so increased that it was becoming more and more difficult to feed and clothe all the children. Though the farm at Corinaldo lay in the heart of a delightful countryside, this fact could scarcely be considered an advantage when casting up the weekly accounts. And so the Gorettis moved to Paliano, and three years later to Ferriere di Conca, seven miles from Nettuno. Ferriere was a village set in a plain between low hills and the sea, a marshy, malarial place until it was drained and rendered salubrious under the Fascist regime. Many readers will remember that the whole of this district witnessed many battles in 1944, as the second Great War drew to its close. At a short distance from Ferriere they

occupied an old and rather dilapidated building that had once been a cheese factory. They were not, however, the sole occupiers. Another family consisting of Giovanni Serenelli and his son, Alessandro, had part of it. This fact, as will be seen, had much to do with making Marietta a martyr.

Though Marietta was quite clearly a perfectly normal, flesh-and-blood girl, there was nevertheless something of the angel about her. "What an angelic daughter you have, Assunta," the neighbours sometimes said to her mother! Her look had something of heaven in it. She was candid as the skies. It was noticed and remembered years afterwards that as she grew older she became more and more a model of piety and good conduct. Little things she used to do and say—things which appeared as of no consequence at the time—were seen to be full of significance in the light of her martyrdom. People who spoke of her recollected her attitude when she was saying her prayers. They remembered how on Sundays and feast days, when her mother was able to attend to the household duties herself, Marietta took the opportunity of visiting the little church at Ferriere and of spending a long time in prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. They remarked upon her reserve. "If anyone asks your Marietta a question," they said to Assunta, "she answers in a few words and stops to chat with no one." Ferriere being more or less a country village, pretty well everything that went on in any household was known to all the neighbours. And so it was common knowledge that nine-year-old Marietta Goretti was a wonderful worker in the home and that she was not only able, but willing, to turn her hand to anything.

(III)

However valuable Marietta's help was to her mother up to this time, it became more so when tragedy overtook the Gorettis a year after they went to live at Ferriere. Luigi who had to work from daylight to dark

to procure a bare living for his family, was attacked by a series of grave illnesses, malaria, typhus, pulmonary tuberculosis and meningitis, which eventually brought about his death in May, 1900. *ten years*

When he took sick there was consternation in the home. Naturally, every effort that love could suggest was made to save his life. More clearly, it would seem, than all the other children, Marietta understood what was at stake. In this emergency she showed herself much older than her years. She was calm, wise, efficient, in a word, a tower of strength to her mother. Looking back over a quarter of a century, witnesses who were called upon to give evidence concerning this part of her life, could easily remember her anxious solicitude for her father, how she ran herself to a standstill going from one neighbour to another seeking this or that needed in the sick-room. She watched at times by his bedside, forgetting then even food and sleep. How in such circumstances she did not catch the infection is indeed astonishing.

Marietta missed her father very much. From the landing of the outside stairway leading to the kitchen, she could see the cemetery and the little cross over his grave. Often she stood there thinking about him. Whenever she went into the village to buy groceries she had to pass that cemetery. She used to kneel before the iron-barred gate, for it was locked, and pray for the repose of his soul. Unbidden the tears would begin to flow and her body shake with sobs. The death of her father took some of the sunshine out of her life. People noticed that she often looked sad.

(IV)

There were, unfortunately, other reasons for sadness besides the death of her father. Financially, the Goretis were next door to being ruined. Assunta thought of emigrating to the U.S.A., and her plans in this direction had reached a point at which she was in possession of a passport for herself and her family. Yet

there was little hope of her ever having enough money for even the cheapest of steamer passages. Marietta knew all this and also that her mother, on whom the whole burden of providing for the family now rested, was prematurely aged at thirty-five.

As he lay dying Luigi's delirious thoughts were much occupied with the future of his family. "Assunta," he said again and again to his wife, "you must go back to Corinaldo!"

But to go back to Corinaldo was impossible. A contract Luigi had made to cultivate some acres near his home and share the profits with the owner, had yet to be fulfilled. Moreover, there was in this arrangement a promise at least, of a livelihood for herself and her children for some time to come.

So the Goretis remained at Ferriere. Life was very hard for them. Every day seemed to bring new worries, new difficulties. They had enough to eat, sufficient clothes and a roof over their heads, but that was about all. Though Assunta Goretti worked all the year round in the fields like a man, digging, sowing and reaping, she was worse off at the end than at the beginning. After consigning to the owner of the land his share of the crops, fifteen tons of grain and close on five tons of beans, she found she was twelve shillings in debt, and that was a very considerable amount for a family living on the brink of poverty.

All who knew Marietta during those years of hardship had nothing but praise for her. There is incontestable evidence that she did all the housework. This was certainly a huge task for a child not yet ten. Assunta Goretti must have had her misgivings about leaving everything in her hands, but what else could she do? She herself could not be home and working in the fields at the same time. And after all Marietta had proved herself quite capable.

Thus it happened that Marietta became in very truth a little mother to the rest of her family. Padre Aurelio, who had every opportunity of knowing the

details, describes her activities in the home as follows: "She bathed her little brothers and combed their hair. She looked after her sisters and taught them their prayers. She cooked, made the bread, washed up, swept the house and did the mending. She fed the fowls. She walked to Nettuno to sell the eggs and the white pigeons she reared, and with the money bought household provisions."

