

José María Javierre

**REPORT AND EUOLOGY
TO A NUN**



A Beautiful thing about the Hospital "Our Lady of Grace" with almost five thousand patients inside it. Half of which were mental patients. They were so well-cared for that "Our Lady of Grace" reached the fame among the doctors of the world for the therapeutic methods applied on the mental patients.

On the 3rd of August for 24 hours day and night unceasingly, the guns of Verdier smashed the Hospital of Zaragoza.

In the melée the people were trying to help the patients out while those shells were falling and coming down through the ceiling. A nun, Sr. Maria who presided over the 21 Sisters of Charity in-charge of the Hospital, directed this saving operation. It was in full swing when all of a sudden the bombs fell on the wards of the mental patients. They felt it was the end of the world and fled among the rubble.

JOSE MARIA JAVIERRE

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WITNESS OF THE FAITH

20

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REPORT AND ENLIGHTENMENT
TO A NEW

WITHDRAWN

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1

A NUN WHAT A NUN !

Villafranca del Penedés, Zaragoza
1781-1853



With his famous painting of the shootings of the 2nd of May, Goya described the horrors of war.

Spring of 1808. Napoleon Bonaparte, fury of war, already Lord of Europe, dreams of invading England. To carry out his strategy he needs to win two battles, one military and the other diplomatic, the two being inter-related. He has to conquer Portugal, territory favourable to the British, one which they utilize as a hornet's nest pricking and spurring the flanks of our continent. And if Portugal has to be taken, it will be necessary "to pass through Spain", ally with Spain... or even better, conquer it too, incorporate Spain into his Empire as the diamond in his Imperial crown.

Spain is governed by a weak King, married to a frivolous Queen; she is smitten with love for a handsome young man who performs the duties of favourite of the King and lover of the Queen. His name is Manuel Godoy, the people detest him. Godoy is detested by the people and the "progressive" courtesans who conspire to place the Crown prince on the throne. The internal quarrels between the King, Carlos IV, the Queen, Maria Luisa, the Prince, Fernando, stoked by the contriving of the King's favourite Godoy, suggest to Napoleon that the Spanish will leap with joy when the Emperor receives them as his subjects: the conquest of Spain will be a triumphal walk for the Imperial troops.

But after the ingenuous proclamation by a Mayor of a town on the second of May Spain was aroused against the soldiers of the Emperor: Napoleon would have to win Spain inch by inch, hamlet after hamlet, the cities, one by one.

At the beginning of summer it was the turn of Zaragoza.

On the 15th of June the French batallions of General Lefebvre blockaded the city.

The "sieges" of Zaragoza had begun.

The people of Aragon tolerated the French assault, because of course, we the people of our land are good, and at that time we still used corsets on our waists and the "cachirulo" (lace mantilla) on the "tied little head". You have heard the anecdote of the simpleton who was riding his donkey between the railway lines; he hears the whistle of the engine that's coming; and he comments craftily: "Well, if you don't get out of my way..."

From that time when we held up like a rampart wall before the cannons of General Lefebvre, the French speak ill of us, they murmur that we are intransigent, hardheaded, obstinate; "unpleasant" is what an old traveller writer calls us, it will be a nuisance: "we have our hard heads", he says, and a heart "like the rocks of the Pyrenees themselves". Who knows, and ill did befall to the said Lefebvre, who could not contend against our people. Even the lovely young Agustina took hold of the fuse when she saw the dead artillery men. For certain, she was born a Catalan; but at the City Gate, so well rooted was she, that we made her "one of our own land", baptising her with the famous title, "Augustina of Aragon".

Well, I who have travelled around half the world and a part of the other half, can testify and I do testify to the good, excellent human quality of the Aragonese, uncouth at first impression, but more tender and loving than can ever be imagined.

What happened is that Napoleon sent us his men in a warlike fashion, to take Zaragoza by force, with the idea of removing the King of Spain and gifting the throne to Pepe Botella; who knows what ideas they had, maybe even to close the temple of Our Virgin of Pilar; they came with the airs of Revolution and it was still very unclear how a democracy would function.

The result was, Lefebvre bombed; but he couldn't get the better of us. Napoleon decided to change the General, withdrew

Lefebvre and sent Verdier: with more soldiers, more horses and more cannons.

Verdier was evil, he decided to demoralize the Zaragozaan personnel with a perverse idea: he lined up his batteries against the Hospital which occupied the very centre of Zaragoza.

A beautiful Hospital, "Nuestra Señora de Gracia", with almost a thousand patients in it; of which about fifty were mentally ill patients who were so well looked after that "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" acquired fame among the doctors of the world for the therapy applied to the demented.

In the twenty-four hours of the third of August, night and day, without respite, the cannons of Verdier pulverised the Hospital of Zaragoza.

There was pandemonium, with people helping to remove the patients while shells fell and the roofs came down. This operation of salvation was directed by a nun named Sister Maria, who presided over the twenty-one Sisters of Charity in charge of the Hospital.

They were in the midst of complete chaos, when suddenly bombs fell on the wards of the sector of the demented; it seemed the end of the world to the mentally ill, and they ran out fleeing through the debris.

No one was able to control them; they ran along the streets, unfortunately straight towards the line of fire and crossed the first line of the French army. The soldiers of Verdier thought they were seeing visions....

.... because behind the band of mentally ill were half a dozen anxious nuns: Sister Maria and several of her companions tried to reach the patients, collect them together, pacify them - gunmen of both sides were not going to fire against them.

Mentally ill patients and Nuns were led to the control post in General Verdier's camp; he could hardly believe what he was seeing...

This Sister Maria is the Nun whose eulogy is being related in this report of mine.



2

THE DAUGHTER OF THE MILLER

Vilafranca del Penedés
1781



*Today the house where Maria Rafols was born looks like this:
the old mill is converted into an ingenious museum with
remembrances of the period.*

The little village is called Santa Margarita, and among its two hundred inhabitants circulates this great Autumn news; The young man Cristóbal is getting married, the son of the Millers of Abadal.

- Cristóbal from the Mill?
- Finally the time has come.
- Who is he marrying?
- Margarita of the Bruna family.

Today, Summer of 1994, after more than two hundred years, I come to investigate the traces of that marriage: and, blessed be God, how things have changed!

The little town that was Santa Margarita continues naturally, on the flanks of Villafranca, heart of the Penedés. But everything has been changed, even its name, later I will tell you why. Today Santa Margarita is also called Monjos: those who are not Catalans pronounce it as Monchos and give it an approximate sound.

Of the Abadal Mill, not a trace!

The head of the family was José Rafols, who emigrated here from the High Penedés; he came here looking for a bride and looking for work. He found both. For his bride, the young girl Cecilia, of the Farrán family; work, well, at the best, maybe a daily labourer of his parents-in-law; but here he remained. The first child born to José and Cecilia was the baby Cristóbal, who as a young man received an offer that made his emigrant father very happy: He was offered no less than taking charge of the Abadal Mill. Delighted, the father José and the son Cristóbal accepted it: Cristóbal Rafols Farrán entered now to form part of the Millers of the Penedés, a distinguished office and quite

difficult. Once installed in his Mill, Cristóbal ground grain and begot children, of his wife Madrona Cunillera, such a queer name "Madróna", this is the way it is found written in Book II of the Parish Baptisms of Santa Margarita. The seventh of these children was given the name of his father, he was called Cristóbal Rafols Cunillera, born at the Mill on the 25th of February 1743. This Cristóbal interests us, because it is just "the young Cristóbal of the Abadal Mills" who, this Autumn of 1771, has decided, finally, to get married: "finally"; he has already completed 28 years and in these lands, a young man who crosses the line of thirty, will remain always, a bachelor.

Let me tell you in advance, that "this young man Cristóbal" will be the father of our nun María Rafols.

The son Cristóbal was in no hurry to marry as long as his father Cristóbal was alive. Those at the Abadal mill formed a Christian family and they were happy; misfortunes have not yet arrived to make the mill change its name - when the farmhands call it "the mill of the bad death". Now, during the years at the middle of the century, the Rafols of the mill are one of the typical rural homes of our country side, simple and honest people, tenaciously tied down to their work and to their traditions. The mill confers on them a certain social category, they cultivate some fields and besides they crush the grain of the farmhands of the whole neighborhood: this service relates the Rafols to every home of the town. The Parish priests of Santa Margarita have gone through the books of the archives page by page to find out the religious conduct of the family: they confirmed that the events in the family were accompanied step by step by the opportune sacramental ritual - baptism, confirmation, marriages, burials. The death certificates underlined a significant presence; dominican and franciscan friars assisted the dying in the home of the Rafols in their last hours. Why the friars? The parish of Santa Margarita cultivated the devotion of the faithful to the Eucharist, associating them with the celebrated

Cofradia (Guild) of the Minerva. Besides the Minerva, the farmhands of the neighbourhood gave their name to other cofradias: that of the franciscan friars established in the convent of Villafranca, and that of The Most Holy Rosary sustained by the dominican friars of the convent of Saint Dominic.

The convent of the Franciscans was in Villfranca; that of the Dominicans was in open countryside, on the outskirts of Santa Margarita, just a stone's throw away from the "Mill of Abadal"; hence, the home of the Rafols can be described, as the Parish archive papers say, "in the shadow of the convent". The Dominicans, besides the Church and Cofradia, had a primary school for the boys and girls of the area.

This Dominican convent carries on its shoulders a distinguished history: it was built by the friars on the plot of land of the medieval house of the Penyaforçs, the nest in which Raimundo de Peñafort came into this world, and whose name placed Villafranca del Penedès at the head of the list of its distinguished sons. Reason enough, as San Raimundo de Peñafort occupies a privileged place among the jurists and among the Saints of all times. Born in this ambit, six leagues away from Villafranca, in the middle of the second decade of the XIIth century, we find him studying law at the famous University of Bologna: the Rectors of the University admired his talent so much that he was retained as Professor for several years. They forced him to write a treatise of law, in the preface of which Raimundo wrote these admirable lines: "Reader, be benevolent; consider my intention and do not fight me with acrimony. Attribute the useful things to God; if you find something useless, it will be because I have made a mistake or because you do not understand me... Correct me with courtesy". What a person this compatriot of María Rafols was when he was young. Older, he improved. He even reached levels of fantasy. Bishop Berenguer of Barcelona managed to get him there and named him canon of the Cathedral. He lasted a very short time in the town council, as Raimundo was taken up with Domingo de Guzmán whom he had met in Bologna, and who became a dominican friar. Popes and Kings had him as their advisor; Pope Gregory IX tied him up to Rome naming him his Chaplain

and "penitentiary". Raimundo corresponded by compiling his famous "decrees", the judicial body of the Church: to reward his work the Pope proclaimed him Archbishop of Tarragona. Raimundo using bad health as the excuse, renounced it; and he came to Barcelona. Those who sought favours in Rome commented, surprised: "This man will go as he came, as poor and as modest as when he arrived; he will take with him neither gold nor dignities nor honours." What he could not avoid was being elected "General" of the Order by his brother dominican friars. Kings, prelates, great lords dispensed admiration and friendship on him, which he used in favour of the needy, of the missions, of culture. On his petition he elaborated the theological book of Thomas of Aquinas that I love so much, the "Summa contra gentes". Raimundo died in Barcelona on the day of the Three Kings in 1725, and to give some names, I will note that at his funeral James I of Aragon and Alfonso X of Castille for example, assisted....

What a compatriot María Rafols had.

Thanks to compatriot San Raimundo, Cristóbal, the "young marriageable man" of the "Abadal Mill" learnt his first alphabets in the little school of the convent of the Dominicans: to read, write, the catechism, the Commandments of God and of the Church. The Parish priests confirmed that Cristóbal "helped his father and his brothers in the work of the mill; later he helped the Dominicans of the convent and the priest in the Parish". He was a good lad.

But he wouldn't get married, he lived without any hurry.

He took a forced decision on the death of his father.

In the Spring of 1770, the old miller, Cristobal Senior died. Cristóbal Junior took the decision: to look for a bride and get married.

The government of the mill and heading the family corresponded to his elder brother Domingo. Of the nine children begotten by Cristobal Senior, two girls died first, Madrona and Lucía; they died at three and two years respectively. Domingo

was the eldest of the males. Cristóbal was the last. Thus the primogeniture corresponded to Domingo, who even while the father was alive was considered as the "inheritor" in the house; he brought his wife and he governed the mill. On the death of his father, Domingo already had six children. The little ones grew up and the family space got cramped, Cristóbal understood that he would have to leave.

He chose a bride... nearby. A young girl from Monjos, Margarita, of twenty years. Monjos was only a row of houses hardly ten minutes away from the Abadal Mill. The little village settlement owed its name to the Cistercian monks of the Monastery of Santes Creus, who because of those complications of medieval bequests had received the donation of an estate near the little River Foix: the monks had traditionally installed an administrator or in-charge, a job that was discharged from 1770 onwards, by Juan Bruna, who was known by the farm hands by the nick-name "Inn-keeper of the Monks", servant of the monks; his house, the village settlement, "Inn of the Monks". Margarita, the daughter born to Juan Bruna and his wife Rosa is the one whom Cristóbal Rafols, the young man of twenty-eight years loves: He wants to marry her. Soon, next year. The coming marriage brightened the monotonous conversations of Santa Margarita:

- Finally Cristóbal of the Abadal Mill is getting married.
- To whom?
- To Margarita Bruna, the daughter of the "Innkeeper of the Monks".

The wedding was celebrated, "having read out the customary wedding banns at the Morning Mass on three festive days and at the High Mass", on the 24th of November 1771.

Cristóbal and Margarita will be the parents of our nun María.

And the village settlement Monjos with the passing of time, "will devour" the municipality of Santa Margarita, supplanting its name: Today the people call it Monjos, and Monjos is what

its train station on the Barcelona-Tarragona line is called. Looking at it correctly, maybe the usurping has been legitimate, as the old documents indicate that within the territory donated to the Santes Creus Monks the Abadal Mill was included, and probably the village settlement of Santa Margarita.

Thus let us give the friars what belongs to them: the name of the Municipality.

Recently married, Cristóbal had no house to offer his wife Margarita. So they installed themselves in the house of the wife, the Bruna family home, in the village settlement of Monjos. From there Cristóbal could continue working at the Abadal Mill under his brother Domingo.

Very soon they had a pleasant surprise. The Alcover family, rich people from Villafranca, owners of lands in the countryside of the Penedés and of houses in Villafranca, possessed the mill of En Rovira, right on the flanks of the city, just one kilometre away: Their miller had died and they needed to find a trustworthy substitute urgently. They thought of choosing him from among the Rafols of the Abadal Mill, whose fame of being hardworking and honest was recognised in the whole area.

Thus Cristóbal Rafols, just two years after his marriage, was at the head of the "Mill of En Rovira". He could not have dreamed of a better gift for his Margarita than accommodate her in the new house; they felt they were living a fairy tale.

Here is where our nun María will be born; I have come here to breathe its air.

The daughters of Mother Rafols, as can be expected, preserve the house as though it were one of those cases or jewellery boxes where women keep family jewels from generation to generation.

The house, typical of the Catalan country houses, overlooks a small territory of orchards irrigated by the little River Milió,

miniscule affluent of the River Doix: the stream that moved the mill originated from this rivulet.

Today the house has an immaculate aspect, converted into a Museum, with its fence and its pots, the devout vaulted niche on its facade. The three floors of the building correspond to the inevitable distribution imposed by the mill. Right down, on the ground floor the gigantic grindstone with its harnesses, the grain deposit, a stable joined to it and the cellar. The "noble" floor, the main floor, with its five rooms destined for the family living place of the Miller: a central room with a window on the facade; two huge bedrooms, another small one; the kitchen, which also serves as the dining room. Upstairs, the loft: the garret and the storerooms, with space to place children's beds if they had a large family.

Cristóbal and Margarita lived here happy, there is no doubt about that: how I would have loved to have met them, surely their skin would have that strange tone characteristic of those persons who live at the edge of the stones of a mill, colour of wholemeal bread and of bran. Happy, they ground grain, they cultivated their kitchen garden, they reached Villafranca for Mass on Sundays, during the week they went to the market... and they begot children: they were born by the dozen ... and unfortunately, they died by the dozen.

The fields of the Penedés, clayey, sandy, calcareous soil, during this second half of the XVIIIth century have no idea about the fortune the vineyards are soon to bring them. Villafranca presides over extense plains where the peasants cultivate cereals, almonds, fruit, vegetables and legumes. Villafranca then and now presents the picture of a city conscious of its category, covering the western side of the province of Barcelona in the limits of Tarragona itself, with Igualada above, Villanueva and Geltrú below. The chronicles narrate that Villafranca already had its stage of splendour when at the very beginning of the XIIIth century James I celebrated Court here with a wonderful result for the future of Cataluña: the King conceded rights and exemptions

to the municipalities. Its long history includes glorious episodes; and such lamentable misfortunes like those occasioned by the revengeful spirit of Juan II, who on withdrawing from the siege of Barcelona, beheaded four hundred people of Villafranca. During the wars against Felipe IV, even during the Succession, Villafranca fulfilled its Catalan commitment. During these years hinging between the XVIII and XIXth century, while our nun Maria is carrying out memorable feats before the armies of Napoleon, Villafranca will upset the vanguard of General Chabrán relentlessly pursuing the column that goes from Tarragona towards Barcelona. The city, gifted with a notable artistic civil and Christian patrimony, presented a hardworking, energetic aspect, capable of starting industrial initiatives of the family type, that make agrarian products disappear: breeding of cattle, pigs, birds, power saws for wood, distilleries for liquor, ceramic for construction, starch, horns, bell foundries, cement, tanning, chocolate, knitted goods, soap, syrups, pasta for soup, printing; not counting of course all the flour activities of the mills; don't you think the people of Villafranca had creative desires to carry forward the progress of their land? The motor for the economic development of the Penedés was the "societies", "centres" and "syndicates" that opened commercial relations with other regions of Spain and foreign countries: thanks to them, Villafranca introduces, through our Nun Maria, the cultivation of potato in this period, something that will obtain a sensational boom during the next French invasion. In the middle of the XIXth century, the woods of the region give way to the vineyards, offering a world horizon for the wines of Penedés. It has been a kind of commercial miracle.

Today I have had the good fortune to visit Villafranca on a feast day: it celebrates the memory of the martyr St. Felix, whose relics arrived about three centuries ago: Felix displaced Raimundo from the being the patron, leaving the Dominican Saint as "co-patron". All the people have very happy faces.

The marriage of the young millers Cristóbal Rafols-Margarita Bruna put into the world a first child whom they baptized Juan and who grew up robust. He was followed by

Cristóbal: before completing two years, he died. Immediately after came a girl, María Margarita: she lasted two months, from the end of February to the end of April 1776. The fourth, Margarita Paula, reached a mature age. But the fifth, "baptised urgently", without a name, was buried the day after she was born... Five more children followed: two will die early.

Why?

The health condition of the Penedés, like that of other regions of Spain, was in those years terribly deficient. Just like wide areas of the Basque country suffered the terrible plague of tubercolosis, according to scientists, favoured by contamination of cow's milk, Penedés suffered the malaria epidemic: the anopheles mosquito lorded it over the territory that was humid, had an abundance of puddles, wells, small extensions of stagnant water, which was a paradise for anophelic breeding grounds. The terrible plasmodium falciparum mosquito camped there comfortably, putting into their homes the malign fever with intermittent fevers that quickly weakened the patient; and at that time, with no efficient chemioprophylaxis, finished them off. The anopheles reduced by half the life of old persons; among the children it caused destruction.

The sixth daughter was born in the mill of En Rovira on the 5th of November 1781. Cristóbal and Margarita had been married for ten years. They had given birth to five children; only two, the son Juan and the daughter Margarita María, still live. So the new born occupies the third place among the children of the mill. Three more girls and a boy are still to come.

She was baptised in the Parish of Santa María of Vilafranca two days after she was born; the "vicar" was Don Miguel.

The documents of the archive call the Parish priest the "Vicar": this too points to the historical character of the city. The "Parish Priest" of Vilafranca, the golden prestige of the centuries, was linked to the Cathedral of Barcelona, assigning him a position

among the canons with the "honour" of "Archdeacon of the Penedés": he used to reside as canon in Barcelona and governed the parish through a "vicar", who in reality exercised the functions of Parish Priest of Vilafranca. I have noted the "pious" description of the matter. The reality is that "someone", King, Archbishop, Count, "someone" decided that the Parish of Vilafranca gave prestige and money to its titular: "the charge" "was presented" to a canon of Barcelona, who leaving the priestly task to a "vicar", will flaunt the beautiful title "Archdeacon of the Penedés"... and will receive "emoluments", in cash or kind. Things of the past!

The baby girl María was baptised, and was given the complete name of María Josefa Rosa. Grateful to the family who owned the mill, Cristóbal Rafols invited Juan Pablo Alcover, son of the owners, to be the godfather. As godmother, Margarita Bruna chose her sister María.

A memorial stone in the parish of Vilafranca commemorates the Baptism of María Rafols, "lady distinguished in alleviating human miseries": alleviating human miseries will constitute the work of this girl, who "armed with charity" will confront fearlessly "the warlike furor of those who laid siege to Zaragoza". She will turn out brave, this little girl! Heroic! Who would say so, looking at her so tiny and cute on the illustrious baptismal font of Santa María.

Illustrious baptismal font that christianised among the thousands and thousands of Vilafranquinos, a batch of "famous sons", whose portraits honour the Gallery of the Consistorial Hall of Vilafranca. The litany opens with the titan Raimundo de Peñafort, and among military personnel, professors, doctors, abbots, writers, poets and bishops, I see our nun, Sister María....

What turns life takes! Today Vilafranca de Penedés, city worthy of praise and respect for so many motives, is known by the citizens of the planet at the end of the twentieth century because of its treasures: the wine of Penedés... and a Nun, daughter of the miller Cristóbal.



3

AN INFANCY BETWEEN JOYS AND SHADOWS

Villafranca, Santa Margarita, la Bleda
1781 - 1798



This is the "almost official protrait" as idealised by the daughters of the Mother María Rafols, based on the traditions preserved in the Congregation.

The archives where thousands of bundles of historical papers referring to the period lie, have committed a grave injustice towards Margarita Bruna, wife of Cristóbal Rafols: They hardly preserve any reference related to her, what she was like, what skills she had looking after her husband and her children, how much care and love she dedicated to them. It's a real pity! If the "Lord Vicar" or the dominican friars of Santa Margarita had guessed the future, what data we would have had today with the most detailed description of family life at the mill of En Rovira! The angels, this is what I say, if only they had known in advance the path foreseen in the plans of Providence for that miniscule little personage baptised with three names, María Josefa Rosa. I suspect that the Lord God would reveal in advance, maybe at least just to the Guardian Angel, as soon as the child assigned to its care is born, the future route of the little one, above all if that little bundle of white clothes presented at the baptismal font was to turn out to be a personage who would carry out memorable feats. I don't know, but I think if the Guardian Angel knew it, he could take extra good care. Of course, every one of us is important and valuable in the presence of God; but just imagine, if the Angel Guardian was ignorant of the number of kilometers he would have to pedal when he was older, and he was careless and let a little boy named Miguel Indurain break a leg looking for nests on the trees of his village: lame strides would be his for his whole life; would he have won the Tour of France four times in a row, a mission that the celestial sports department had assigned to him?

Well, ignorant or knowledgeable, the case is that no angel informed any of the dwellers of the field of Penedés about the feats foreseen for the little girl María Rafols. As a consequence,

no one took the trouble of leaving the qualities of her mother written down for us.

Neither do I think this angelic lack of care is unusual; let me share something confidential with you. A few years ago I started composing a "critical biography of the Virgin Mary", a little book in which I want to put together and analyse with great detail the precise data that we know for certain about the life of Our Lady. Limited undoubtedly, even though splendid and fraught with suggestions: will you permit me to comment "on what we know with accuracy" of the Virgin Mary and "what we would like to know" even though we don't exactly know it. The first surprise lies in the fact of the total absence of historic indications regarding the parents of the Virgin, whom we tenderly venerate with the names of Joaquim and Anne invented by tradition. They were silent parents of a discreet enigmatic child. Only once, in the fields of Bethlehem, did the angels bustle with activity about Mary, but it was because of The Child "who you will find in a stable, go there and adore Him". About Joaquim and Anne, absolute silence, not a single trace to decide archaeologically if they were born and lived in Jerusalem, in Nazareth or in Seforis, a place that I think "is the most possible". Not to say probable: Seforis, the dazzling city constructed by the Romans to be the capital of Galilee, seven kilometers to the North of Nazareth, on the outskirts of which "Joaquim" grazed a flock, maybe cultivated a vegetable garden, like the majority of his countrymen did. Who knows; the angels didn't say a thing, they are dumb about it.

About Margarita Bruna, the wife of Cristóbal Rafols, hardly any strands remain that permit us to reach the skein bundle of an honest, Christian peasant woman, consumed with the loving care of her husband and children. She was saved no pain, as usually happens with mothers who give birth to many children; we see her a widow while still very young and loaded with children. In Villafranca she was called "the Lady Miller of En Rovira".

After ten years at the mill, Margarita's name was changed. More correctly, the mill was changed: she went on to be called "the Lady Miller of Mascaró".

Why did Cristóbal Rafols change the mill?

What happened?

We do not know the exact motives. I think some misgivings with the Alcover family, the owners of the En Rovira Mill is unlikely: rather, the relationship seems affectionate; this is confirmed with the presence of Juan Alcover as the godfather of the little girl at her Baptism two years earlier.

Maria completes two when they change residence; in May 1783 a new little sister is born, baptised Rosa Lucía "at the Parish of Our Lady at La Bleda", a small village of fifty inhabitants three kilometers away from Villafranca and within the municipal limit of Santa Margarita. The little girl Rosa died three months after birth. The La Bleda parish documents where the arrival and departure of Rosa Lucia is related, define her father Cristóbal thus: "Miller of the Mill of Mascaró". That's right, La Bleda had its "Mascaró Mill", called so perhaps by its proprietors.

The transfer of the miller Cristóbal of "En Rovira", to the outskirts of Villafranca, to "Mascaró", the tiny village of La Bleda, could be due to an advantageous economic offer or the search for less contaminated land: but of the three children that would be born to him here, the first, Rosa Lucía, died at just three months...

During the three years they stayed at La Bleda, the Rafols enriched their home with two baby girls: Josefa and Antonia. They served as precious little living toys for María: when Josefa was born, María was four years old; she was six when Antonia arrived. At the Mascaró Mill is where Maria will grow from the time she is two till she is twelve.

They lived in a house that was the twin of the "En Rovira Mill", organized on the same lines as all the mills of the territory; the ground floor was destined to the grindstones and the granaries, with an adjoining barn; the upper floor was their living quarters.

A detail preserved in the first tradition of the peasant farmers is curious; this is when the feats of María Rafols began to be known; of course she wasn't there: the family of Cristóbal and Margarita left a remembrance of good people, "accustomed to take the poor in to their barn, well, charity was proverbial in that blessed family".

We can well see that the mother, Margarita, did not give her children a bad "schooling".

She, Margarita, became their teacher: La Bleda, very tiny village that it was, did not have a school. In any case, the good literary formation that we will later check out in María Rafols could have its support base in these ten years at La Bleda, not only in the teachings of her mother; the Parish priest taught the children Catechism on Sundays, preparing them according to custom, for their Confirmation and First Communion: there is nothing that prevents us from suspecting that through the week he would also teach them the alphabet. On the other hand, the excellent school of the Dominicans of Santa Margarita was at a prudent distance away, easy to travel for the lads during the good months of the year.

Closing these pictures of the existential trajectory of Mother Rafols, let me tell you about the long and conscientious investigative work done by José Ignacio Tellechea and Rosario Aznar, tracing very closely the footsteps of our Nun, ready to enquire into any lead, however tiny and insignificant it may seem. Piece by piece, they have put together an impressive documental collection.

But dry lagoons have been still left, deprived of any real information. I have smiled trying to guess that my friend José Ignacio's patience failed him totally because of these infantile years of María Rafols. Certainly children, even though as adults reach distinction, as children they often offer scanty differential profiles. It's better this way definitely; they avoid appearing as

affected children, overdressed, "la-di-dah" creatures; let me write this word even though it will not figure in the dictionary of the Academy. The little girl María lived a normal infancy, thank God. Without drawing attention to herself with visible premature signs of sanctity. Her Guardian Angel, was absolutely quiet. When the story of her feats reached Villafranca, her contemporaries had already disappeared. All those who declared to contribute information about the Rafols family tried to remember "that they had heard about what that little girl used to do"... I am not saying that they "invented"; however, the result was that they contributed generic phrases and some episodes of very doubtful authenticity.

My friend José Ignacio, fed up of delving into these first years of María Rafols without obtaining a harvest, allowed himself to be drawn by fatigue and accepted as official, the declaration of a lawyer of Villafranca who in 1926, 150 years after the infancy of our little girl, collects "references of the Alcover family", of the owners of the En Rovira Mill, "who had totally disappeared because they were dead". The testimonial contribution of the lawyer, Santiago Abella, was the inevitable, about a little girl who in 1926 was already taken to be a Saint:

"In the little girl María Rafols virtue was anticipated as a matter of course".

And the lawyer, Sir, is so satisfied with himself.

He continues:

- As a very little girl, in the harsh nights of winter, she used to sleep near the fireplace while her mother prepared the dinner. But she never wanted to go on to the bed. There, daily, without fail, as soon as the Father came home after his day's work, they prayed the Rosary, and the tender creature waited for this moment: as soon as her father entered she got up happy and prayed the Rosary with great fervour...".

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He is in a time warp, our lawyer:

- She had a naturally sweet temperament, she was esteemed and admired by all. Unlike other little girls of her age, she did not care for vanities, nor for toys, and only went with her mother; she surprised everyone with her air of sanctity. To her pilgrim beauty was added the most valuable beauty of the soul...

You are overdoing it, my dear Santiago. What I cannot forgive you for, is that you are converting María into an abnormal little girl for us, a maid wrapped in the silks and velvet of an oriental palace. She was the daughter of peasant farmers, her father was a miller; and she was brought up breathing the air of the countryside with the wonderful smell of ground wheat. As the icing on the cake of his baroque work, the lawyer makes use of a couple of episodes which all through my life which has been spent studying biographies of saints, modern and old, I have seen repeated a hundred times: That "on seeing a beggar pass, she ran into the house towards her mother to ask for something to give as alms"; that one day "she heard a shepherd blaspheme and she cried bitterly and long"; that one year during a large attendance at an acrobatic performance at the circus "there was a very intense hailstone storm in the municipal limits, and only the field of the En Rovira Mill was saved from that pernicious phenomena"... Let's look at it clearly, the lawyer Sir did not literally say that the little Rafols girl was the one responsible for the mill not getting the hailstones, but the intention was clear.

I meditate on the declaration of the lawyer Abella, the most likely I think, would be the piety of the little girl towards the poor: From the Archivist Altisent comes the news of the barn - "pallera" in Catalan - adjoining the Mascaró Mill, where the Rafols took in the poor of the road. This archivist condenses his investigations with one sentence that I see as prudent, and reasonably founded:

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- There, in the Mascaró Mill of Bleda, in that unknown little corner, María Rafols was impregnating herself with the love of God, through Divine Grace, and the thorough Christian education that she received from her parents.

Come on, the little girl María grew up like did Jesus of Nazareth. Who of course has been painted to us by the apocryphal gospels as carrying out prodigies much before his childhood companions: for example, he made clay birds and made them fly. Let's be fair: Mr. Lawyer Abella did not dare to go so far with our little María...

At the end of May 1785 it was a big feast for Villafranca and its surroundings: the Bishop of Barcelona Don Gabino came on a pastoral visit and confirmed the children of the area. The Parish collected about forty little girls of the town, with some from Santa Margarita and la Bleda, at the convent of the calced Carmelites. The Rafols family contributed three girls: Margarita who was seven years old, Maria who would soon be four and Josefa who was just two months old. It was the custom as the Bishop might not come back for Confirmation for a very long time, hence even little creatures with nappies were brought. It was also the custom to offer the Most Illustrious Lord a sumptuous meal; the dessert was "brazo de gitano" elaborated with dozens and dozens of eggs...

Till María was twelve years old, the miller Cristóbal governed the Mascaró Mill of la Bleda. In the Spring of 1793 he returned with his family to the village of his birth, Santa Margarita. There is no mention of the reason for the same. But we might take a clue from the fact that a few months after his return, in January 1794, Domingo Rafols, Cristóbal's elder brother dies. As the inheritor he had received the family leadership and with it, the control of the Abadal Mill. I suspect that Domingo had fallen ill and called his brother Cristóbal to take charge of the mill, "this mill" of Santa Margarita which was considered the true family den, and where the grandmother Madrona still lived.

When he returned to his village Cristóbal installed himself with his family in the house of his wife Margarita, the Bruna family home called "Hostal dels Monjos" ("Hostel of the Monks"): they occupy rooms adjoining the village settlement, known as "Quadra del monjos". The Bruna family, decimated little by little saw all its men die, one by one; first the brothers of Margarita, then Juan and Manuel; then their father; only women now lived in the "Hostal", the mother and the sisters of Margarita. The arrival of her daughter, her son-in-law and her grandchildren made grandmother Bruna very happy. Unfortunately this joy will be short-lived.

From the "Hostel of the Monks" Cristóbal goes back to his old work at the Abadal Mill, this time as the governor. Soon after Christmas a spiral of deaths fell on the family causing the surprise of the peasants of the surrounding areas, who from this unfortunate 1794 invented the sombre name for Abadal: "Mill of the Bad Death".

Five persons died within a few months. First the last son of Cristóbal and Margarita, the child baptised José; he didn't even complete half a year. For the little María the death of her little brother must have had a special impact, the earlier deaths occurred when she was too small; now she is twelve years old. Later not only her Uncle Domingo, who was her father Cristobal's brother, would die, but also his wife Rosa; within a space of just one week. After a month, the mother Madrona, as though she was just exhausted with so many sorrows. The worst happened in Spring: Cristóbal falls ill. Margarita looks after him with great love, terrified at the thought of herself a widow having to look after her children, five of them: the eldest, Juan, was already twenty-two years old; but four girls followed him, the eldest Margarita Paula who was sixteen, María who was twelve, Josefa was nine, Antonia was seven. She will be what the peasants call "a cuadro", ("a square") if her husband died.

He did die, at the beginning of Summer. Patient and having received all the Sacraments, Cristóbal left a memory of a good

Christian gentleman. The Parish Priest of Santa Margarita, and Friar Pablo, the Franciscan of Villafranca assisted him. "Cristóbal the Miller" had completed 51 years of his age.

Margarita remains in her Mother's house, four girls tied to her apron strings. I suppose the boy Juan works at the mill. Margarita ponders carefully: what should she do. Whether she should remarry looking for support in another husband. The girls are growing...

About María we know that she is growing into a tall, lanky, slim young girl. Even though the blessed malaria leaves traces on her health, she will never be robust.