(V)

Though Marietta worked hard all day and into the night, she nevertheless found time for prayer. She would never go to bed without saying the Rosary with the rest of the family and then another for the repose of her father's soul. At this time, that is, at the time of her father's death, she had not yet made her First Holy Communion. Her mother thought she was not old enough and that, moreover, there were too many other obstacles in the way.

"Mamma, do let me make my First Holy Communion," Marietta used to say to her.

"But, my child, how can you possibly do so? You do not know your catechism. You do not know how to read. And I've no money to buy you a dress and veil and shoes."

Marietta was very disappointed. "If that is so," she used to answer sadly, "it looks as if I shall never be able to receive Jesus, and I do want Him so much!"

However, Marietta's importunate requests finally brought their reward. Her mother consented to let her go to Ferriere to receive instruction in Christian Doctrine. This Marietta appears to have done more or less regularly for eleven months. For one whose heart was so full of love and longing for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, those months must have seemed like years. But the great day came at last. It was the Feast of Corpus Christi, 29th May, 1902.

The little church at Ferriere was the scene of this tremendously important event in Marietta's life. Thir-

teen other children, two boys and eleven girls, received their first Holy Communion on that smiling May morning. It is not stated anywhere that her mother was present. However, her eldest brother, Angelino, was certainly there, for he also was one of the First Communicants. One wonders how he managed to learn the catechism. Perhaps he accompanied his sister on her visits to Ferriere. Fitting him out with a new suit and boots was an added drain on the almost non-existent resources of the family, but this did not prevent Assunta Goretti from doing the handsome thing by Marietta and procuring for her all that would make her look her best. Certainly Marietta did look her best. She wore a new frock made by her mother, and new shoes and stockings. On her head, over a white veil borrowed for the occasion, was the customary wreath of wild flowers. She wore her mother's ear-rings, and around her neck her mother's treasured string of coral beads.

A Passionist from Nettuno preached a short sermon to the children. He told them of the great love Jesus had for each of them. He explained to them the best way of welcoming Him into their hearts. He asked them to promise Jesus to keep their souls holy and pure even at the cost of death. And in conclusion he recommended them to say the Hail Mary three times every day in order to obtain the grace of perseverance.

The effect of those words upon such a soul as Marietta's proved to be, can easily be imagined. Her love for Jesus must have grown stronger even to the point at which there was no earthly desire or affection standing in the way of the closest union between her heart and His. It was noticed that unlike the other children who chatted gaily as they went after Mass to the sacristy to thank the priest, she was silent and rather serious-looking. One wonders whether she was given any premonition that as Jesus had laid down His life for her, she would soon be asked to sacrifice her life for Him.

(VI)

One of the chief effects of Marietta's First Holy Communion was to make her more and more sensitive to sin. Anything even remotely evil, became utterly repugnant to her. She began to hate even the slightest offence against the infinitely good God.

Not long after her First Holy Communion she went to the public well in Ferriere to fill a jug. There she overheard a girl carrying on an unbecoming conversation with a boy. Marietta was horrified. She ran home, leaving the jug on the parapet of the well. Naturally her mother wanted to know why she had not brought back the jug. Then the truth had to come out.

"Mamma," said Marietta in explanation, "she was talking about hateful things at the well."

"Why then did you listen?" chided her mother.

"Mamma, how could I do otherwise, for I was filling the jug!"

"I understand, my child," said her mother. "I know you are astonished that any girl would say such things. Remember, if you were to say such things people would be still more astonished at you."

Marietta could hardly believe her ears. Did her mother really think that she would ever offend God in that dreadful way? "Me? Talk about such things," she said with amazement in her voice? "I should rather. . . ." She did not finish the sentence. Why? Did she begin to think she had spoken with too much confidence? Only the grace of God keeps even the best from falling. More probably her thoughts went back to the sermon she had listened to with such attention the morning of her First Holy Communion. She had then resolved to die rather than sin. Yes, rather than offend God she was willing to be martyred.

(VII)

Marietta was tall for her age, being five foot three inches in height. She had very regular features. Her eyes and her hair—she always wore it hanging down over her shoulders—were deep reddish-brown. Her mouth was well shaped and her lips a pale red. She was very self-possessed, neither taciturn nor timid, and always spoke and acted with a grace and polished ease altogether unexpected in an uneducated country girl. In other words, she was a young person of singular charm whom people never spoke to without pleasure and never passed in the street without giving her a second look.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Alessandro Sere-nelli, just turned twenty, robust and handsome looking, as he was described a little later, should have found her very attractive and have fallen in love with her. Unfortunately, his was not a pure and noble love; it was shamefully contaminated by the passion of lust.

It must not be concluded, however, that Alessandro was bad all through. The Gorettis knew him to be morose-tempered and domineering, but to the neighbours in general he appeared a fine, honest young man, as good in every way as the next. He went to Mass regularly and to confession and Communion every now and then. He was acknowledged by all to be a very hard worker. He seldom went away from home, even to the nearest town, Nettuno. But, moody by nature, he was not very sociable. Instead of mixing with other lads he preferred to read. He read everything that came his way, and some of this reading had the unfortunate effect of stimulating what was normally evil in him. Gradually he reached a state of mind in which he no longer strove to overcome his sinful passion but rather sought opportunities of indulging in it.