And what path is left for the mother, the widow, Margarita Bruna? Widow at forty-four years.

For the moment she stayed with her son and the girls in her mother's home, the "Hostel of the Monks". Four years passed this way. During this time she gets used to the idea of getting married again. Effectively, on the 19th of February 1798, the widow Margarita Bruna contracts a second nuptials with the widower José Marcer, resident of the neighbouring Villanueva y Geltrú.

From this day on, the names of Margarita Bruna and her children disappear from the books of the parish of Santa Margarita; which indicates that they all changed residence to Villanueva y Geltrú, residence of the new spouse.

At the time of her mother's second marriage, María had completed seventeen years: From the time of the death of her father we guess she was hidden by a dense veil of mist.

She is in Barcelona.

Since when? For a long time? "Is she there", or does she go and come? To do... what?



4

THE BISHOP OF THE SICK

Barcelona
¿? - 1804



*Above, the travelling trunk utilised by the Sisters on their trip from Barcelona to Zaragoza.
Below, imaginative portrait of Father Juan Bonal.*



Around the time of the marriage of her mother Margarita to the widower Marcer, María Rafols, who had passed on from being a little girl to a young lady, “went to Barcelona”. Nobody has been able to fix exactly “when” or “how” even after turning upside down all the bundles hidden in the archives and libraries; why did she go?; that she went is certain: she was taken to a school, so evidently she went “to study”.

We enter a cloudy stage in the personal trajectory of María: till we find her a woman of twenty-three we can hardly find any information and suppositions like greyhounds closely follow her trail.

Let me remind you that we don't know too much about the life of Jesus either, during the stage of His silent life in Nazareth with Mary and Joseph: Nobody gave any importance to the son of a carpenter, who later became a carpenter himself, till he started preaching on the banks of the lake. Before María Rafols completed twenty-three years, she did not attract the interest of chroniclers towards her person: spying into her comings and goings from Villanueva to Villafranca, is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Who advised Margarita Bruna to send her daughter to a school in Barcelona? Was it the Parish Priest, or a friar from the Dominican convent who was a teacher in the little school in Santa Margarita? Was it a Franciscan friend of the family, or Father Pablo who gave the dying Cristóbal Rafols the Last Sacraments? Maybe it was José Marcer, Margarita's new husband, stepfather of María, maybe he saw her as smarter than the other children....

Someone paid for the trips, the clothes, the books, the school, who? Probably Margarita and her man: did José Marcer enjoy

a good position in Villanueva y Geltrú? I think that when Cristóbal Rafols died, Juan Pablo Alcover who was María's godfather, the son of those rich people who called the Rafols to take charge of the "En Rovira" mill was the one who came forward. Someone paid for the expenses at Barcelona, we don't know who.

Whoever it may be, he was right in choosing the school: the Order of Nuestra Señora, Enseñanza (Teaching); a most prestigious institution; and notable, as being cloistered religious, they received school girls within their monastery; they enjoyed a reputation of the highest quality. Founded by Juana Lestonac, their nuns were separated into two families, the Order of Nuestra Señora and the Compañía de María; around 1950 and at the urgent demand of Pius XII the two branches were fused into only one Institute. Both the branches had an excellent history as teachers and educators. What a pity, if I had had to live in Barcelona during the years of María Rafols, we would have had information about her "student stage": I have gone to and admired the schools of the Order of Nuestra Señora, Enseñanza.

How much time did she spend there, was it as a "boarder" in the school of the Enseñanza at Barcelona? How often did she "go down" to Villanueva y Geltrú to be with her mother? Did the Rafols or the Marcer family have relatives in the Catalan capital whose presence would serve as a support to the young María? All these are questions without answer. She would make friends, she would frequent the churches, she would go around in Barcelona... I confess to you that I am a journalist trying to be a biographer with a distance of two hundred years, and this dark tunnel of María Rafols is becoming painful, suffocating.

The darkness reaches right from the time the protagonist, that young girl was fourteen years, or was she sixteen years? Till she was twenty-three, already a young lady: of which it is known that she was slim and graceful, of good height, but of weak health.

We have seen her, rather, we have hardly seen her, we have guessed what she must have been like, through the dotted lines that separate the XVIII and the XIX centuries: Now, it is 1804, María Rafols is twenty-two years and about to complete twenty-three when she suddenly appears to us illuminated, on the scenario of public life. From now on we will know everything about her. Let us say "almost everything": we will follow her trajectory step by step.

From Summer to Christmas 1804 two things that give her existence, a turn around happens to María: I think there was some relationship, between the two.

The first happening, is that her mother dies in Villanueva y Geltrú. It was difficult to trace the date of death because of a bureaucratic transaction: The certificate figures in the Parish books with the name of Margarita incorporated to the surname of her husband Marcer, not to her own, Bruna; thus, the investigators were at their wit's end searching all the registers. Finally it appeared:

- On the 21st of June 1804, in the present parish of San Antonio Abad, of Villanueva y Geltrú, Bishopric of Barcelona, Margarita Marcer y Bruna 52 years of age, died, after having received the Holy Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Extreme Unction...

She died after becoming a widow twice, José Marcer preceeded her. Perhaps whatever Marcer possessed had been given to his children from his first marriage, to the "inheritor", I don't know; the thing is that Margarita did not have her own burial place: she was buried "in the new common grave of the parish"; the death certificate leaves no place for doubt: she was buried "with the solemnity of the poor class". That is, without solemnity. It adds "that there was no will made": for what? She had nothing to leave in inheritance.

Let us now illuminate the image of María Rafols in her new day to day life: let us dedicate one minute for a global reflection on the twenty-two years she had completed.

I only want to underline that the infancy, adolescence and early youth of María are not woven with threads of gold. Like most Spaniards of her age, she enjoyed a loving family atmosphere; and like the majority, in the bosom of the family she had to bear difficult moments of pain. Without need for long predication, the example of her parents has forged in her a reflected consciousness, furnished with fundamental virtues: fidelity, sacrifice, an attitude of service towards others. She has experienced poverty; she really breathed austerity; and she is well trained for small sacrifices. A simple hardworking young girl, with no double dealings, she left Penedés for Barcelona. Clean soul, clear eyes. Pious, well grounded in the Christian faith that passes on from grandparents to children, to grandchildren. She knows that in this world there are poor, poorer than her and her brothers and sisters: she has seen them some nights, taking shelter within the barn adjoining the Mascaró mill. The people of Villafranca whose testimony I look at with distrust because of the time that has passed, all insist: María as a little girl, besides being a precious little creature, gave signs of precocious, alert intelligence. Well, so the nuns of the school of Enseñanza at Barcelona received excellent material to form for their educative work.

And, they obtained excellent results: This we know thanks to the second happening that marks María in this year 1804, and places her in the scenario of public life.

A few lines above I suggested that María is embarking on a great personal adventure *just six months after her mother passed away*. This is a curious coincidence that makes one think: perhaps María resolved to take the decision "to become a nun" as soon as the tie that linked her to the land of her birth was not there any more, where her brothers and sisters, grown up already, followed each one his or her own path. The vocational proposition

must have matured much earlier; and when her mother passed away, she became as free as the birds.

There being no photo of hers, what a pity, I close my eyes and try "to invent for myself" imaginatively how this girl would be seen in Barcelona or in Villanueva by those who knew her when she was twenty-two years old. I must confess to you that due to the scarce data available of her infancy, and of the sketch that you will see, collected between 1804 and 1815, my fantasy elaborates a gracious picture of a lovely, attractive young girl. It is said that as a child she was very, very pretty. Well, as she grew up, I see her prudent, demure, but a jewel. That is how I see her, a gem.

Our simple people usually say "question of luck", for the Greeks it was *destiny*; for the Arabs *fatality*. In Christian language we have a word that introduces "some" presence of God in the weft of our lives: *Providence*. After long years of weaving and un-weaving friendships around the planet, I have come to the conviction that the significant encounters of our trajectories is prefixed on route pages that the angels call providential.

What I want to say is that María Rafols crossed paths with Juan Bonal "because it was so written", it had to happen. And it did happen. This was the second event of 1804, decisive.

How many priests and friars María knew, adding to them the Parish Priests of Santa Margarita, the Dominicans of the school, her new friendships in Barcelona, try counting them all...

But the discovery of Don Juan Bonal, was the icing on the cake: Providential.

Even though I do not dare decide if María discovered Don Juan, or it was Don Juan who won a select piece, who caught in his nets an exquisite little bird.

What a good type of priest was this Father Bonal. He lived for sixty years, riding between the XVIIIth and XIXth

centuries: half of it, thirty years he spent in the service of the sick, the mentally ill, the abandoned children. He belongs to this dozen of distinguished demented persons called John of God, Vincent de Paul, Camillus de Lellis, Angela of the Cross, Teresa of Calcutta, a family in which we will see how our María Rafols, the young girl lost in Villafranca del Penedés and found in Barcelona, enters decidedly in such a short time; men and women who followed literally those words of Jesus when He said that *it is He* who is sick, hurt, eaten by misery, ragged, full of lice, that *it is He* when we see a human just thrown on the street, suffering on a hospital bed, agonizing, abandoned. The priest Bonal, Father Bonal, was going to be a teacher, literate and wise. He came across Christ, *he saw Him* under the skin of the sick: he bid his books and career good-bye. He spent thirty years assisting prisoners infected with the plague, begging for alms from village to village to take food to the hospital, and medicine and bandages and blankets, embracing the dying. His figure stands out today like a giant of the tableau of distinguished personages of the first third of the XIXth century. And what are worldly honours, volatile, hay flowers, short-lived: The village of his birth paid him homage with a memorial tablet stone one and a half century after his death! And the city of Zaragoza "was at the point" of dedicating a street to him; but it didn't happen because his path crossed that of María Rafols, not a fragment would remain today of the memory of Juan Bonal.

They must have met around 1800, Father Bonal has just completed thirty; María was nineteen. Don Juan was born in a little village of the Ampurdán, Terrades, the Province of Gerona, almost on the border with France, a little to the north of Figueras. The son of peasant farmers, the first of his brothers and sisters, he had to receive as "heir apparent" the fields of his father. Juan renounced it in favour of his brother Jaime: he wanted to study, arts attracted him; maybe right from an early age he thought about becoming a priest.

He studied tenaciously. At twenty he entered the "Sertorian University" of Huesca, which to me, as I am a native of Huesca, makes me proud: Now won't the University of my hometown enjoy prestige such that a young boy from Gerona, instead of enrolling for academic courses in Barcelona, came to the Alto Aragón. He may have had relatives or friends there, I have no clue; but he came to Huesca.

The pompous, impressive title of "Sertorian" was sported by the University of Huesca in honour of the Roman General Quinto Sertorio. Many Spanish who had never gone beyond the banks of the River Ebro towards the Pyrenees, imagine that the streets of Huesca are infested with wolves in winter. They will have to be encouraged to travel to Huesca, to Jaca, to the Ordesa Park, to Ainsa, to the valley of Ansó, and to climb the foothills of the Aneto, to see what is really good: during the snows of winter and under the soft sun of summer. My Huesca, a small lovable city, loaded with history: from the time of the ancient peoples of Lérida till the XIIth century, urbs victrix, victorious city, and prosperous, was the capital of the Pyrenean area. Even at the time of the Romans: General Sertorio, who paraded the Iberian peninsula as though it was a handkerchief, had Huesca as his "plaza of arms"; and here he died, assassinated by the henchmen of Pompey. In praise of him, the "University and General Study" of Huesca, created by Pedro IV of Aragón in the middle of the XIVth century on the old "palace of the kings", which in turn was erected over the musulman Zuda, bears the title of "Sertorian". Kings and Popes embellished the Huescan University, which received "royal" and "papal" honours, and produced illustrious students; and maintained its stature with dignity when from 1789 to 1791 Juan Bonal from Gerona came to frequent its lecture rooms: Juan Bonal left as a graduate, "Bachelor of Philosophy" on the 30th of May 1791.

Equipped with his brand new title of "Bachelor", he sat for a public entrance exam for the post of teacher in Ripoll. He did work there. But having resolved to say Mass, he studied Theology for three years with the Dominicans of Barcelona; and one, the last one, of Theology and Ecclesiastical History, in

Zaragoza. While he was preparing for his priestly ordination, he appeared once again for public exams for the post of teacher in Reus: he won it, and there he remained for seven years, five of them already ordained as a priest.

In Reus, in this period of his of teaching and saying Mass, the young Juan Bonal, with his twenty-five years of age, made a great discovery: that was Jesus, the same Christ, son of the Virgin Mary, *who resides in*, is in the suffering, the poor, the abandoned. The priest Bonal decides to put aside his literary projects and "dedicate himself" to get relief and assistance for the needy. A document of those years refers to the admiration provoked in Reus on seeing the young priest "visiting patients of the Holy Hospital and prisoners, taking in helpless children, helping abandoned maidens". His stay in Reus served Father Bonal as a training; and besides, he completed it spreading his concern among men and women, to assist these needy people, above all among the young people, who would go to talk to him during the long hours he spent in the confessional.

Father Bonal could not have found a better school than Reus to train himself as "Passionero", an expressive word with which the priest who was "destined to assist" spiritually - sometimes even materially - the patients of a hospital were designated: Bonal left Reus with a "doctorate" in this "unexpected career".

Reus, a capital gifted with stateliness to preside over the "Country of Tarragona", had always been lacking in natural or political help; this is what one of its illustrious sons, the unforgettable jurist Pedrol Rius, who with Prim, Fortuny, Gaudí, Rosa Molas, ennobles the history of Reus, had confided to me: "it has neither sea, nor river, nor mining, nor Courts, nor Archbishopric; nevertheless, it became the second city of Cataluña". In the middle of the XIXth century, Reus came down, it lost its inhabitants and its energy: Tarragona, the capital of the province just at a distance of a dozen kilometers, took its place. But at the end of the XVIIIth century, when Juan Bonal was a teacher and exercised as "passionero" there, Reus occupied a post of honour in the

advance towards progress; the Catalans considered the city as a "symbol of commercial daring and progressive spirit": Salou was utilized as the port for the departure of the products of the Lower Aragón, streets were laid out outside the walled city, industrialists renovated their old installations, a municipal theatre was erected, stately houses were constructed, five new fountains were put up.... and the waves of misery let loose by the ineptitude of the national politicians was tackled.

It was far from strange that "this city of Reus, energetic and advanced", also occupies a position of vanguard in Hospital assistance in Spain: here, in the Hospital of Reus, the first "Daughters of Charity" who had come from France, worked from Christmas of 1792. Don Juan Bonal sees them, deals with them, and he has food for thought...

The Daughters of Charity reached Reus exactly on the 24th of December 1792. They came on the rebound from France and Barcelona.

They were founded in the first half of the XVIIIth century by that fabulous champion of charity called Vincent de Paul: a marvellous invention in favour of the needy. Till then nobody had thought that there could exist "nuns" outside their cloistered monasteries: Becoming a "nun" meant that the girl would close herself up for always "in a cloister". St. Francis de Sales tried to get religious "to visit the poor in their own home"; but the ecclesiastical organization did not tolerate such a novelty and ended up closing the nuns in monasteries. Vincent de Paul took this lesson into account: he declared that he "was not founding religious nuns", he was looking for good women to practice the Gospel seeing Jesus in the poor, in the orphans, in the sick. He got together some exemplary Christian women of the little villages and took them to a house in Paris, where Luisa de Marillac, St.Luisa, gave them lessons in nursing and in piety. Thus was born the immense family of the Daughters of Charity, who by a forthright decision of the founder, sacrificed the

tranquility of the convent in favour of the needy: "slaves and servants of the poor".

According to the custom of that epoch, still very far from the "emancipation of the woman", Vincent de Paul had to put at the side of his "Daughters" an association of priests, in charge of perfecting the religious formation of those women, stimulate their piety, sustain their sacrifice: they were the "fathers of the Mission", dedicated to preaching "popular missions" called "Paulian religious", put in charge by their founder of attending to his Daughters of Charity.

This story of the "Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul" has a lot to do with the future of our young María Rafols: Don Juan Bonal, whose path would very soon cross that of María Rafols, "discovers" in Reus the existence and the work of the Daughters of Charity.

By this time there began to be besides "French" also "Spanish": the "fault" lies with the Paulian fathers. In 1792 they sent half a dozen young Spanish girls from Aragón and Cataluña to Paris, for them to "come to know" the "Society of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul" and "to import it" to Spain.

The project bore fruit; immediately a group of these young women, prepared in Paris and bringing at their head a French Superior, Sr. Juana Davit, a mature woman trained in hospital tasks, took charge of the famous Hospital of the Santa Cruz of Barcelona in the year 1790.

Unfortunately, the administrators of the Hospital of Barcelona wanted the sisters to break all ties of dependence on their superiors in Paris and obey "exclusively" the directorate of the same hospital: they felt they were the bosses controlling the place, almost dictators. There was no manner of reaching some sensible agreement, and the religious had of course to defend their own identity: so after three months the Daughters of Charity abandoned the Hospital of Santa Cruz, only one remained behind.

The news of the "hospitable religious" had already circulated around Spain: Reus, in the vanguard of novelties, asked them to come to their Hospital.

A rich widow on her death had bequeathed, "in favour of the Daughters of Charity, always and when the good ladies saw it suitable, to set up a foundation in Reus".

The Paulian fathers had a convent of theirs established in Reus; hence Sr. Juana Davit, the "failed" Superior of Barcelona, was attracted to that invitation: she sent one of the three teams into which her religious were divided, to Reus; the other two went to Lérida and to Barbastro.