Marietta at this time was no longer a child. Though not yet twelve years of age she was physiologically an adult. Nevertheless, her feelings for Alessandro could

in the circumstances have never been anything but sisterly. She did in fact regard him and act towards him as if he were her brother. This was but natural, for although the two families did not get on very well together, they were intimately associated. They had their meals at the same table. Indeed, it would appear that Marietta cooked and laundered and mended not only for her own family but for the Serenellis as well.

Eventually Alessandro let Marietta see plainly what was in his mind. When they were alone one day he suggestively spoke of things forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. Marietta turned on him. "Stop speaking of such things," she said in a trembling voice! "You know it is sinful." Then she burst into tears and ran away. As she ran she heard his threat: "If you tell anyone, you'll pay for it!"

Marietta did not tell anyone. She was convinced he would never attempt the same again. For a whole month it looked as if she were right. However, at the end of that time he approached her with even viler suggestions. Once more she told him in unmistakable language that he was wasting his time in trying to get her to commit sin. "God does not want us to do such things," she said, adding as she turned her back on him: "You will go to Hell!"

But this renewed attempt made her afraid. She realized that she would have to do something to protect herself from him. "Mamma, please do not leave me alone in the house," she pleaded.

"But why, my child?" asked her mother. "Because I am frightened," replied Marietta.

"Frightened?" said her astonished mother. "Of whom are you frightened? There is no one about the place but your little brothers."

Marietta was silent. Why did she not explain? Because Giovanni Serenelli was a very difficult man to deal with, and any complaint made against his son would have caused a domestic upheaval.

The truth is there was insanity in the Serenelli family. Giovanni's wife died in a mental home and so did one of their five children. The Serenellis behaved towards the Gorettis as if they owned the house and lands. At this very time, according to the evidence given in the official processes of beatification and canonization, Marietta was particularly thin because for a whole month the Serenellis had locked up the bread and left the Gorettis to find what other food they could.

Giovanni Serenelli seems to have been very unkindly disposed towards Marietta, jealous of her, perhaps. He was always ready to find fault with her. On the other hand, he seems to have thought that Alessandro never could do any harm. One day when Marietta brought a jug of water in from the well, Alessandro having taken a drink poured the rest of the water out of the window and then imperiously told her to fetch more. Naturally she asked why she should do so. Whereupon Giovanni turned to Assunta and said sneeringly: "I see you train your children to work hard!" Later that day Assunta consoled Marietta, saying: "Have patience, darling. Alessandro will soon be going away to join the army."

How Marietta must have clung to that hope! But Alessandro's going away would not have been an un-mixed blessing. On the contrary, it would have rendered it easier for the Serenellis to carry into effect their threat of dissolving the partnership they had entered into with the Gorettis for the cultivation of the land. Had they done so the Gorettis would have been reduced to absolute poverty.

(VIII)

Thus, Marietta was in a very trying position. She avoided Alessandro as best she could, but in the circumstances this was not easy. There were times when she could not escape from his presence. Whenever he managed to see her alone he flattered her, pleaded

with her, threatened her. Sometimes he behaved indecently before her. All she could do was to take refuge in prayer.

At the beginning of July, Marietta made up her mind that somehow or other she must go to Holy Communion on the following Sunday, 6th July. Since there would be no Mass at Ferriere, this meant a walk to Nettuno, seven miles there and seven miles back over dusty roads in the season of the greatest heat. One of the neighbours, Teresa Lungarini, promised to accompany her.

Saturday, 5th July, was an unusually busy day. The beans were being harvested and everyone who could help was in the fields or in the threshing yard not far from the house. Every now and then Marietta heard two ox-drawn carts loaded with beans, one driven by Angelino, her brother, and the other by Alessandro Serenelli, come into the yard, their wheels rolling noisily over the cobble-stones. At the first sound of their approach her two younger brothers would rush away from her side and down the outside stairs to meet them, leaving her alone with her two-year-old sister. She could hear their high, shrill voices and their laughter.

It was indeed a season of contentment. Though the weather was hot and sultry, the crops were good. There was joy and peace in every heart except Alessandro's. Into his the devil seems to have entered. He was at that very moment contemplating what he would do to Marietta if she would not agree to his proposals.

In fact, it would appear that as far back as two months previously he had thought out the details of his possible crime. He needed a dagger, but not being able to find one, he looked about for something that would do in its place. The Gorettis, he remembered, had a punch that would do. It was between nine and ten inches long and had a handle. He saw it could easily be fashioned to suit his purpose and

at once took it to a blacksmith who at his request filed the sides down and sharpened the point. And thus everything was in readiness. All he wanted now was to catch Marietta completely alone.

(IX)

The opportunity Alessandro was seeking came that very Saturday afternoon when Marietta's thoughts were particularly happy in anticipation of the great joy that would be hers on the morrow.

The midday meal was over. Giovanni got up from the table and said pleasantly: "Out you go, children, into the beautiful sunshine!" Assunta, more practical, intervened. "Marietta," she said, "you had better stay and clean up the kitchen." At this, Alessandro very pointedly remarked that he had left a shirt to be mended on the bed in his room. Knowing what was in his mind, she said nothing, and was reprimanded by her mother for her lack of courtesy and kindness. When, however, everyone had gone outside she ran to Alessandro's room, snatched up the shirt and returned to the kitchen. Then, after the dishes had been washed and everything put back in its place, she took her sleeping baby sister in her arms and went out to the landing at the top of the stairway. She laid the child on an improvised bed and sat down to mend Alessandro's shirt in full view of everyone in the yard below.

It was the hottest part of the day. Neither man nor beast felt inclined to work. Alessandro's father lay sprawled out in the shade, unwilling to end his accustomed siesta. He was ill with malaria, a fever then endemic in that part of Italy. Alessandro on the other hand was full of energy, seemingly bent on getting to work again as soon as possible. He was already in his cart. Assunta Goretti and the other workers were standing about. Every now and then Marietta looked up from her mending and down at the scene in the yard.

Suddenly Alessandro jumped from the cart. Calling to Assunta to keep an eye on the oxen while he went to get a handkerchief, he walked away hurriedly. He ran quickly up the stairway, pausing only ever so little to ask his father how he felt, and giving Marietta a fixed look as he passed her at the top, and went into the house.

No sooner had Assunta got up into the cart than the oxen, worried by flies, stampeded out of the yard and nearly upset the cart in pulling it over an embankment.

For a few minutes there was a lot of noise, raised voices, Assunta crying out: "St. Anthony, help me!" In the midst of this confusion Alessandro stole quietly to the door and asked Marietta to come in. She said she would not unless he first told her what he wanted. He did not ask her again. Instead he caught her by the arm and pulling her in shut the door behind them. Once more he entreated her to allow him to have his way, following up his entreaties with threats. He took up the home-made dagger which with careful forethought he had left lying close to his hand, and showed it to her, telling her at the same time what he intended to do. But to all his pleadings and his threats, Marietta's answer was the same: "No, no, no! It would be a sin!"

Met with such a determined refusal Alessandro lost completely whatever control of himself he possessed up to that moment. Infuriated he pushed Marietta back over a large wooden box and putting one hand nearly into her mouth to prevent her from crying out for help he struck at her again and again with the dagger. Within a few minutes she had slipped to the ground bleeding from no fewer than fourteen separate wounds, and Alessandro in terror at the enormity of his crime and at its inevitable consequences, had thrown the dagger behind the wooden box and shut himself up in his room.

Though mutilated so dreadfully Marietta did not die immediately. In the designs of Divine Providence

she was to be set forth in the Church of God as an admirable model of virginal chastity, in much the same way as St. Agnes has been set forth as a model for the past sixteen centuries. The whole truth about her had to come not only from the lips of her murderer and those who knew her intimately, but from her own as well.

After a short time which must, however, have seemed endless ages to her, Marietta was able to drag herself to the door and pull it open. She saw Alessandro's father at the foot of the stairway. She called out to him. Her voice was weak, but it reached him. He ran up immediately. One look and he was out leaning over the balustrade of the landing and shouting to Assunta Goretti and the others to come in at once.

At the sight of her daughter Assunta fell down in a faint. When she came to, Marietta had been taken up gently from the floor and laid on a bed. She was still conscious. "Mamma," she murmured, when her mother came into the room.

"Oh, my darling, who was it did this to you?"

"Alessandro!"

"But why, my child, why?"

"Because he wanted me to commit a horrible sin and I said to him: No, no, no!"

Very little could be done for Marietta at Ferriere. She was therefore taken in a military Red-Cross ambulance to Nettuno, from which place it had been sent with several policemen as soon as the news of the tragedy arrived.

During the slow seven-mile journey Assunta sat by Marietta's side in helpless grief. The horses could have been made to go faster, but the consequent jolting over the rough road would have caused Marietta greater agony.

As she was being carried into the Orsenigo Hospital at Nettuno, Marietta said: "I am thirsty," but the ambulance attendants, considering her condition, were afraid to give her a drink. She was taken immediately

to the operating theatre, where after a preliminary examination Dr. G. Impallomeni and Dr. F. Bartoli (both gave evidence during Alessandro's trial for murder, and the latter in the formal process of beatification) decided against giving her a general anaesthetic. Instead they used local anaesthetics to dull the pain as they tried as best they could to cleanse and sew up her numerous wounds. As they were doing this the only words that passed Marietta's lips were: "Help me, O Mary, help me!" These she repeated again and again. Never once did she lose consciousness.

When the operation was over the two doctors went to speak with Assunta, who with Mario Cimerelli, a neighbour of hers, had been waiting in a corridor not far away. They told her they could hold out little hope of Marietta's recovery.

It was indeed astonishing that Marietta was still alive, let alone conscious and able to describe what had taken place that Saturday afternoon, for the heart sac and the left lung had been pierced by the dagger blows and the abdomen was a mass of wide, deep wounds.

In the meantime the parish priest had come, heard Marietta's confession and administered the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. A few hours later he brought her Holy Communion. Assunta was then by her daughter's bedside, and at her suggestion Marietta asked her pardon and that of all others for whatever faults she had committed. The parish priest likewise desirous of awakening in Marietta the very best dispositions before she received Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the last time, said to her: "Marietta, do you understand who it is I am about to bring to you?" "Yes," she answered, "it is Jesus whom in a little while I am going to see in Heaven."