The Municipality of Reus obtained the royal licence to bring the Sisters to the Hospital; a reasonable contract was signed with them, one which would avoid the failure of Barcelona: for the internal regime of their timetable, the Daughters of Charity would follow their rule; in the regime of the Hospital, they would fulfill the disposition of the administrators; the number of Sisters, three initially, would be increased as the income permitted; and "they would start classes for public teaching of girls, whenever it be possible". With the French Sr. Juana Davit, came two Catalan sisters.

The Hospital of Reus occupied an old ramshackle house in what is today's Sol y Ortega street, close to the Priory of San Pedro: the trio of Sisters functioned smoothly; the municipality, happy; and so were the patients and their families and the whole of Reus.

This Hospital served as a "university" for Don Juan Bonal to graduate as a "passionero". He saw how the Daughters of Charity fought till they managed "to open a school" besides working at the Hospital; thus they fulfilled the desire of Vincent de Paul, who had understood the two fundamental needs of the poor- hounded by illness and lack of culture: these were the two plagues that consumed the families of the lower classes: he wanted to join the hospital tasks with those of education, two worlds which looked at superficially could be considered distant.

If the Hospital of Santa Cruz of Barcelona was permitted the luxury of doing without the Daughters of Charity, they did not do it just like that: they counted on "other women" and even men, dedicated to give help with absolute submission, that is, without any external authority posing any "interference" to the administrators of the Hospital. These men and women constituted the famous "Hermandades (Brotherhoods/Fraternities)": groups of Christians who for some hours or full time went to the Hospital to collaborate disinterestedly in the care and company of the ill, to the cleaning of the house, to getting donations in cash or kind.

The hospitable "Brotherhoods" were not exclusive of Barcelona: many other hospitals of Cataluña and the whole of Spain had them. The charitable priests like Don Juan Bonal had discovered the hospitalary vocation, and tried to foment this humanitarian service of high quality among young boys and girls: he oriented them towards some "Brotherhood" in which they would commit themselves, even "to serve the sick perpetually"; even though they avoided giving them the judicial form of "religious congregations" in order to avoid the suspicion with which the hospital administrators accepted the offer of collaboration when the "group" depended on "another authority" different to the Board of government of the hospital itself.

The "Brotherhood" that best responded to the desires of the Hospital was the one made up of artisans formed by craftsmen: ropemakers, weavers, druggists, carpenters, who used to dedicate their free hours to the sick and decided to offer themselves "completely", without conditions, to the Board: they wanted to work "as if they were servants taken on hire", but voluntarily and gratuitously. The Board of the Hospital placed the condition that they would not form "a religious congregation" nor would they have a superior, nor would they pray the psalms together; without putting more than a belt and the hospital shield as a habit. The "rules" of this "Brotherhood", dedicated without reserves to the approval of the administrators, served as a model for the parallel "Brotherhoods" in other Catalan hospitals.

These "Brotherhoods" which at the end of the XVIIIth century flourished all over Cataluña imitating that of Barcelona, are linked with the very long secular history of Christian charitable organizations in Spain. Our Church, so often lazy and reserved with regard to the march forward of the planet, even an enemy of development of political liberties that worry society, impulsing it towards reformist horizons, was always at the head of charitable institutions: it knew to respond by means of the generous action of men and women believing in the evangelical imperative that sends us to give food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, visit prisoners, console the sick. Century after century, from the first Council of Elvira till our times, the Christian community of Spain created centres of assistance for any kind of need, especially hospitals: when public administration either did not exist or did not have efficient economic structures. There has hardly been a believer with capacity and social category who has stayed away from assistance to the sick. We have the curious case of Cid Campeador, to whom has been attributed "the first gathering" or hospital where the lepers, with that "oriental" disease that invaded Europe after the Crusades, found treatment. "General" or "special" hospitals appeared in the shadow of Bishoprics and monasteries, winning the protection of kings and municipalities. In the year 1401, the Hospital of the Santa Cruz was born in Barcelona when six earlier "infirmaries" that had belonged to the Bishop, the Town Council of the Cathedral and to the Council of Ciento, were joined together. Twenty-five years later, Alfonso V of Aragón acted as patron to the grand Hospital "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" in Zaragoza, with the curious title of "Domus Infirmorum Urbis et Orbis", house for the sick "of the City and of the World": The sick sheltered there will not be asked either their country or their beliefs.

The multitude of hospitals, the census of the "Dictionary" of Cangas-Argüelles at the end of the XVIIIth century places them at more than two thousand, carried with them poverty of economic means, sometimes misery; and scarcity of sanitary personnel. As time progressed, gratuitous charity gave way to the greed of the administrators who "worked" in the hospital as a source of income not always controlled by the "Boards of

Patrons", who were gentlemen of ecclesiastical or civil lineage distant from the problems of everyday life. The reform and concentration of hospitals advanced under the pressure of the economists during the monarchy of Carlos IV, whose Court gave no example of morality, neither public nor private: the "secularization of charity" was subject to the failures and thefts of national life. Fortunately, the "municipal commissions of charity" could count on the "Brotherhoods", whose new formula brought objectives of service identical to those of earlier centuries when they exercised in the shadow of the Hospitalary orders: as notable as the famous "Soup Brotherhood", dedicated to making the beds, washing the sick, distributing their dinners and breakfasts. At the "Santa Cruz" of Barcelona there was never a lack of tertiaries of Franciscan, Dominican, Servite or Carmelite inspiration who fortunately, once a week, visited the hospital: they swept the wards, made the beds, they paid attention to the patients, they cleaned and tidied them up.

From Reus Fr. Juan Bonal penetrates into the fabric of the Hospitalary Brotherhoods. He sees the Daughters of Charity work: their number will grow rapidly because the French Revolution is provoking the escape of friars and nuns who cross the frontier looking for refuge and work in Spain. His hours in the confessional permits him to know young girls and also young boys, desirous of consecrating their existence to the favour of their needy brother: Bonal and other priests of the neighbourhood, friends of his, ask if these boys and girls could not give fervent spiritual category to the hospitalary Brotherhoods, creating groups as committed as the Daughters of Charity. They know the resistance that the Boards of Government of the hospitals, how they oppose any intent to convert the "Brotherhoods" into religious organisms with judicial structure. This will be a question of prudence and patience, they will advance step by step till the decisive moment is reached: in the meanwhile it will be his task to give each brotherhood the quality and fervour proper to a "congregation".

Don Juan Bonal knows in what the hospital of the Santa Cruz of Barcelona is sheltered - the radiating focus of the Catalan Brotherhoods: he will try to obtain his work post over there. Several priests consider him to be the leader of their ranks. The hospitals of Mataró, of Olot, of Figueras, of Cervera, have recurred to the Santa Cruz of Barcelona, asking for "brothers" and "rules" that permit them to "copy" his Brotherhood. Not far from Reus, in the parish of Valls, Bonal has struck a friendship with another Valian priest, Jaime Cessat, who at the cost of his personal fortune is erecting the ruined hospital of his village: Cessat wants to bring the Daughters of Charity to Valls, and as the municipality raises the well-known inconvenience of "total subjection", he entrusts his hospital to the "doncellas vallesanas" (maidens of Valls) who "animated by the spirit of charity" commit themselves to perform the work "without receiving any salary other than their maintenance". Bonal and Cessat meet frequently, exchange points of view and experiences: both are very certain that "one day" there will spring up from their Brotherhoods authentic religious congregations with the characteristic elements of congregation and life independent of the interferences that are today imposed on them by the Board of Government of the Hospitals... Towards this goal their effort is directed. For this "future style of consecrated life" the girls and boys who go to them asking to be incorporated into the care of the sick are prepared.

The fame of Don Juan Bonal as a "passionero priest" stands out in the whole of Cataluña when the Board of the Hospital of Barcelona names him "vicar", that is to say, the religious person responsible, for the Santa Cruz of Barcelona. The Spring of 1804 is underway. This appointment reaches him in the village of Montroig, where he has been exercising the ministry of Parish Priest for nine months: Undoubtedly from Reus and from Montroig, Fr. Bonal has frequented the Hospital of Barcelona and various hospitals of the region: his appointment

as vicar of the Santa Cruz signifies public recognition of his commitment to hospital work. And in an act of confidence on the part of the Board of Barcelona: they have seen in him a man capable of fomenting and vitalizing the Fraternities at the service of the Hospital.

It has been something like electing him as "the bishop of the patients". Don Juan Bonal will not let them down.



5

THE PATROL OF
BARCELONA FOR ZARAGOZA

Barcelona, Zaragoza
1804



Map of Zaragoza and situation of the Hospital Nuestra Señora de Gracia before it was destroyed by the French. To the left is the Hospital of Convalescents where later the Hospital Nuestra Señora de Gracia was established, as it stands today.

From the hand of the "Bishop of the sick": Our young María Rafols climbs into the scenario of public life.

María could have met Don Juan on a thousand occasions. From Reus, capital of the "Country of Tarragona", to Villafranca, capital of the Penedés, it takes half a day on foot: with Valls half way through the stretch. It is a little more difficult to reach Villanueva y Geltrú, stopping at Tarragona. The links between these towns is so close because of family and sentimental ties, that the lady who made a bequest to bring the Daughters of Charity to Reus, Doña Jerónima Clavería, widow of Sulliván, signed her Will and died, in Villanueva. Let's not say anything about the priests and friars of the area: They all know each other, they have contact with each other. Naturally they comment on the dedication of Don Juan Bonal to the Hospital cause, this mania which entered into the "professor" of Reus who has now become a "passionero"; they carefully follow the development of the groups of young boys and girls that Bonal from Reus and Cessat from Valls cultivate to vitalize the Brotherhoods. Any of the Parish priests, any of the friars could have introduced María to Don Juan. Maybe the priest and his "spiritual daughter" met without intermediaries, on some trip of Fr. Bonal. Or in Barcelona, when he was going to or coming from Reus.

They met; young María fell into the "hospital circle" of Don Juan.

Naming him "vicar" of the Santa Cruz of Barcelona, an immense field of work was entrusted to him: he has the doors open of one of the hospitals most distinguished because of its history and because of its energy, not only in Spain but in the whole of Europe.

However, Fr. Bonal does not plan to remain “always” linked to the Hospital of Santa Cruz. Don Juan and his friends “the passionero priests”, the first Jaime Cessat, priest of Valls, knows perfectly well the incisive decision with which the Governing Board of the Santa Cruz rejects the “consolidation” of the Brotherhoods, impeding its evolution, logical, towards judicial forms of a religious congregation: the experience of the Daughters of Charity, rejected because of their fidelity to the obedience to their internal superiors, has made it very clear that the Santa Cruz never thinks of tolerating the presence of a Brotherhood developed in the form of an Institute with internal rules independent of the orders dictated by the Board for the regime of the Hospital. Don Juan Bonal aspires to break this enclosure: it is not very reasonable, even humiliating, that men and women who come with religious impetus to generously occupy a post in the sacrificing tasks of assisting the sick, gratuitously, without charging even a dime, anonymous silent servants, have their very legitimate path towards a “life together” as a group and spiritual autonomy cut. Let the Brotherhoods become bodies separate from the administration of the Hospital, “it is what the Board hates, it is what is most revolting to it”: Well, this is just the goal of “the organic religious institution” that Don Juan Bonal has stamped on his forehead.

He doesn't hide his intentions, nor does he fail in his fidelity to the Board: his men and women fulfill the work assigned to them attending completely to the orders, without causing problems, never ever fomenting rebellion; but Don Juan is training them in the spiritual exercises, he binds them among themselves, he stimulates them, he talks about vows and even tries out, without drawing attention, certain clothes similar to the formal religious habits.

The Brotherhood of the Santa Cruz has sent its persons to other Hospitals as the seeds of new Brotherhoods: the first group that Don Juan Bonal, vicar of the Santa Cruz, situates outside

Barcelona will go off with defined characters, proper of a religious institute. Sooner or later they will overcome the tension with the Governing Boards, but they know perfectly well what is their final objective.

This "leaving of the founders" will happen to Fr. Bonal very soon, much before he thought it would.

He was named "vicar" of the Santa Cruz on the 2nd of March 1804: three months later, in the thick of summer, he receives an invitation. From Zaragoza: They want him to bring "his Brotherhoods" to the Zaragozan Hospital.

Why do I have to tell you, the category of the Hospital of Zaragoza. Barcelona is Barcelona, a city that is renowned, populous; while in this period, the beginning of the XIXth century, Zaragoza hardly counts forty-five thousand inhabitants. Thus comparing hospitals, the Santa Cruz of Barcelona figures with greater honour in the European catalogues. However, the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" of Zaragoza sustains its category with dignity, it reaches the shoulders of the "Santa Cruz". Check this out.

Noble from its origin: the Hospital was born by the will of King Alfonso V of Aragón called the Magnanimous, a requirement of the Council, the University, civil and ecclesiastical personalities of Zaragoza. Built on a site that today occupies the heart of the city, it covered the actual terrain from the Coso through the Paseo of the Independencia right till the Church of Santa Engracia: not a single stone remains on another stone, the French pulverized it all.

The Zaragozan bourgeoisie, represented by the ecclesiastics of the Town Council of La Seo and the councillors of the Council governed the Hospital; having got the protection of the crown, it sported the title of "Royal"; besides "General", open to all kinds of patients, demented, woman in labour, foundling children, no matter where they came from: their founders gave it a motto worthy of imperial institutions,

written in high-flown Latin, *Domus Infirmorum Urbis et Urbis*, House for the sick of the City and the World. It enjoyed the protection of the Catholic Kings, Carlos V, Felipe II; it lent unpayable services to Felipe V when his army was given a beating near Zaragoza during the War of Succession. The Popes from Rome condecorated it with symbolic "laurels" and gifted it with privileges, benedictions, indulgences. Its church presided over by the blessed image of the Virgin of Grace, who navigated it like a glorious vessel through the centuries: "Royal and General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace". Till the French...

The sick were sheltered there, crowds of them. To give exact data, I note that during the last decade of the XVIIIth century, the Hospital registers a movement of four thousand patients a year ("fever"; "surgery", "venereal disease", syphillis) plus around fifty lunatics, eighty with scabies, one hundred and fifty foundling children; almost fifty thousand data cards in ten years. Which places it among the dozen significant hospitals of the Peninsula. Its therapy with the mentally ill earned world fame.

The succession of "Ordinances" that governed the Hospital was most curious: from the first ones known, those of 1496 to those of 1800; in essence, the institution is entrusted to various "Aldermen (civic dignitaries)" who under the presidency of the Archbishop constituted the "Most Illustrious Board" called "Sitiada" (Besieged). Let me confess to you that this name, "Sitiada", perplexed me when I heard it; I wondered if it had been given to the Board of the Hospital with the motive of the war-like "Sieges" imposed on Zaragoza by Napoleon's army in 1808. Not in the least; the Board of Our Lady of Grace bears the name "Sitiada" from very ancient times, perhaps from its origins. In Aragón the term "Sitiada" designated the boards of governing and administration of hospitals during the Old Regime. "Sitiada", why? I have to ask the Zaragozan archivists; I think it could signify "Board situated, located, established, assembled", Board in session. It doesn't need to be said that belonging to The Sitiada has represented in Zaragoza a touch of distinction: "The Most Illustrious Sitiada".

The economy of the Hospital supported the ups and downs characteristic of similar enterprises: buoyant at times, enriched with

the protection of the Crown and the Church; anguished at worrying periods. Ignacio Tellechea enjoyed himself raking out from among the bundles of documents, the litany of help that Felipe V adjudicated to the Hospital: taxes on the sale of meat in the region, on the manufacture of soap, on games of chance and betting, on ball games; licence to print calendars and catechisms and spelling books and prayer books; sole right to organize raffles of jewels, and the most celebrated of pigs: I wonder whether the Regidores of Zaragoza would be up to tricks like in Tafalla, where according to the verses of Tudela, numbers were sold and then "the blessed pig was won by the Hospital"... Jokes aside, the Nuestra Señora de Gracia possessed houses, inherited estates, received legacies: the civil law of Aragon disposed that the Hospital Nuestra Señora de Gracia "inherited ab intestato from the patients who expired in it without leaving neither spouse nor relative in straight or colateral line till the fourth degree". It also benefited from a practice, "legendary" among the Notaries of Zaragoza: they had the obligation of reminding everyone who made a Will before them, that if they wished to make some bequest to the Hospital Nuestra Señora de Gracia, the testator was free to do so". Excellent initiative, similar to an old Navarran law.

The doctors of Nuestra Señora de Gracia have left a scientific mark as members of a "Zaragozan Medical School". In these first years of the XIXth century five "master surgeons" constitute the faculty body, two doctors, two " invigilating bachelors", besides the huge group of "health workers" and young servant boys.

A body of "Passionero" chaplains, under the direction of the "vicar" and "co-adjutor" dedicate themselves to the spiritual care of the patients: one of them had to manage the Basque language; another French; another Italian; so as to care for the patients coming from those areas: House of the sick "urbis et orbis..." .

Zaragoza, at the start of the nineteenth century has a population of forty-five thousand inhabitants. Its "Royal and General Hospital" shelters six to eight thousand patients every

year: it is easy to guess the importance of the Hospital in the civic fabric of the city. Hundreds of travellers who cross Zaragoza as the centre of communication between Madrid-Barcelona in a horizontal line, Bilbao-Valencia in a vertical line, go to the "Hospital of Nuestra Señora de Gracia" looking for assistance. The Zaragozans feel a legitimate pride in their hospital centre.

The government and administration functions perfectly thanks to the interest of its Aldermen, two of them canons of the cathedral town council; and the rest, aristocratic personalities elected from among the flower and cream of the city: with the Archbishop at the top of this "most illustrious Board of the *Sitiada*".