By this time the whole countryside had learnt the story of Marietta's heroic defence of her chastity. During the twenty hours or so she lingered on in pain, the hospital was crowded with visitors all wanting to have

the consolation of seeing her before she died. They were allowed to file past her bed silently. Some, however, could not be silent. At the sight of her they gave vent to their feelings against Alessandro and called for his death. The parish priest fearing perhaps the effect of such words on Marietta, said to her: "Marietta, you have won a great victory. Now you have to win another. It is a victory that Jesus won on the Cross and I want you to win it for love of Him. Tell me, Marietta, do you forgive the person who attacked you?"

Marietta opened her eyes in astonishment. The parish priest mistaking her look set about helping her to overcome what he thought was reluctance to forgive completely. "Jesus wants you to pardon him," he continued, "just as He pardoned the thief who was crucified with Him." Thereupon, Marietta said with emphasis on every word: "Yes, I forgive as Jesus forgave the thief, and I want Alessandro to be with me in Paradise."

All through her twenty hours of agony Marietta showed almost incredible fortitude. She answered with a gay smile all enquiries about how she felt. To her mother's anxious words: "How are you this morning, darling?" she replied in spite of her sleepless night and all her pain: "Oh, not too bad, Mamma!"

As Sunday, 6th July, wore on, Marietta grew weaker. Late in the afternoon she became delirious and seemed to live over again the terrible scene in the kitchen at Ferriere.

Then, unexpectedly, a name fell from her lips. "Daddy," she said in a voice that was faint but nevertheless had an accent of joy in it, as if she saw her father entering the room. Mostly, however, there was anguish in her voice. At times her body was convulsed with pain. Her agony was heart-rending to witness. As the end drew near she became calmer. Suddenly she made a gesture as if to warn off someone. "What are you doing, Alessandro?" she cried out. "Don't you

know you will go to Hell?" And then as if in a panic she raised herself up a little and clutched at the arm of Teresa Lungarini, who was kneeling by the bedside. "Teresa," she exclaimed in a choking voice, and fell back dead.

(X)

From the very beginning Marietta was acclaimed on every side as indeed a true martyr. Scarcely had she been carried from the operating theatre when even the waxed cloth covering the operating table was taken away as a relic.

Her funeral was more like a triumphal procession and can now be seen as a presage of the public honour the Church would one day bestow on her. As the bells of the churches tolling sorrowfully were heard all over the town, an immense crowd of people made their way to the cemetery. Behind the hearse walked the Children of Mary carrying palm branches, mute symbols of martyrdom, in their hands and reciting the Rosary, for Marietta had been enrolled among them on her death-bed.

Marietta's heroism was soon known everywhere in Italy and then beyond Italy and throughout the world. Pius X and Benedict XV took a particular interest in the Gorettis, and provided for the welfare of the two girls, her sisters. But the Church is slow to set the seal of its definitive approval on the sanctity of anyone, and so it was not until 1935 that the first formal investigation into Marietta's life and death was commenced. In 1938 her "Cause of Beatification and Canonization," as it is called, was officially introduced at Rome, and that marked the real beginning of the searching judicial enquiry that precedes every beatification and canonization.

In the meantime, in 1929, her body had been taken with ecclesiastical permission from the cemetery and had been enshrined underneath a magnificent monument erected in her honour as early as 1904, in the Pontifical Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace at Nettuno, which is under the care of the Passionists.

From the moment of her death Marietta's heavenly intercession was sought by those who were in desperate need of divine intervention, to cure their bodily ills. And this trust in her intercession was not misplaced. Innumerable cures were reported, some of them of a kind that leaves no room to doubt their miraculous nature.

Here are some of the cures mentioned by Padre Aurelio: A young boy suffering from tuberculosis was brought by his mother to Marietta's grave in the cemetery a short time after her death. With tears in her eyes she besought Marietta to cure him. At once he began to be better. His illness never returned and he later joined the army and saw service in the first Great War. Montanari Fiore of Corinaldo was cured of intestinal tuberculosis and was able to return to his hard work on a farm. Domenico D'Elia, of Cermaggiore, was cured of advanced pulmonary tuberculosis. Giuseppe Sala, of Rome, was cured of purulent otitis media by doing no more than resting his head in silent supplication against the marble monument over Marietta's tomb. And a Passionist lay-brother, a member of the community at La Scala Santa, Rome, who was about to have a gangrenous finger amputated, placed a tiny picture and a relic of Marietta around it, and was rewarded by an almost instantaneous cure.

But one of the most striking manifestations of Marietta's heavenly power was the conversion of Alessandro, her murderer. He had been tried and found guilty. There being no capital punishment in Italy, he was sentenced to imprisonment for thirty years. For a long time he remained obdurate and refused to repent of his crime. But he was miserably unhappy. One night after he had gone to bed full of the blackest depression and near to despair, he saw Marietta in a dream. At least, that is how he himself explained what happened. He said it was the only time he ever dreamt of her. She was clothed in white and was in a garden full of lilies and other white flowers. These

she gathered into bundles and gave to him. As he took them, each flower to his utter bewilderment was transformed into a brightly-shining tongue of fire. He awoke a changed man. Shortly afterwards he made his peace with God and has since then given every evidence of the sincerity of his conversion.