However, the Hospital also suffers its pains: a severe one that threatens the efficiency of the curative system and darkens the good name of the institution.

This concerns the "mozos", servant youth : service personnel, men and women, whose number, between those resident on the premises and those coming from outside daily, rises to 240 employees. During the years they had built up such corruption that the administrators gave up, incapable of correcting it. The daily functioning of the house depended on these servants - the cleanliness of the patients, their meals, the cleanliness of the wards, timetable, order, fulfilling of the instructions of the doctor, in a word, the image of the Hospital. Two permanent scars spoil the servants: they come from the lowest social strata, with no preparation or "vocation" other than that of earning their livelihood under a roof rather than manage a large hoe in the field; and who were paid undignified salaries, hence considered it legitimate to retrieve it at the cost of the patients, their families and the goods of the Hospital.

A quality witness tells us exactly what used to happen. It makes one burst into tears. Either the Sitiada was not illustrious any more, or it had to look for solutions. The witness, Don Vicente Fernández de Córdoba, the Count of Sástago, occupies a distinguished place among

the blue-blooded families of the country: Grandee of Spain and gentleman of the Chamber of His Majesty. he resides habitually in Zaragoza, even though he has an open house in Madrid and his estates in Andalucía. He likes ostentation, he considers the aristocracy to be a divine privilege, an erudite person, friend of nature and of horses, he takes it to be the duty of the rich to occupy themselves with public affairs. By a royal decree he was named "Regidor" (Alderman) of the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia". He took his charge to heart, spent hours and money in favour of the Hospital. To him we owe a "report" that relates with the most picturesque details, a little blood curdling, the functioning of the "servant youth" during those years. Besides his direct personal observations, Sástago includes paragraphs supplied by the priests of the Seminary of San Carlos, who were then the "passioneros" of the Hospital.

See "what was happening" in one of the more high and mighty hospital centres of Spain: Behind its magnificent facade, cheating, disorder and vagrancy rule here.

The problems start right from the entry of the persons taken in: sometimes they are not even sick, we are talking about "vagabonds, with neither work nor income", who have hardly ever before known "bed, white bread and meat"; they fake accidents, "they know how to have a fever at the time it is convenient to them", "they complain of a pain that is not seen and can only be investigated. Understanding the strategies of these people", Sástago relates the case of an old man "whom we could not get to leave the Hospital even knowing that he was well"; Sástago ordered, "with the pretext of cleanliness they shave off his famous beard that had reached his chest"; the old bearded man took his clothes and ran off "to save his long beard".

Not to mention the complications of relationship "between the patients and their visitors":

- How to avoid Pedro, who is saying that he is the husband of the woman of number five, makes her his mistress or concubine?

"These people", the visitors, rob or change the food rations of the patients.

Under the cynical look of the "young servants", who, "serve the rotten rations or with worms, keeping the fresh ones for themselves", and later doing business:

- There is a patient who is selling his ration of bread and meat for a couple of cigarettes or one more peg of wine.

The young servants distribute the food "throwing the bread, the meat, the eggs or the sponge cake on the beds"; they pass in front of them with the soup "without heeding those who have no appetite or do not feel like having it"; they trade the rations "for money and goodies"; they cook "senselessly", provoking complaints from the patients; they pay no heed to the laments, and they do not bother "to make a small cup of chocolate or any other extraordinary trifle if they are not gratified with money"; they rob the linen meant for "bandages and foundling children", pilfer the bread, the meat, they baptize the wine; they don't take care of the dressings, they forget to administer the medicines at the correct time; they make fun of and despise the patients, they hit them...

The "passioneros" have told the Count details from the wards:

- One hardly enters and one comes across passageways and rooms, especially in surgery, with immodest men and women, talking in the corners or seated for a long time on the bed of some women patients.

If a confessor goes there, called by a patient, "he has to sit carefully not to stain his clothes with the water and filth on the floor and having to avoid catching insects on the beds": beds and the whole room "give out stench". When a poor priest tries to "preach in a loud voice", the servants distract the gathering "eating and drinking, smoking, talking, playing cards, frisking about".

Sástago finishes off the forty manuscript sheets of his report with a sharp retort:

- I have seen a prescription made for a dead person, a person in agony being robbed, considering someone as healthy for his ration; and this, where? In the Hospital that I am convinced is the best administered in the whole of Europe.

The "Most Illustrious Sitiada" should remedy the situation; it wants to do so.

They look for the remedy, for years: They have decided to bring from some place a team of men and women who will organize the traffic of the "young servants", invigilate them, stimulate them, govern them.

But the *Sitiada* cannot find a satisfactory solution. They have been investigating for fifteen years. What they are trying to do is to situate "responsible persons" into the fabric of the Hospital, persons who guarantee the functioning of each ward, each service, avoiding the actual chaos: the women heads of the wards are attributed with the ordained title of "Mother" and a theoretical authority, whereas the fact is that the maids neither obey nor respect them; the same thing happens in the men's ward, where the "Ward Assistant" is absolutely controlled by the "young workers". The *Sitiada* wants to find a group of persons who are capable, and if possible "with a vocation", that is to say men and women who do not work in the Hospital for money, for the salary, rather as an exercise of an ideal Christian at the service of the sick...

Something like what is told by news coming from Barcelona, according to which the Santa Cruz Hospital has certain "Brotherhoods" available that are generously consecrated to the hard work of Hospitals.

The *Regidores* of the *Sitiada* sent a conscious request to their colleagues in Barcelona; that said: "kindly do us the favour of informing us":

- If it is true that the Hospital of Santa Cruz experiences advantages after the establishment of the honest maidens who, united in charity, dedicate themselves to the care and assistance of the sick women and foundling children.
- From Barcelona this was the reply: the "Society of honest maidens" exists; still in its beginnings, with a number that is insufficient for the Hospital; six "maids" have been trained with the Daughters of Charity in Paris; of course, the "Santa Cruz" will be delighted to inform "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" if the number of "maids" increases...

This barcelonic experience motivated the Zaragozan Regidores to look for solutions. For the male group they approached the Congregation from Madrid, the ones called "Obregones", officially "Hermanos Mínimos", founded by Bernardino Obregón in the middle of the XVIIIth century; for the female team, they tried the French nuns "Hermanas de la Sabiduría" from La Rochela. Both transactions failed: the friars and the nuns demanded "integral respect for the essential rules of their Institute", as against "the totalitarian style" of the Boards of the Hospitals, style that the Sitiada wanted to maintain.

Between the squabbling and bickering, the *Sitiada* supported a situation of emergency in the year 1803 because of the plague: the Hospital space became too limited; and above all, completely adrift as far as services were concerned. The *Regidores* decided, after the plague, to write again to Barcelona, whose Brotherhoods kept gaining more fame each year: at the beginning of the Summer of 1804, the "Santa Cruz" received the new request of the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia": this time with urgency.

Three months earlier the Hospital of Barcelona had incorporated Don Juan Bonal officially as "vicar", responsible for the "Brotherhoods": undoubtedly he was the most prestigious

Catalan priest among the "Passioneros" of the Princedom; his presence was felt in the care and growth of groups of fervent young people devoted to the Hospital.

"Santa Cruz" decided to accept the Zaragozaan petition: Don Juan Bonal would visit the Aragonese Hospital.

There is no trace of any document, but I would like to know what were the commentaries of Don Juan Bonal "with his people", boys and girls of the Brotherhood groups attached to the "Santa Cruz" of Barcelona. What would the person Incharge of the directors of the Catalan Hospital have told them so that they went to inspect the Aragonese Hospital and study "on site" a transfer of the Brotherhoods to Zaragoza: two Brotherhoods, one of men and the other of women "each one at the service of the sick of their sex".

The trip was done in the month of September. He was accompanied by a Brother of Charity, which is, belonging to the Brotherhood of Barcelona, "a secular", intentionally underlined by the documents.

The big Lords of the *Sitiada*, from the Archbishop downwards receive them as divine envoys: they expect from them a remedy for the chronic evils of the Hospital.

The *Sitiada* of 1804 is made up of, in addition to the Archbishop, two canons: the precentor Navella and Señor Cistué; a Count, Sástago; a Baron, Purroy; two Marquesses, Montemuzo and Fuente Olivar. Fine people, one can see; with whom Fr. Bonal will deal with things of life and death concerning the patients of the Hospital, not such refined people, God be praised.

The two travellers were put up within the Hospital, "in the room reserved for Preacher of Lent": so that they can come to know directly "the service in all the wards", thus they can tell the aspirants of both the sexes "the work to which they will have to be subjected if they enrolled in the Brotherhoods that the

Sitiada wanted to transplant into this General Hospital". They were, true, the most illustrious gentlemen, showing them the stark reality of the situation of the house.

One whole long month Bonal and his man stayed there; the Regidores (Aldermen) verified "how they continuously assisted in the Wards observing with the greatest details all that was done there".

One of the Aldermen, the canon Cistué, would later show his true colours; right from the beginning he was not in the least pleased about the coming of the Catalans, well "he distrusted new plans and projects": with a certain hypocritical attitude: he wanted to prove himself right, paying from his pocket, "the expenses and food of these emissaries", so that the "coffers of the poor patients" did not suffer any loss.

The Aldermen and Fr. Bonal had several meetings during the month, treating the matter with the obligatory seriousness. The priest drew up a plan of work for his Brotherhoods, and presented "a little notebook of possible pacts". The Aldermen worked on this base of Fr. Bonal and completed the "little notebook" with the changes that the *Sitiada* considered necessary. The dialogue bore fruit: "the matter ended with complete uniformity", in agreement.

They decided to accelerate the pace, so that by the end of the year the Brotherhoods would arrive in Zaragoza: Don Juan would return to Barcelona immediately; he would choose twelve men for the male Brotherhood and twelve women for the female one; he would update them on the work programme and on the needs of the Hospital; he would comment with them on the "little notebook of pacts" where the conditions to which they had to subject themselves were stated. Of course, the Aldermen stressed "the subordination and obedience that *the new servants* had to show to the ordinances of this Hospital": speaking clearly, the Brotherhoods are sometimes submitted to the authority of the *Sitiada*. Fr. Juan knows by heart the same old song of the Hospital Boards, always stubborn in defending "their control", above all,

over the personnel, and avoiding the step of the Brotherhoods leading to the formation of a "religious institute"; everything in its own good time, he thinks: Zaragoza will not be more sensitive than Barcelona, he has faith he will breach some stretch...

The Aldermen, except canon Cistué who was a nuisance, adored him: they see the Brotherhoods of Don Juan Bonal as the divine remedy to renew the Hospital, to heal its scars, to open a new stage of splendour.

At the time of leaving, only one thing was still to be done: to inform opportunely the date of arrival "with his men and women".

Inform us.

As soon as possible...

With this proposal Fr. Bonal returned to Barcelona: As soon as possible. The new goal, Zaragoza.

So many things we would like to know and never will, there being such few documents. For example, I wonder whether when preparing his Catalan expedition during the months of October and November 1804, he had a premonition, or was it a decision, regarding his future: he would remain linked for always to the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital.

He needed just two months; his teams were ready by the middle of December.

They, the men and women of his Brotherhoods, felt sure that they were leaving Barcelona definitively: for life. I see them leave as though they were travelling to remote lands of the planet. A missional exercise of charity impulses them, they go on ready to give love to suffering brothers. Unknown, far away.

One by one, person after person, Don Juan chose twelve men "Masculine Fraternity"; twelve women, "Feminine Fraternity".

For the men, "Brother José Torradellas" was named the superior, "the President".

For the women, "Sister María Rafols" was named the superior, "the President".

"Brother" and "Sister": even though the *Sitiada* does not want to recognize *the religious men and religious women*, Don Juan Bonal will guide two small communities formed with totally religious interior norms and spirit towards Zaragoza: Brothers and Sisters of Charity. The Aldermen of the *Sitiada* will try not to notice, they'll look the other way. But Don Juan dedicates these months of preparation in Barcelona to put fervour into the spirit of the travellers and to decide on their form of life, their timetable, their incipient "rules": on the basis of the "Little Notebook".

About the Brothers, the concrete links accepted before leaving appear dark; for the Sisters, Fr. Bonal clarifies things: they are dressed with a habit and they formulate their commitment to poverty, chastity and hospitality; commitments that one day will be public vows.

Those young girls had to live some time of idealized, illusioned consecration. Two of the twelve had crossed thirty, experienced women. The others, young: some, very young. The "adventure" to which Don Juan invited them transformed their existence by the art of magic: simple, ingenuous "maidens", girls who had grown up in families in villages, who normally went on feast days, guided by the hand of some priest, to the "Hospital Fraternities" to practice in the "Santa Cruz" "works of charity and mercy". Now Fr. Bonal opens them to a horizon of immense love, total and profound: the sick Jesus Christ needs them, waits for them. Now this is not only on Sundays, the call they receive needs a definitive answer: "for always".

The twelve respond.

María Rafols completes her twenty-three years just this November.

So young, and Fr. Bonal names her "captain".

Superior of the Feminine Fraternity: "President", she is called.

And this when Fr. Juan "knows" the Wards of the Hospital of Zaragoza... Poor María, little does she know what awaits her.

The priest Bonal, one can see, is not afraid of anything. Nor anybody.

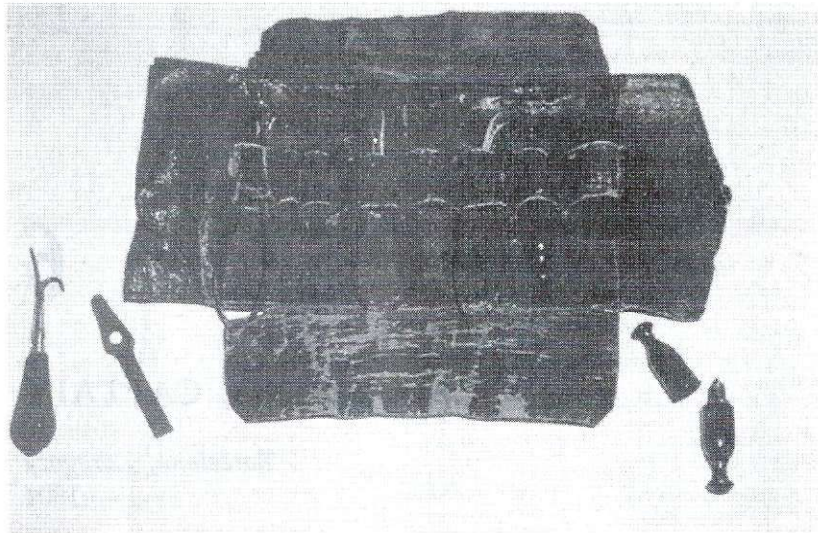
In the beginning of December, he sends this message to the Aldermen of the Sitiada: The Sisters have begun their journey.



6

SO YOUNG, CAPTAIN

Barcelona, Zaragoza
1804



A 14 de mayo de 1816
Dada para que
se pague de leche para
la niña por dispensa-
cion de los médicos
D^{na} Maria Rafols

Surgery instruments utilized by the Sisters in the epoch of Mother María Rafols.
Below, a voucher in the handwriting of the Mother.

A caravan of four, five covered wagons, half a dozen perhaps, leaves Barcelona towards Aragonese lands. I think it is quite strange that a person like Fr. Juan Bonal, conscientious and systematic Catalan that he is, should forget to note down his personal impressions of the journey. He must have written them, there's no doubt about it. But his papers burned with the walls, the books of the archives, the beds, the Church, everything burned when the canons of Napoleon bombarded Zaragoza and demolished the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital, the misdeed that we will soon remember. The least is, even though lamentable, that we have lost valuable documents; a bigger misfortune was the lot of the patients and those who looked after them: there was almost a flare up, between the two.

Don Juan did not write the journey of his caravan, which went covered with awnings; what rain fell that rainy December of 1804. I have taken a liking to Fr. Bonal, but he would have some nerve to get his expedition started just during the weeks that are at the heart of winter. Couldn't you have waited for spring, dear Fr. Juan? If they took the road via Lérida and Fraga, I who was born in the Monegros, can guess how the freezing wind between Candanos and Bujaraloz would have whipped them as they went along the southern slope of the mountains of Alcubierre. After March, almost around April, their journey would have been a real delight. And what a December it was...

I think I am stupid reproaching Don Juan for having hurried off his expedition: he was in a terrible hurry to reach, he had given his word to the gentlemen of the *Sitiada*; and if discomforts had to be experienced, the patients of the Hospital have been suffering greater ones.

Thus it was, braving the cold they set off.

Twelve men, "brothers", and twelve women, "sisters", plus Fr. Juan; twenty-five persons take off. Each cart would have a muleteer, who would require very special skills to handle their horses on long journeys during bad weather. Let's take five muleteers, a total of thirty persons. A couple of mules per cart...

How many days would the journey take: well about ten to twelve days; maybe even fifteen.

Don't refute me, didn't Fr. Bonal show great valour?

And the maidens?

Neither water, nor rain, nor tiredness, they would go happy. Those young ladies would be as blessed as Mother Teresa of Jesus who centuries earlier set out to travel the highways of Spain to found monasteries: for sure, she would have got into some storm or the other!