In 1929 Alessandro was released from prison on parole. One of his first acts was to seek out Assunta Goretti and formally ask her pardon. Assunta opened her arms to him. "Marietta forgave you," she said, "and so do I."

Alessandro was one of the first witnesses called during the official ecclesiastical investigations into Marietta's life and death. He now lives at Ascoli with the Capuchin Franciscan Fathers, for whom he works as a gardener.

In 1945, these investigations were formally closed. Two years later, on April 27, Marietta was solemnly declared Blessed.

Among the vast crowd in St. Peter's on that day, was a very old woman in a wheel-chair. When she was recognized as Marietta's mother, not even the sanctity of the place could restrain the people's acclamations. Whether they knew it or not, there was on this occasion an added justification for such an outburst of feeling. Never before in the long history of the Church had it happened that a mother had lived long enough to be present at the bestowal of this tremendous honour on her child. Once before it very nearly happened. Had St. Aloysius Gonzaga's mother survived a few months longer she would have been able to be present at his beatification, which took place only fourteen years after his death.

Those who were near Assunta Goretti on that morning, clearly perceived that she was entirely unmindful of the words and actions of the crowd. She was still only a peasant woman, unable to read or write. But years of serving God faithfully and the heavenly intercession of her child, had brought a deep knowledge

of divine things. She knew the small worth of human praise. She knew with St. Paul that, "not he who commendeth himself is approved: but he, whom God commendeth." And so her thoughts were not on earth but with her martyred child. Every now and then she raised her eyes to the huge picture of Marietta with her head surrounded with the nimbus of the Blessed, which occupied the place of honour in the famous Gloria of Bernini, for all the world to see.

Was Marietta Goretti no more than an innocent, artless girl, instinctively terrified of sin as one is instinctively terrified of a snake? Was she like the ermine of the old legend, which allowed itself to be killed rather than touch with its paws the mud of the roadway? Was she impelled in her resistance only by a natural sentiment of modesty? These questions were asked and answered by Pius XII in an address he gave on the day following the beatification. No, he said, Marietta in an atmosphere of shameless passion was neither ignorant nor insensible, but was strong with that supernatural strength which is sown in every Christian soul at the moment of Baptism. Had she lived to an adult age it is possible that she would have followed the way of so many other girls, and through a holy marriage have become the means of giving not only devoted children to the Church, but future saints to Heaven. However, Christ reserved her for Himself. She had not been thinking of the future. She desired only one thing: never to break the law of God and to be faithful to Christ even at the cost of her own life.

(XI)

The beatification of Marietta was the signal for a world-wide increase in devotion to her. Through the press and the radio Catholics in every corner of the globe became acquainted with her humble life and glorious martyrdom. In Italy a full length film with the title: *Il cielo sulla palude* (Heaven over the marshes), was made and has received the highest ap-

proval for accuracy and artistry. The charming candour of her personality has emerged more and more. Her heavenly intercession has been sought everywhere and numerous have been the wonderful graces obtained. Two of the many miracles said to have been worked as a result of praying to her, were presented as evidence in favour of her canonization, and after exhaustive investigation by medical experts were accepted as genuine. They were the cure overnight of Anna Musumarro, who was suffering from a dangerous attack of pleurisy, and the almost instantaneous cure of Giuseppe Capo, a workman who had his foot crushed into a formless mass by the fall of a huge block of stone, and whose leg the surgeon was about to amputate.

When the date for Marietta's canonization was announced so great was the demand for tickets of admission to St. Peter's that there was only one thing to be done if the piety of the faithful from many lands was to be satisfied, and that was to break all precedents and perform the entire ceremony out in the open for everyone to see.

So on Saturday, June 24th, towards evening, when the heat of a midsummer's day had passed, upwards of a quarter of a million people of every age and condition, some of them from far distant Australia, were gathered in the Piazza of St. Peter's, in adjoining streets and on roof-tops and balconies, all waiting with a sense of excitement for the ceremony to begin and joining in the hymns and prayers broadcast through amplifiers by Vatican Radio. Looking down on the crowd from a window of the Papal apartments, were Assunta Goretti and her two daughters, one married and the other a nun. Her two sons, one of whom had arrived from the U.S.A. a month previously, occupied places of honour near the temporary Papal throne erected at the top of the steps of St. Peter's in between the incredibly huge pillars and up against the great bronze door.

A canonization is not only a deeply impressive religious ceremony because of the solemnity of the ritual and its spiritual significance, but it is, if the term may be allowed, something of a spectacle. Everything is arranged for effect. The whole brilliant display is intended to stir hearts in their profoundest depths as well as awaken the liveliest sentiments of faith, hope and charity. The Church in focusing attention on a new saint, points to a hero or a heroine who has climbed in one way or another the heights of sanctity and who beckons the faithful to follow.

At seven o'clock on that June evening Pope Pius XII, wearing a mitre and vested in a richly ornamented red cope, was borne in the sedia gestatoria through the crowds now densely packed. Accompanying him were the Cardinals, the members of the Papal Court, and about one hundred and fifty Bishops. From the moment the people caught sight of him until he had taken his place on the throne, there was unceasing applause, a multitudinous chorus of vivas.

The solemn ceremony then began. After a formal, reiterated request for Marietta's canonization, made by Cardinal Miscara, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the Pope knelt down and intoned the *Veni Creator* or hymn to the Holy Ghost, which was sung by the Sistine Choir. When the people joined in the singing it really seemed as if the Piazza had become a vast new basilica.

As the hymn came to an end there was a perceptible air of expectancy among the crowd, and people who had field-glasses turned them towards the Pope, for the great moment was at hand. When the Amen had been sung all who were taking an official part in the ceremony rose and stood with heads uncovered. The precious mitre was replaced on the Pope's head. Then he too stood, and exercising the plenitude of his power as the successor of St. Peter and Christ's Vicar on earth, made in solemn tones the following proclamation:

"In the name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith and increase of the Christian Religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by Our own authority, after mature deliberation and after having invoked the divine aid many times and sought the advice of Our Venerable Brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, of the Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops present in Rome, We decree and define that Blessed Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr, is a Saint, and We insert her name in the catalogue of the saints, ordaining that her memory is to be recalled with pious devotion every year by the Universal Church, on the day of her birth, that is, July 6th. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Though the proclamation was made in Latin, its purport and contents were probably known to pretty well everyone in that immense gathering to whom the Vatican amplifying system brought the Pope's voice. At all events, when the Pope ceased speaking and with great rapidity a veil was withdrawn to reveal over the bronze door and above the Papal throne, an enormous painting of Saint Maria, there was at once a tremendous outburst of cheering. There were tears of joy in many eyes and an uplifting of souls to God in praise and gratitude. Instinctively the gaze of many tens of thousands turned towards the room in the Papal apartments from the window of which Assunta Goretti had witnessed what it had never before been given to any mother to witness on earth. One wonders what were her thoughts and feelings!

But the ceremony was not yet finished. God had to be thanked publicly for giving another saint to His Church. The *Te Deum* was therefore sung by the Sistine Choir and immediately afterwards the Pope recited the prayer which will be henceforth said in the Mass of St. Maria. When it was ended the people were warned through the loudspeakers to remain silent while the Pope knelt, rightly the first to invoke in

private prayer the intercession of the new saint. When he rose to his feet again it was to address not only the vast multitude stretching out on all sides before him, but also through Vatican Radio an unseen audience in many parts of the world.

By a loving disposition of Divine Providence, he said, the supreme exaltation of this humble girl has been celebrated this evening with a solemnity without precedent and in a form until now unique in the history of the Church. It has been celebrated in the vastness and majesty of this mysterious place which has become for the time being a holy temple vaulted over by the firmament proclaiming the glory of God, and in the presence of a concourse of people greater than ever before seen at a canonization.

Why have you come in such numbers to witness the glorification of this martyr of purity? Why on reading or hearing an account of her short life, an account so similar to the Gospel narrative in its simplicity, in the colour of its content, in the starkness of the death scene, have you been moved to tears? Why has this girl conquered your hearts? Obviously there is in this world so apparently immersed in a sea of pleasure not only a select body of the faithful whose thoughts are habitually in Heaven, but also a multitude for whom the supernatural perfume of Christian purity has an irresistible fascination.

If it is true that in the martyrdom of Maria Goretti her purity shines out most prominently, it is likewise true that in this purity all the other Christian virtues triumph. Her martyrdom was a fundamental and significant affirmation of the soul's dominion over the body. In that act of supreme heroism altogether unforeseen there was made manifest her tender obedience to her parents, her self-denial in her daily hard work, her acceptance as part of God's providence the evangelical poverty in which her lot was cast, her love for the Catholic Faith which she regarded as a treasure and her desire to know more of it, a love that

was nourished by constant prayer, her ardent devotion to the Holy Eucharist, and finally her charity in pardoning her murderer, a charity symbolized by that wreath of wild flowers that adorned her veil on the day of her first Holy Communion.

Thus it is that this sacred ceremony has resulted in a spontaneous outburst of popular reverence for the virtue of purity. At the root of every martyrdom there is always a tragic contrast between good and evil. Behind Maria Goretti's martyrdom there was a scandal which seemed unheard of then. Today, largely because of the lack of opposition from good people, evil customs, propagated by books, magazines, theatre shows and radio as well as by the devotees of fashion, beaches, clubs and organizations, have found their way into the heart of society and into families, to the harm chiefly of young boys and girls, the natural guardians of virtue.

Oh, young boys and girls, you who are as dear as the pupil of an eye to Jesus Christ and to Us, are you determined with the help of God's grace to resist firmly any attempt made by others against your virtue of purity?

And you, oh fathers and mothers, in the presence of this multitude of people, before the image of this young girl who by her unsullied candour of soul has captured your hearts, in the presence of her mother who having educated her for martyrdom, kneels now with indescribable emotion to invoke her, are you ready to assume the solemn duty of keeping watch in so far as you are able, over your sons and daughters, in order to preserve them and defend them from the dangers that surround them? Are you ready to keep them always far from places that would destroy their piety and lead them towards moral perversion?