Contemplating the expedition of Fr. Bonal I begin to think of the forays of St. Teresa through Castile, La Mancha and Andalucía. From way back in the middle of the XVIth century, hasn't time gone by! However, this manner of travelling continued like a carbon copy of the tracing. We can include in our case the suspicion that Satan didn't like the idea of Don Juan Bonal going with his Fraternities to fulfill silent feats of love in the Hospital of Zaragoza. The mystics fully certify that of all the holy feats, the ones that make the devil explode most are the silent ones, the ignored ones, deprived of applause, lacking prizes and honours. Nobody has been given medals of civil merit for having spent years cleaning the pus from wounds and warming soup for a hospital ward. Thus, "Old Nick" decided to sharpen his horns against the carts of Fr. Bonal and they were confronted with a terrific storm. So, congratulations, Brothers and Sisters, young maidens of Charity; this was said by Mother Teresa, experienced as she was in matters of angels and devils :

- *When the devil begins to trouble, that's a good signal.*

The old chronicles tell us that Mother Teresa of Jesus transported her young little nuns in carts hermetically closed with awnings: to protect them from indiscreet looks, not to mention keeping them away from the cold air and the ardent sun. But within the carts, they had a great time, sometimes praying silently, sometimes singing, and sometimes telling jokes, always blessed, free from all fear. Ah, what a coincidence, they usually carried with them a little statue of devotion, a St. Joseph, a Virgin... I am saying coincidence, because these "little girls" of Fr. Bonal devoid of a bridal portion, they only have what they are wearing and maybe an extra vest, their habit just worn, worn for the first time; they bring this, yes, a crucifix covered with a silver sheet, someone in Barcelona gifted it before they were leaving, with the bright idea of placing an embossed little image of the Virgin of Pilar at the feet of Christ, because of course, they are travelling to Zaragoza; the only relic that remains today of that journey.

It is so easy to relate; and they would go so happy, squeezed together, full of laughter and feeling a little strange with their new habits; the journey is just terrible; all the water they want and more, and that too, very heavy; muddy roads, icy wind, black sky, ten, twelve or fifteen days; with their nights, they will have been foreseen by Fr. Juan, being as he was, a conscientious Catalan; neither would the meals be of the "four fork" type, nor the accommodation of the five star type. However much the "girls" were given, their magnetic needle pointed steady, without trembling.

What would Fr. Juan have told them every night before putting them to sleep; María Rafols would already be exercising her Presidency...

The Brothers had a better defence, the journey did not require of them any tedious formalities. Women as groups of nuns on the roads and markets were more noticeable.

The "chronicler" of Zaragoza in those years was Fernando Casamayor y Zeballos, a person of social standing, not

any one at all: he practised as the Governor of the Court of the Royal Audience. However, he was crazy, just like other enthusiastic pen pushers who till very recent times have always been disseminated through all the towns and cities of the planet. He was crazy with regard to his love for Zaragoza.

They have been punctilious, frequently picturesque, at the service of the town of their birth. They worked in any office, high, mediocre or low; well-to-do or terribly poor, some aristocratic: at the margin of other interests they were concerned with, above all, punctually registering, recording the civic happenings, day by day, month after month. Spontaneous chroniclers, journalists by inclination. It was his "hobby". I don't know if the Royal Academy in their last remittance of baptised voices admitted the strange word: Casamayor, from the years 1772 to 1832, elaborated a manuscript which put together "small and big incidents" in forty nine volumes! They are kept by the Library of the University of Zaragoza, under the title of Casamayor himself: "Political and historical years of the most important things that happened in the Imperial and August City of Zaragoza".

On the 28th of December 1804, volume XXI of the Casamayor diary registers the great news: The Catalan expedition entered. Casamayor makes a mistake, he has to be pardoned:

- The Brothers and Sisters of Charity called *Obregones* arrived in this City from the Hospital of Barcelona, at the request of *the Most Illustrious Sitiada* of this Holy Hospital of Nuestra Señora de Gracia.
- He calls them *obregones*; Casamayor is confused with the reference of some years earlier when the *Sitiada* tried to import the Obregon religious from Castile. I willingly pardon him this error in exchange for a piece of information of his that has not been recorded in any official chronicle, only he has done it. He relates that "twelve men and twelve women came, with a priest who is their Confessor and Director"; and he notes, with sharp

journalistic sense a detail that had been missed by everyone else, how they were dressed:

- They wear (the men) a long cloak and cassock of brown material, and a crucifix on the chest; the women were dressed in black with the same cross.

Thanks, Señor Casamayor.

For Christmas, the expedition was still a few days away, Don Juan Bonal sent an express messenger in advance to the Aldermen of the *Sitiada*: informing them that they would arrive in Zaragoza on the 28th at nightfall.

The news circulated all over the city: the twelve Brothers and the twelve Sisters, who are going to take the reins of the Hospital, are on their way from Barcelona. The event attracted popular interest, taking into account what the Hospital as an important Institution signifies. Besides, it is the attraction of the "Sisters". Say what they may the gentlemen of the *Sitiada*, in the eyes of the people the travellers are "friars" and "nuns": this is what they are coming for, to exercise this office of theirs. A dozen friars do not impress too much, one can see them every day. But a dozen nuns outside the convent, and coming not to close themselves up in their monastery but to work in the Wards of the Hospital, looking after the sick and being seen by everyone: such a happening had never before been contemplated. Notwithstanding those days of bad weather, half of Zaragoza was there to receive the caravan.

The Aldermen knew how to carry themselves with elegance, and they organized the reception brilliantly. They sent the Superintendent of the Hospital to wait for the retinue on the outskirts of the city: they lent their own carriages to accomodate the Sisters in them. Effectively, the Superintendent met the expedition on arrival at the Camino del Gállego, the River on the perimeter of Zaragoza, which flows into the Ebro.

The reports insist over and over again: "it was night and it was pouring".

The Superintendent accommodated the Sisters and Fr. Juan in the vehicles of the Aldermen; and he, heading the entourage, all went towards the Puerta del Angel: from there the Sisters would go walking to the temple of Pilar, followed by the carriages of the Sisters; in the meanwhile, the covered wagons, "with the poor luggage of the whole retinue", were guided directly to unload in the Hospital. The Sisters descended from their carriage at the doors of the temple: the Sisters and Brothers, Fr. Juan and some "passionero" priests of the Hospital entered, prostrated themselves before the image of the Most Holy Virgin "giving her thanks for their safe arrival", "asking her for protection and help to carry out with charity and fervour, the destiny for which they had come".

From the Pilar, the Sisters once again accommodated in their carriages and the Brothers on foot, "came to the Hospital".

A crowd had collected there, defending themselves as they could from the rain: some in the patio; those who managed to get place, were in the Church, with its doors wide open. The full complement of the Aldermen of the *Sitiada* occupied the central passage of the temple. I can imagine how astonished the travellers were, male and female, at this spectacle. And how happy Don Juan Bonal would be: Who having completed his first greeting, indicated to the Brothers and Sisters that they should kiss the hand of all the ecclesiastical Aldermen, canons Novella and Cistué - I have my eye on the latter, he is going to give us a hard time. Here the reports introduce a pearl. I suppose Don Juan pronounced a small discourse before the Aldermen, and wanted one of the Brothers or Sisters to later corroborate his words on health and offering to *the Sitiada*. The case is that one or the other pronounced Castellano with difficulty, the language they were used to, being Catalan. The chronicle, in this case written by the canon Novella, indicates with pleasant complacence:

- In the way they were able to express themselves in their broken language, they manifested their desires to serve the patients.

Of course, the ones who would speak were Brother José Torradellas and Sister María Rafols, the brand new Presidents.

Certainly, the canon Novella, when all is said and done, an "alderman", writes that in a little discourse "in broken language" the recent arrivals included promises of submission to the *Sitiada*...The canon wanted "to state in the Act" how obedient they came.

The greetings brought to a conclusion, the aldermen invited the group "to go up to the Hall where chocolate had been prepared for them". Nice and warm, how wonderful it would be. The crowd was such "that they hardly let the Sisters and Brothers and the *Sitiada* pass". Applauses and uproar.

Not everyone! The chronicle emphasizes this; the chronicler heard "malign language" as the Sisters and Brothers climbed up the main stairs:

- May their legs break before they reach upstairs.

The chronicler found it difficult to describe the causes of that anger, he writes honestly:

- The discontent of a certain class of servants of both sexes who were in the Hospital is indicated, because they foresaw their inevitable sacking; others, who had to continue, did not want to have in sight witnesses and even more persons meddling with their actions that were in contradiction to the delicacy of conscience.

After having the chocolate, the Aldermen wanted to accompany the Brothers and Sisters on a first visit "to the Wards of the patients of both sexes": it must have been an emotional spectacle "because of the tender expressions with which they

consoled" the patients. Perhaps the Aldermen began to get impatient, because they "pulled the recently arrived away by force", who "did not show any sign of getting tired of conversing with the patients: finally they were given the respective sections that had been prepared for them as rooms".

When leaving, the Aldermen left Fr. Juan, the Brother President and the Sister President, an affectionate order: Three days of holidays, they will begin their work on the first of January.

- So that they could rest from the fatigues of the journey; and so that during those three days they could see something of the city and present themselves before the Lord Bishop.

I don't know if each Sister was assigned an independent cell, but my opinion is that the Sitiada did not have enough finance: In reality the "department" prepared for the Sisters was a large passage with separations improvised by partitions. Alone, or in the company of other Sisters, María Rafols, so young and already captain of a patrol of a charitable vanguard lived her first night of the convent. It was still raining very heavily; the wind of Moncayo would lash the windows of the Hospital. We call Zaragoza the bride of the wind, some nights it even seems that her bridegroom is going to kidnap her and take her away swiftly as if on wings. That night perhaps the wind kept her awake helping her with her silent colloquy with the Brother Jesus, President of all the Hospital workers of human History. He, Jesus, President with a Capital P. She, María Rafols, President, "delegated". In the face of people who give an example of sacrifice and charity, the public applauds their surrender, their service to the marginalized, to those in pain. What is behind the sacrifice in the bases of their charity, is not questioned: the "why" is not investigated, for what reason does this woman give her caresses to the dry skin of someone on his deathbed. The secret, where....

I consider it stupid to start commenting that very willingly would we ask the Creator to do a touch up of some of the norms

that move the sun and the stars. However, I dare to desire that Yahveh would consent on some familiarity between the angels and us, as happened during the centuries of the Old Testament: for example, that her Angel Guardian would announce to María Rafols, the first night of her "presidency", how many thousands of daughters, Sisters of Charity, her daughters, would also have "the first night" of loving colloquy with the Brother Jesus, General President of all the Hospital workers.

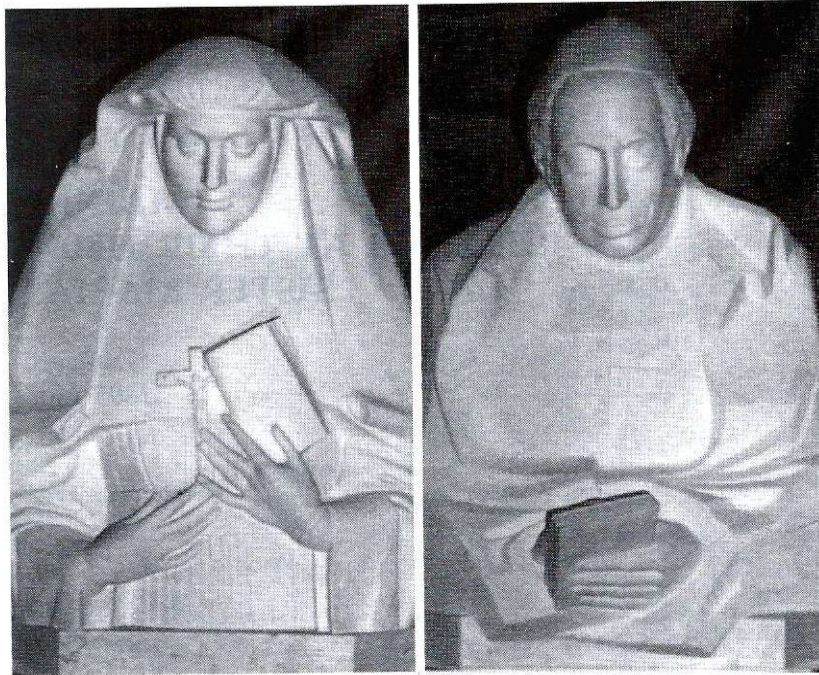
And maybe, who knows, someone who would tell me that the Angel had the permission...



7

**"MAINLY
HAVING AT THEIR HELM
SISTER MARIA"**

Zaragoza
1805-1807



The distinguished sculptor Pablo Serrano made two busts: One of Mother María Rafols and the other of Father Juan. Both are preserved in the Novitiate of Santa Ana, Zaragoza.

How did they do it? How did the new Sisters and Brothers behave in the Hospital of Zaragoza? There was expectation. Against them, against the Sisters and the Brothers, the “young servants” had formulated their dark threat:

- May they break their legs before they reach upstairs...

How did it go, what did they do?

Before anything else, let us state what the result was: The Hospital was given an impressive change, sensational.

However, may the truth be told - at first it was so-so for the Brothers and later it was just terrible.

For the Sisters, on the other hand, it was glory: they fulfilled their work divinely, they earned the affection of the whole Hospital. And don't forget that that building enclosed the greatest miseries of the world.

The Sisters worked so marvellously, that an Alderman of the *Sitiada* responded to whoever had asked, “How do they cope?”; this is what he replied:

- I dare to say that with these women it is easy to govern a hospital; and without them it is very difficult.

Govern a hospital like that one, and in those times, was a daunting task.

The “young servants” did not take more than a week to attack the Brothers. They couldn't do anything to the Sisters. The Brothers of course, were soon liquidated; it was a shame.

Sr. María, so young and already captain, “president” of the feminine Fraternity, demonstrated having a hand “gentle and

firm", with which she guided, and defended, her small flock without leaving opportunities for penetration by the bad agents of discord.

However she had the upper hand: the "young men" hardly had any access to her Wards. In those times it was unthinkable that "Sisters" would care for "men" patients with any ailment whatsoever, much less when it concerned venereal diseases; thus they had the women's wards assigned to them; and those who collaborated with the Sisters were not the "young men" but the "young women", less "dangerous" at that moment. Even this barrier was soon crossed by the Sisters of María Rafols, when the brothers failed: the Sisters "will occupy" the whole Hospital, with men and women patients, without great fuss.

A portrait of hers is what is missing: the true face of María Rafols. What a pity, there is no photo, that's what we lack.

You, the readers, cannot imagine how tricky it is for a writer to describe the facial characteristics of a person, so that it may "be seen" by those who have not dealt with the person nor have they contemplated a portrait. Let's take a look at the colour of the eyes, the delicacy of the skin, of the pink cheeks; we look for unusual adjectives to attribute to the lips, to the tip of the nose, to the dimple on the chin; we exalt the shine of the spotless white teeth, the black eyebrows, rosy cheeks... And at the end the reader is left with not even a clue of how our hero really was in mortal flesh, our heroine.

If above all this, it concerns a "sister", still "a secret nun", because the Sitiada does not want to hear of "Fraternities elevated to religious congregations"; "secret", well, but a nun; then the difficult description of María Rafols, who was on the exterior, of course that's what it seemed, she was invincible.

As just a few years ago the daughters of Mother Rafols got Pablo Serrano to sculpt the bust of their Foundress, giving us the vision of a modern artist loaded with spiritual vigour, I am amazed: Pablo Serrano signifies the powerful force of a sculptor,

perhaps the most forthright of contemporary Spain; there are for example Pérez Galdós in Las Palmas and Unamuno in Salamanca. With María Rafols... I think she "escaped " from the hands of the artist. My unforgettable José Luis Martín Descalzo praises "the classic cut" of the sculpture, "serene, austere... her lips point to an approaching smile; the eyes, with a little mascara, lead us towards the mystery...". I'm sorry José Luis, but with the way you used to like to reprimand me, you would enjoy making a row if you heard me saying that María Rafols was far above Pablo Serrano, the image he left must have been excellent, but it is a cold image, only fascinating, not mystic: instead of taking this devotional path, that evidently was very far from Pablo Serrano, if only he had dared to give us his María Rafols, fragile, symbolic, with the intrepid features as for example he gave to the "peasant woman" in his monument at Teruel: a "Hospitalary María" cast in bronze at the doors of the pus and the lice. This would have been the "true face" of María.

Another great friend of Martín Descalzo and mine, the Jesuit Luis Alonso Schökel, the recognised Biblical scholar of international fame, invented when we were young a descriptive guide line for valiant personages: Take a look at them from another angle, "consider them" from a significant, symbolic angle. For example, said Schökel: the most beautiful Helen was the cause of the war of Troy; how can the beauty of that woman be described? Well, Homer managed to do it utilizing a peculiar point of view: the Greek rhapsodist relates that when the old men and women of the martyred city saw Helen pass through the streets of Troy, even though they were tormented, hungry, submitted to a cruel siege, and walled in while their children fell fighting, on contemplating Helen they commented:

- Her beauty is such that it is worth a war.

Such an accurate flirtatious remark has never been made, not even in Andalucía, about the beauty of a woman; what does it matter what the colour of her eyes was, nor the black of her eyelashes: it was worth tolerating a war for her sake.

To the "María Rafols case" a parallel method fits like a glove. We remain without exactly contemplating her face because nobody could photograph it: just these first years of the XIXth century the "discoverers" of photography, Daguerre and Niepce, apply iodine to the copper plated sheets trying "to fix the image". They will achieve it, but the matter is a long story and we cannot expect that these scientists would go to Zaragoza to put before their "machine" a nun from the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital. What fortune it would have been if the cosmic look of Francisco de Goya had fallen on our Hospital: what a portrait of the young María Rafols we have lost.

Not a photo. We have only been told, "she was tall, gracious and slender". We know this... from outside. From within her about her intimate, profound portrait, what hues and what shades do we know!

They are called "Sisters of Charity", and with the passage of time their patron "Santa Ana" will be incorporated into their title.