And now, all you who hear these words, raise up your hearts! Over the marshes and mud of this world there is always the beauty of heaven. It is the heaven that little Maria Goretti loved; the heaven she wanted

to reach by the only road that leads to it: religion, love of Christ, the heroic observance of His commandments.

Hail, O sweet and lovable Saint! O Martyr on earth and Angel in heaven! From thy throne of glory turn thy gracious gaze on all who love, venerate and exalt thee! On thy brow thou dost bear bright and shining the victorious Name of Christ; in thy virginal countenance can be seen the strength that proceeds from love, thy constancy and fidelity to thy divine Spouse! Thou art a spouse of blood and thus made to His image! To thee, now a powerful intercessor with the Lamb of God, we confide the faithful here present and all who are spiritually united to us! Admirers of thy heroism they ardently wish to be thy imitators in fervour of faith and in unshakeable moral purity. May fathers and mothers have recourse to thee in order that thou mayest assist them in their mission as educators! May youth be so protected by thee that it may proceed along the road of life in the serenity and joy that belongs to the pure in heart! Amen.

When the Pope ceased speaking there was a moment of breathless silence. It was broken by a thundrous outburst of cheering, a rising crescendo of vivas, mountainous waves of applause that rolled endlessly onward. The cheering seemed to grow wilder as the Pope passed again through the crowd on his way back into the Vatican. Only when he had disappeared from view did it subside.

Thus the day of Marietta's canonization came to an end. One by one the flood-lights were switched off, but it was a long time before all the people had dispersed and silence fell again on the darkened Piazza.

TRIDUUM IN HONOUR OF SAINT MARIA GORETTI

I

We adore Thee, O Eternal Father, source of every blessing, and we thank Thee for Thine infinite glory and goodness. And in particular we thank Thee for the glory Thou hast bestowed on Thy beloved Servant, Maria Goretti.

Thou didst direct her from infancy by Thy grace and blessings. Thou didst inspire her with a love of virtue, a hatred of sin and an ardent desire to love Thee above all things. Faithfully corresponding to Thy divine attractions, Saint Maria Goretti loved Thee as a devoted child and rather than fall into sin, gave in martyrdom the supreme proof of her love.

O Heavenly Father, grant that in imitation of her, we may love Thee with our whole hearts and above all things. May we employ our lives in fulfilling Thy holy Will and may we as loving children give Thee honour and glory.

And thou, O Blessed Martyr, intercede for us with the Eternal Father and obtain for us this great blessing. (Say one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)

II

We adore Thee, O Eternal Divine Son, Wisdom of the Father, and we thank Thee for having suffered and died for our Redemption. And in particular we thank Thee for the heroic example of virtue, the fruit of the same Redemption, which Thou hast set before our eyes in Thy beloved Servant, Maria Goretti.

Reared in the shadow of Thy Cross, educated in the school of sacrifice, she was drawn by Thee to Thy holy altar as a generous victim. Thou didst nourish her soul with the Holy Eucharist and instil into it the perfume of virginity. Thou didst give her a taste of Thy Sacred

Passion. Thus, Saint Maria Goretti loved the virtue of purity, loved Thy Sacred Passion, loved the most holy Virgin Mary, and in order to preserve these loves unsullied did not hesitate to shed her blood in painful martyrdom.

O Jesus, glorious King of Martyrs and Crown of Virgins, grant to us similar effects of Thy Redemption. Make us strong against the seductions of the world by the thought of Thy Passion, by the grace of the Eucharist and by devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

And thou, O Blessed Martyr, obtain these favours for us from Jesus, and draw us to Him by the force of thy holy example. (Say one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory be to the Father.)

III

We adore Thee, O Eternal Divine Spirit, Love of the Father and the Son, and we thank Thee for the gifts Thou dost bestow on the souls of the just. And in particular we thank Thee for the grace and sanctity Thou didst infuse into the soul of Thy beloved Servant, Maria Goretti.

Thou didst endow the soul of this child with such prudence and heavenly wisdom that she held the things of the world in little esteem and cherished piety and the fear of God.

Thou didst give her the strength of martyrs and the sacred flame of love. Thou didst make her into a new St. Agnes.

O Holy Divine Spirit, grant through the love which Thy Servant, Maria Goretti, had for Thee, that we also may dispose our souls for the reception of Thy gifts, and that having welcomed them, we may appreciate them at their true worth and make them fruitful in our loves.

And thou, O Blessed Martyr, spur us on by thy example and help us by thy intercession, that the grace of God may not come into our souls in vain, but that

it may produce, as it produced in thee, fruits of sanctification here on earth and treasures of glory in Heaven. Amen. (Say one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)

PRAYER TO SAINT MARIA GORETTI

O Saint Maria Goretti who, strengthened by Divine grace, did not hesitate, though only twelve years of age, to shed thy blood and sacrifice thy life, rather than commit sin, turn thy eyes compassionately towards the multitude of men and women who are wandering far from the path of virtue. Teach us all, but especially the youth of today, that the love and service of God is to be preferred before all else. Obtain for us a true horror of sin, so that keeping it always far from us, we may be able to live piously here on earth and enjoy eternal glory in Heaven. Amen.

Nihil Obstat:

W. M. COLLINS,
Censor Dioc.

Imprimatur:

✠ D. MANNIX,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.