Sisters of Charity; and as such they lived and exercised their profession.

Even the Brothers: their start was impeccable, exemplary.

The people of Zaragoza saw the Hospital converted into the eighth wonder of the world.

They felt proud.

And rightly so!

Our friend, the "enthusiastic chronicler" Señor Casamayor noted on the 1st day of January 1805:

- The day dawned gentle and clear...

A delightful day, old friend: Zaragoza initiated its year with a "gentle and clear" day. Now let's continue:

-
- and the feast of the Infant Jesus was celebrated in the Church of the convent of St. Dominic.

Very good, that's where we are going. Casamayor continues:

- That was the day that saw the beginnings of the Brothers and the Sisters of Charity, who had come from the city of Barcelona...

We already know that; and "they started" in this manner:

- ... confessing and receiving communion at the Oratory of the Soup Fraternity.

The members of this Fraternity, what words and what a "daring" title, which still survives, they go voluntarily to talk to the patients of the Hospital and they serve them the breakfast soup.

Casamayor does not write his note on the first day of January itself, but some months later; and he already has facts to transmit to us the impressions that circulate in Zaragoza about the Brothers and the Sisters, who "having confessed and received communion" started their tasks:

- They left immediately to wash the hands of the patients and to clean stables (wards) and beds, from that time onwards taking charge of all types of assistance, be it day or night.

All the women's wards were effectively in the hands of the Sisters; for the men on the other hand, the number of Brothers was not sufficient; hence the "young men of service", besides functioning under the orders of the Brothers in some of the wards, they continued managing others. A very bad solution, as we will later see.

Even now I want to take a note from the "diary" of Señor Casamayor, who certifies that with the presence of the Brothers and Sisters...

- ... all classes of patients had benefitted a lot and the Hospital had been freed of expenses of clerks, commonly called "zoqueteros".

.....they are called zoqueteros: not "blockheads", silly people, rather they are called "zoqueteros", vagabonds who go around collecting pieces of bread. That means, the said "young men" occupy the last step of the salaried of the period, they worked at the Hospital as the last recourse for subsistence: Nothing strange then, their lowest human quality.

The Oratory of the Soup Fraternity, installed within the Hospital itself, was a great opportunity for the Brothers and the Sisters: there they could celebrate "their exercises of prayer and rosary", till their own chapel was put up.

Casamayor was not exaggerating. The "official" documents of the *Sitiada* refer "to the holy service of assistance to the sick" carried out by the Fraternities, "each one in the ward of his or her own sex", the Brothers with the men and the Sisters with the women.

- Very soon the advantages will be experienced.

The first, very notable, was the cleanliness: To see those wards, black with filth earlier, now "shining", seemed a miracle:

- Living quarters, beds and crockery of the patients... There is no day when the wards are not swept twice in the day, besides cleaning immediately any dirt or water that falls onto the floor; and no day when the beds are not made once for every patient; and no day when the crockery is not washed. There was no bed that was not taken away immediately and substituted by another clean one for the new patient when a patient went away or died, the clothes of the others were changed with regular frequency.

About the cleanliness of the beds, I find a gladdening testimony of the poor priests of the Seminary of San Carlos who came to

hear the confessions of the patients and who would sit there appalled by the dirt of the clothes: now "anybody can come near the beds, and even feel confident, to hear the confessions of the patients without the fear of dirtying themselves on the floors or pick up anything from the beds". Anything, what thing? Lice, of course.

"The uproars that were experienced earlier and which could not always have been remedied because persons of so much respect were nowhere in sight" has disappeared from the wards.

The patients receive medicine and food "on time", "with punctuality and zeal".

Besides that, they receive: consolation, company, "love and watchfulness proper of a mother or a spouse":

- In so far as the painful situation allows, they carry it out with devotions inclining themselves to the conformity that was so necessary: they pray the Hail Mary and the Acts of Faith, the Rosary, and the due Thanksgiving after lunch and dinner.

The "Passionero" priests are delighted that the "suspicious visits" had disappeared; and that the Sisters prepare the patients to confess, to receive Holy Communion, to die in a Christian manner.

From time to time, the Aldermen and the Passioneros look through the corner of their eye at the wards where there are no Brothers that continue to be managed by the "zoqueteros" young men; the contrast frightens them:

- In these wards people smoke and fight, they use obscene language, men and women are seen seated on the beds of the patients, they play cards; they don't go near them to console them, or to clean them.

- Our friend Sástago emphasises "the charity of the Sisters, the cleanliness, the consolation to the sick, even spiritually moving them to resignation".
- Never in my life had I seen the patients hair being combed, the uncomfortable insects being killed, dirty glasses being cleaned, applying the poultices ordered by the professors; not a single article of clothing is lost, things are stitched when they have a little time and energy, robberies are avoided...

He concludes:

- If this is not true, either I am blind or I am only fibbing.

It was true; he was not blind, our good Count Sástago.

These women had come to fulfill a vocation, they respond to a call. Thanks to the tenacious search carried out in the papers of that period, we know the "project of life" designed by Fr. Juan Bonal for his Hospital Sisters.

You will remember, that when Fr. Bonal made his first trip from Barcelona to Zaragoza to establish the transfer of the Fraternities, with the Aldermen of the *Sitiada*: Bonal brought with him "a little Notebook" where the conditions of the agreement were written. The *Sitiada* studied and touched up those conditions elaborating another definitive Little *Notebook*, one that was agreed upon by the two parties: the *Sitiada* wanted to leave an unappealable record of their absolute authority, of the submission of the Fraternities to the norms specific to the Hospital; and above all, they wanted to close all avenues to the changing of the Fraternities into "religious congregations", which would mean an independent authority and regime.

This was the "agreement" signed as a judicial platform of the Fraternities with the Hospital. But logically those groups of men and women, created by Bonal and other "passionero" priests in

Cataluña, consecrated themselves to the tricky task of generously caring for the patients "for a religious motive"; they were sustained by a Christian ideal of response to the deep sentiments of love for Jesus Christ and for their suffering brothers and sisters: A young girl of twenty-three years like María Rafols, "tall, gracious and slender", doesn't decide to renounce having a husband and children just "for nothing", dedicating days and nights to rescuing beggars from the gutter and washing the sick: she chooses her path "for love". What love?

The love described in the Gospel when the Lord Jesus tells us that He is with the poor, the sick, the prisoners, in the marginalized; that He is the poor, the prisoner, the marginalized.

The women, some very young women, others already mature, who see Jesus *thus*, who see Him *there* "incarnated in the suffering", suffer an invading illumination of the Spirit; and "they respond", leaving behind everything, they *serve*, they *act*, they *love*.

There is no doubt that with *these women*, Fr. Bonal and his Hospitalary priest colleagues of the Catalan area decided to assemble organic patrols, in accordance with the characteristic style of "religious congregations": giving them "a scheme of functioning" and some "solid spiritual foundations". This was so much more urgent because of the fact that they were breaking the traditional manner of "being nuns" exercised till then; that is to say, they will not be "protected" by the walls of a monastery, "sheltered" by the defence of the cloister. They are going "to face" the Hospital wards, directly dealing with the patients.

In a word, "besides" the "Little Notebook" agreed upon by Fr. Bonal with the *Sitiada* to sign the agreement that incorporated Fraternities to "Nuestra Señora de Gracia", they brought their own internal, private "rules" or "constitutions" not subjected to the approval of the Aldermen, rather "reserved" for their profound existence: their religious group.

These "Constitutions" which design an authentic "congregation" have appeared. They will remain discreetly

recondite, avoiding the suspicions of the Aldermen. But in them are stated in black and white how the Sisters are: Why they do what they do, and what is their style.

I copy in inverted commas literally:

Because "it is a matter of faith: Jesus Christ receives as His own everything that is done for His poor". As clear as this, as simple: "They will be greatly subjected to the poor Patients - the capital, please note, was put by the document, the Constitutions themselves - respecting them and recognising them as their Lords - this capital is also theirs, as in reality they are... seeing in every one the person of Jesus Christ".

Or rather, let us understand: each time a patient enters the gates of the Hospital, whoever has entered is Jesus Christ. They, the Sisters, are going to be their nurses; this is how they think:

- *If they were to take care of a great personage or a royal person, how much care and vigilance would they put in so as not to show disrespect and to obey punctiliously all their orders? So, how much more...!*

How much more here! They decide to give refuge to the Patient with affection, adore him, and fuss over him:

- *When the Patients arrive at the Hospital, they wash their hands and feet, they cut their hair..., they will give them their breakfast, lunch and dinner with all their love and charity, trying to make them contented, varying and changing the food, giving them eggs instead of meat, or cooked greens...*

Starting from the presupposition of identification, of "incarnation" of Christ Jesus in each "Patient", they sublimate their work, inevitably dirty, raising it to an angelic level: They take care of "Jesus Christ represented in the Poor", another expressive capital. Here you have a fascinating litany:

- *In the cleaning of dirty glasses, the Sisters consider that the Son of God, to clean us of our faults, became man...*

- *When they make the beds, they consider that they are making them for Jesus....*
- *When they give water to the Patients, they consider that they are feeding the tired Jesus...*
- *When they give them their food, they will do it with the fervour of Martha serving Jesus who was lodged in their home...*
- *When they give dinner, they will consider Jesus in the Cenacle...*
- *When they sweep the wards, they will consider how dirty their souls still are...*

Fascinating, truly fascinating.

And one feels foolish reading now, from a distance, the timetable, the detailed rules of living together, the "style" to which their behaviour adjusts.

They get up at four in the morning. Thirty minutes of getting ready and sixty of mental prayer. From five-thirty to six-thirty they do a first cleaning of the wards of the patients, "cleaning the night glasses", thus bad impressions and bad smells are avoided for the persons who later begin to circulate. At six-thirty they hear Mass. At seven they begin their actual Hospital day, till eleven: dressings, cleaning, beds, crockery, accompany the doctors during their visits, they give out the medicines, they serve the soups and the meal. From eleven to two they fulfill their spiritual exercises: reading, rosary, examination of conscience- yes, friends: every morning and every evening they examine their behaviour, if they have been good, if they lost their patience... they eat, they talk, they rest. At two they accompany the second round of doctors, medicate the patients, distribute soups and dinner. From seven to eight prayer and the second intimate examination of conscience. They have dinner. From eight-thirty to ten they check the dressings, change the clothes of the patients, take a round with the Doctor on duty. They go to bed at ten. Except of course those of the first "Vigil"

till one in the morning, and the second "vigil" from one to four: they watch, they walk through the wards, they console the most afflicted.

Thus every day, and every night.

- But this is a mortal timetable.
- They are compensated.
- Is it a question of faith?
- They have it with the presence of Christ; a question of faith.

Absolute faith, without cracks.

These women, from the start, besides professing "chastity, poverty and obedience", speak of "hospitality": it consists in this—give the patient one's own life.

Even one's own "spiritual life", one's prayer. Just check out this curious text:

- If during the time of our confession and communion, the most venerable aspects of the spiritual life, assistance to some Patient arises, these devotions should be omitted to answer the obligation of charity to the needy Patient.

I suppose it would be difficult for Fr. Bonal to manage medieval books of mysticism from the Rhine at that period of time, but this recommendation to his nuns marries perfectly with a celebrated maxim of the Meister Eckhart: "If you are in ecstasy and your neighbour asks you to take him a cup of tea, leave your ecstasy and make him that cup of tea". More or less, in free translation: I do not have the German text at hand. Gosh! Fr. Juan Bonal and his Sisters...

Lodged they are, in that long corridor, with improvised divisions for cells. I think the Aragonese expression of the new Sisters who keep joining and who describe "the furniture of their

convent" is very amusing: "In the dining room we have four "*pobrecicas*" *poor little* tables (our familiar aragonese diminutive), with legs in the shape of a charpoy; a fairly big picture of the Last Supper with glass and the frame of walnut wood; the seats were of gypsum. In the cell of María Rafols there was a bed of iron, painted dark blue, without adornments, very simple, with four "*piñicas*" *little knobs* in the shape of *little artichokes* of gold coloured metal. There was also a "*pilica*" of Muel (mud ceramic) with the attributes of the Passion..."

The details of the cell of the Mother, her elder Sister or President have remained indelible on this nun: "... a little table with a black oilcloth and *little flowers*, a big reed chair with a high back painted chocolate colour, the same as the table: a small wash basin painted blue, basin and jug with a blue stripe. The cover of the bed was of percal, with coffee coloured background and full of bluish leaves".

The first years her ambit of work was circumscribed to the female wards, including the demented and the Foundling Hospital; and of course, the wardrobes. Sister María was in everything, a mirror to her founding companions and guide to those who kept entering: the 12 initial ones became 17 in two years; 21 in the third year. We know only one name, others remained written in that Other Book that God the Father carries in His own handwriting.

The tradition of the nuns has dedicated memorable praise to Sister María: "She had the affection and love of a true mother for all her daughters.... at night she got together all the young Sisters and entertained them... she assisted the patients, exercising with them works of mercy... even though she had great affability and kindness, she knew to reconcile them with fortitude... in her dealings with the doctors, practitioners, the gentlemen who formed the Board of Government, there never was discord, she always procured peace and good harmony... where she was, there never were discussions of any type... she had great presence of mind and great strength of spirit..."

Yes, soon to be twenty-five, the Elder Sister, "tall, slender", appeared resolute, valiant. The phlebotomy examination caused a sensation among the Aldermen of the *Sitiada*.

I confess to you that I had to use the dictionary to know the medical meaning of the word, I didn't have a clue.

"Phlebotomy" means the art of bleeding. We well know the importance medicine gave, until very recently, to the bleedings. Today, according to experts, bleeding "preserves a certain efficiency" in the crisis of severe pulmonary edema and in attacks of cardiac asthma. In olden times, the frequent use of bleeding made it necessary to have health workers who had mastery over the technique and obtained experience: the Hospitals convoked examinations of phlebotomy and granted the corresponding diploma. The perforation of a vein of the fold of the elbow, or an arm or a leg, carried out by introducing a needle or perforating with a cut of the scalpel, imposes a certain expression of doubt by us who lack training. The aldermen of the *Sitiada* had recommended to the "lieutenant surgeon" of the Hospital a short learning course that was finished off with the examining of the candidates before a tribunal of certain solemnity.

What nobody could have expected of "Nuestra Señora de Gracia", happened: four Sisters, with María Rafols first, got themselves inscribed in the course of phlebotomy. They had solicited prior authorization of the aldermen. It's a pity internal details of the Hospital escaped our chronicler Señor Casamayor, surely the news caused commotion and some scandal: the Sisters seem quite daring.

Their examination, brilliant: "very outstanding", according to the official Act of the *Sitiada*. The Act adds that the Sisters "were at an advantage" as compared to the "dispensers" who were already trained and "with years of practice". María Rafols, with Sisters Tecla, María Rosa and Raimunda were declared "apt to execute the operation of bleeding". Later papers of the Hospital

confirm that effectively, they practiced it later, "with admirable skill".

Now I must relate to you that two years after working in Zaragoza, the Sisters soon got a call from Huesca: to take charge of the Hospital and the House of Mercy.

After a few years invitations came one after the other, Canarias, Madrid, Burgos, Alcañiz... But the *Sitiada*, obstinate in their distrust and their negativity: impedes the Sisters from escaping from their hands to create a "religious congregation"; thus they cut their wings.

What I would like to put today in full view of the most Illustrious Lord Aldermen of the *Sitiada* is the world map that the Mother General of the Sisters of St. Anne has presented me, with the actual status of the congregation, from England to Chile, from Mexico to Papua, from the Ivory Coast to the Philippines: including Spain, twenty-five countries, with almost three thousand Sisters. And to think they were chained for half a century, not even to the towns of the Province of Zaragoza were they permitted to go.

To Huesca, yes, they were permitted, they couldn't refuse: it was none other than the Bishop who asked for them, who automatically received backing from his colleague, the Zaragozaan Archbishop, president of the *Sitiada*, and of the two canon aldermen; three votes of major consideration.

I guess that Don Juan Bonal must have been thrilled to implant his Sisters in Huesca, the small Upper Aragonese city, in whose University he had studied when young.

Huesca was scourged by a terrible outbreak of the plague in the year 1804. Its Hospital "Our Lady of Hope" was without health personnel. Bishop Sánchez Cutanda, a native of Teruel and scholar of law, president of the Huescan *Sitiada*, did not know what to do; neither did his aldermen. From 1805 they began to

hear about the marvels related in Zaragoza, because of the Sisters who had arrived at the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia": they dreamt about bringing them to Huesca. The Bishop decided to request the Zaragozaan *Sitiada* to send " a Sister capable of taking charge of the government of the Fraternity": Don Juan Bonal was put in charge of looking for a team of Sisters.

Responding to the Episcopal petition, so say the papers, *the Sitiada* of Zaragoza "proceeded with the greatest gallantry", how well-behaved: "even though they were sensitive to parting with any of the Sisters, they wanted to make the most complete gift", choosing as the head of the new foundation Sister Teresa Calvet, one of the twelve foundresses of Zaragoza, a woman, according to the *Sitiada* "of much virtue, much naturalness, of much charity and the most appropriate disposition".

Fr. Bonal, always discreet, silent, prepared the team: the Bishop asked him for twelve Sisters, eight for the Hospital and four for the House of Mercy, where the foundling children are sheltered. On the 19th of May 1807, Don Juan took his Sisters to Huesca: Teresa and Antonia, taken from Zaragoza; the others brought from Cataluña, six of them cultivated by the great friend of Bonal in Valls, Mosén (Sir, title given to clergymen in Cataluña and Aragon) Cessat. Both the houses formed just one Fraternity under the direction of Sister Teresa, for whom it was a great sacrifice to separate herself from the Zaragozaan "mother house".

The "pacts" of Huesca repeat clauses of Zaragoza; the Sisters will continue the mode of existence proper to their Zaragozaan community, the habit, and the customs. Both the *Sitiadas* oblige them to be "independent"; but they maintain unbreakable links.

The Sisters, do extremely well.

The Brothers... they are sinking.

And because of the fault of canon Cistué, the Brothers were about to drag the Sisters with them.

The battle was born of the "deaf resentment" that the arrival of the Sisters aroused in the "young men workers", who, the truth is, saw their moral and economic shady deals threatened first, then their job itself. They decided to defend themselves tooth and nail mixing astuteness with violence. Besides, they had the villainy to get the canon Cistué on their side.

The final objective of the attacks was to finish with the Fraternities, throw them all out, the Brothers and the Sisters. The onslaught against the Brothers was easy; against the Sisters it was difficult.

The twelve Brothers who came with the first expedition from Barcelona set to work in the wards assigned to them: with enthusiasm similar to that of the Sisters. The group of Brothers, so it seems, lacked the interior cohesion that the Sisters brought with them; they lacked maturity: maybe Fr. Bonal had to recruit them in a hurry that autumn of 1804, because of the urgency to go to Zaragoza. However, their wards changed colour, they were clean, the patients attended to, the patients were happy. Their success stood out by the contrast with the neighbouring wards where the "zoqueteros", servant young men continued: rows, living it up, gambling, "their liberty in the dealings between women and men is shameful to talk about".

The papers denounce "the tricks and wiles" of the young men against the Brothers, who were constantly exposed to "innumerable offensive words and taunting"; they were disqualified as ignorant, because they lacked aptitudes "for such a tedious and tough ministry", because they had been picked "by hand" when Mosén Bonal needed them: "they took this office so as not to work on their own, that is if they had any work, or because they had been persuaded that those who embraced it would have less burdens", "inexperienced persons" who pretended to substitute the "trained nurses with practice of many years".

This initial lack of professionalism would be true. The Brothers hooked on too fast to new aspirants, both Catalan and Aragonese: another ten were soon added to the initial twelve, plus 50 "probationers". Of course there was a system of incorporation, thought out undoubtedly by Fr. Bonal: the aspirants spent a period of trial and examinations; then they "used to serve three months gratuitously in exchange for maintenance"; they wore the habit; and they were still submitted to six months of test. However, the upset caused by those entering and those leaving warns of grave defects of formation.

That is to say that the assault of the "mozos" against the Brothers found fertile soil. The conspiracy reached unbelievable heights: "someone" robbed a quantity of linen and sheets from the wardrobe of the Hospital, the custody of which corresponded to the Brothers and Sisters. The "mozos" shouted the scandal and accused the Brothers of being thieves and careless.

Faced with such evil cynical art, the Brothers lacked defence. Every week the supreme authority of the Hospital corresponded to one Regidor (alderman). The "mozos" "flattered and gratified" the Regidor whose turn it was, setting his orders against those of the Superior of the Brothers. The orders of an Alderman to the Brothers frequently went contrary to the orders of the Alderman of the preceding week. Not that it mattered too much to the Aldermen that these discrepancies appeared blatant.

We men have less capacity of tolerance than women; at least this is what happened with the Brothers of the Hospital. They lacked the endurance of the Sisters: they abandoned the undertaking by the number... And on the 8th of April 1807, the President, Brother José Torradellas decided that he too was going away; he wrote a letter, ingenious and loyal, explaining to the great lords of the *Sitiada* how tired they were, their grief and their sense of depression.

He handed over his letter of resignation to the Alderman incharge of the week.

Bad luck, that week it was the canon Cistué.

Don Francisco Cistué, intelligent, good jurist, with trimmings of a "noble" family, canon, dean and prestigious, offers the image of the "illustrious" clerics of the period: liberal, pro-french maybe, prayed very little... Let's get down to specifics, not much of a friend of the patients at the Hospital praying the Rosary aloud.

Cistué, ill at that time, did not attend the sessions of the *Sitiada* in the year 1804: hence he did not participate in the negotiations of Fr. Bonal. However, a sermon of his of the Feast of Our Lady of Dolours of 1805, includes this paragraph which I copy here from the *Diary* of Casamayor:

- The Orator greatly extolled the advantages that were noticed in the infirmary since the installation of the Sisters of Charity; the maids were very clean and tidy, and so also were the wards of the poor: all thanks to the care and refinement of the said Sisters, who took great pains to have them neat and tidy.

What is life! The "mozos" won over the canon who would have thrown out the Brothers from the Hospital a couple of years later and "maybe" even the Sisters.

We ignore the process of his disillusionment. But on the 8th of April 1807, when Brother Torradellas handed over his letter of resignation to him, Cistué, who became absolutely furious, decided to annihilate the Fraternities: that of the men immediately; that of the women, in due time. And if Count Sástago hadn't confronted our friend, face-to-face, he would have done it.

The crisis was terrifying, and finished off with a formal process at the Royal Chamber of Madrid.

Flourishing the letter of Brother Torradellas, Cistué presented it before the *Sitiada* of the 19th of April - he did not waste any

time, the day after he received it - a judgement putting an injunction on the stay of the Brothers in the Hospital. The fury of the canon appeared unjust if one examined just one detail: he criticized the letter of the poor Brother as injurious, crude, insulting; when it was really full of humanity, devotion and courtesy. During the whole crisis, even during the process, Cistué maintains a posture of incomprehensible aversion. Obstinate, relentless.

Sástago pitched himself against him. The voting was a draw - three-three against and in favour of the Brothers. They decided to put down in writing the arguments of each of the parties. Marques de Montemuzo, a legalist "square" unhappy because the Hospital was forgetting the ordinances of the times of Felipe IV, voted with Cistué; and also did the administrator-accountant, resolute supporter of the "mozos". Sástago was backed by the precentor Novella and the Marques de Fuente Olivar.

Sitiada of the 13th of April: reading of the reports, and voting with a draw. Session of the 16th of April, draw again. Cistué attacks. Sástago counterattacks:

- The Brothers receive food, outer clothes and a small amount for their underwear, as agreed upon, as compensation for their services; aside from the parenthesis of one hour of mental prayer in the morning and half an hour in the evening, the whole day is spent taking turns among themselves, at the service of the patients: cleaning the dirty glasses, tidying the wards, the beds and the patients, lunch and dinner; they fulfill everything the doctors order them, they clean the hair of the patients, they console and they animate.

And now I am showing you the other side:

- In the wards where there are no Brothers, the patients are served by medical assistants, surgeons and mozos

or servants who do the cleaning who are a kind of porter... taking advantage whenever they can, without scruples, to rob the patients and even the Hospital itself.

Cistué, unchangeable: *Sitiada* of the 16th of April, a draw.

Sástago resolved to go to the Archbishop, President of the *Sitiada*, and who resided at the Court. He ordered besides a probe among the patients who were unanimous in their defence of the Brothers; and he requested reports from the confessor priests of the Hospital.

The *Sitiada* of the 27th of April received a letter from the Archbishop "advising that they try by all the means imaginable to get the Brothers to continue". Cistué bit the bridle. He resisted.

But on the 2nd of May, Montezumo renewed his call for the old *Ordenances* of Felipe IV. Sástago resolved it by surmounting the controversy and recurred it to the King.

The Royal Chamber opened the process, and its resolution, on the 11th June 1807, ordered, "that the Brothers and Sisters continue at the Hospital". On the 27th of July, the Aldermen of the *Sitiada*, even Cistué and his two friends, signed their obedience to the Royal Order. Cistué didn't give up; he presented an expedient, to which he received no reply.

The bad thing was that the Brothers, in that entire storm, lost heart: they got reduced to five, to one, to none. At the doors of 1808, the masculine Fraternity of the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" had been extinguished. It disappeared. Several Brothers looked for jobs in other hospitals.

And the Sisters?

The commotion of Cistué hardly grazed them: the canon understood that if he went "against them" he was stepping on a minefield; the whole of Zaragoza would tear him to pieces.

While the first three Superiors of the Brothers abandoned their post, María Rafols continued serene at the helm of her group.

Only Cistué dared to guess the future, he acted as prophet:

- With regard to the Fraternity of women, who came here at the same time for the care of the Female Patients, I recognize that, *for now*, there is no motive for them to follow the same fate (throw them out, like the men were); and I confess in good faith, that this Establishment can produce good effects provided that...

Lord Almighty, this prophet: *For now*. The highlighting is mine, naturally. "Good effects"; thus he subjects himself to the *Sitiada*, he couldn't do less. Words of the canon.

Sástago gave Cistué a forceful conclusive reply:

- And with respect to the fact that Señor Cistué offers a small eulogy to the Sisters with a *for now*, I say that they are inimitable; that within their district, subjected to the *Sitiada*, the Sister Mother has to be sent without subjection to the Senior Nurse.

The canon was as quiet as a mouse, not a word.

In the testimony collected by Sástago during the process of the Royal Chamber, there is a sentence of the penitentiary Francisco Amar:

- I am inclined to think the congregation of the Sisters being on such a flourishing note, in such a short time they could reach the degree of perfection that prudently is possible in human things.

Don Francisco, I'm going to ask the Mother General of the Sisters of St. Anne to request for celestial permission for you to come to witness the Beatification of the "Sister Mother" María Rafols on the 16th of October 1994 in St. Peter's Square: You have

earned it. I trust that at least you will see the festivity from some cosmic balcony....

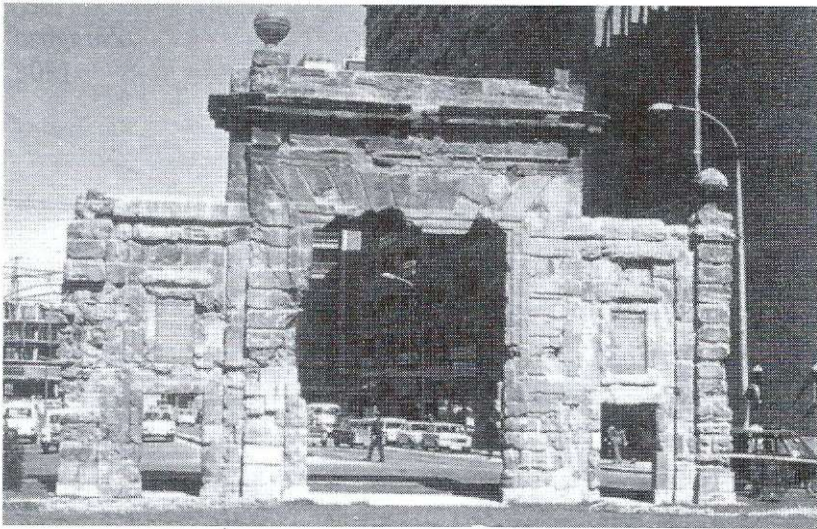
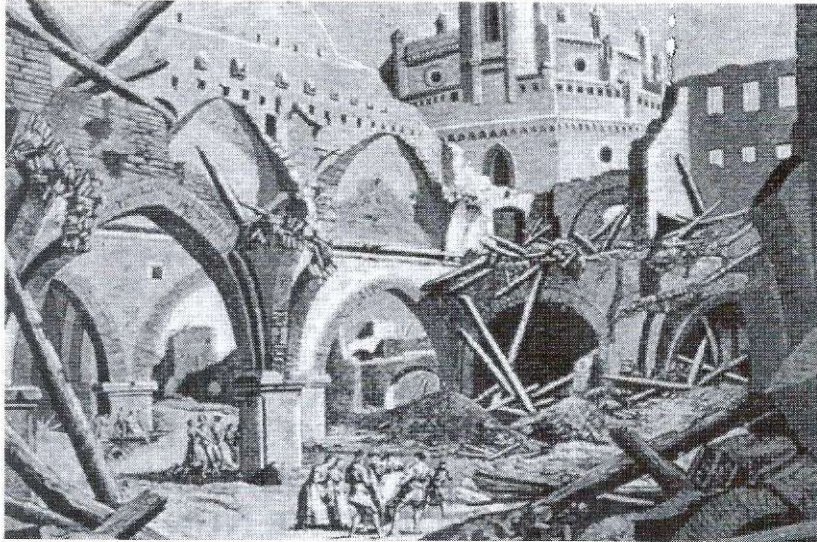
After the process against the Brothers was closed, the official *News* of the *Sitiada* commented a posteriori:

- Even though the *Sitiada* had the greatest confidence and were sure that the Sisters would make the greatest progress in this Hospital, mainly with Sister María Rafols at the head, named Senior Sister at the beginning, in which duty she continues today, carrying it out with the greatest skill and satisfaction....

Well, Mr. Secretary of Acts: You have used the word "senior" four times, three times as an adjective and once as an adverb; and the genitive "which" incorrectly; but you used one phrase correctly, phenomenal:

- Mainly having Sister María Rafols at the head.
Phenomenal.





*Illustration of the period with the ruins of the Hospital.
Below, the famous door of the Carmen.*

The thunderbolt of war falls over Zaragoza.

Suddenly María Rafols and her sisters are going to find themselves right in the eye of the hurricane.

Till now they lead a silent existence, dedicated with affection to the patients of their Hospital. Zaragoza knows that they exist because the visitors comment on how "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" has changed its image from the time the Sisters reached there. They exercised goodness quietly. With the passage of time, one of the daughters of Mother Rafols named Pabla and almost a saint, would invent this prodigious phrase, when she is General of the Institute, and would propose it as a norm of life for the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne: "No one should know that we exist only because of the noise". Beautifully said.

From 1804 to 1807, the Sisters of the Hospital made no noise.

This 1808 they are put in, even though they do not want it, within the noise of war unleashed over Spain. They will be heard.

The hurricane will reach them.

The hurricane is called Napoleon Buonaparte.

He is enveloping Europe, Spain, Zaragoza furiously... and the Hospital "Nuestra Señora de Gracia". With María Rafols and her Sisters within. War invades them; they enter the heart of the struggle.

The first months of 1808 represent perhaps the saddest page of the history of Spain; then came May, the second of May 1808, and the Spanish people recovered with blood the paternal honour that their kings had lost. The miserable behaviour of the king,

of the queen, of the heir apparent prince and of the court minion opened our territory to Napoleon's army: defenceless, literally, the men and the women of Spain will win the War of Independence against the troops of the French Emperor, till then Lord of Europe. Napoleon confessed that the War of Spain had caused him his ruin. But the heroism of our simple people could not prevent the wave of conflict from reaching the Hispanic territories of America: Can anyone put brakes on an earthquake....

In a few years Carlos IV ruined his inheritance, the splendid inheritance of his father Carlos III. Till Paris started the French Revolution, Carlos IV presided over a Court in Madrid anaesthetized by the entertaining frivolities of his wife María Luisa de Parma. Towards 1786, a handsome young man, a noble from Extremadura and a Bodyguard, Manuel Godoy, simultaneously conquered the favours of the Queen and the sympathy of the King: Three years later, on the death of Carlos III, Godoy saw himself elevated to the category of court minion and managed to eliminate first Floridablanca and then the Conde Aranda. But the game of chess that the Revolution started on the chessboard that was Europe reduced the political and diplomatic capability of the team then responsible for the life of Spain: the King, the Queen and her favourite. England, France and Napoleon, played their cards, but with an edge.

When the French Revolution broke out in the summer of 1789, Spain, being faithful to the dynastic principle, automatically finds itself as the enemy of the new French government. Neither could they count on the support of England, whose fleet piracies our ships and supports the emancipators of Hispanoamerica. These are years of bad crops for us. Among the bourgeoisie layers of Spanish society democratic ideas begin to circulate, satires begin to spread the subversive cry "long live liberty!". The Courts still try to distract the simple people with collective entertainment, like the famous balloon of the Plaza de Oriente: from the balconies of the Royal Palace, Carlos IV, surrounded by his family and with Godoy, raises the big balloon for the first time: "revolutionary" groups disseminated within the crowds, uttered "infamous cries" against the monarchy and his court minion, trying

to provoke a mutiny; their riot is immediately drowned by the cheers and applause of the multitude delighted when the balloon rises majestically...

The French King was guillotined in the beginning of 1793, that Spring France and Spain declare war: Godoy has signed an ephemeral alliance with England to stand up to the Revolution. Three Spanish armies attack France from the Catalan, Aragon and Basque frontiers, while English troops disembark in Tolón, where the star of Napoleon Bonaparte begins to rise. Carlos IV and Godoy understood that the conflict lacked objectives, while within Spain alarming revolutionary symptoms began to be detected: The peace of Basle was signed with France in the Summer of 1795, with Godoy earning the title of "Prince of Peace". The atmosphere changes and Godoy negotiates an alliance with the French Republic against England: Carlos IV, in the autumn of 1796, accuses Great Britain "of historic offences inflicted on the Spanish sovereignty", and opens the Spanish-English War. Our squadron protects the movements of the General, Napoleon through the Italian peninsula. Cadiz and Tenerife valiantly bear up the onslaught of Nelson.

Godoy really considered that Spain's enemy number one was England, threatening for the traffic of our American markets from the sea route, but the French Directorate didn't trust him and with the help of the Jovellanos managed to get Carlos IV to retire him from the direct government. From the shadows, the court minion continued exercising his power as the supreme commander of the armies. Napoleon Buonaparte being already the "first consul" since the coup of the 18 Brumario, France demanded that Spain in the spring of 1801, attack Portugal in order to delink the neighbouring country from England. Reinforced with twenty thousand French of General Leclerc, the troops of Godoy advanced on Portugal, which lost the "War of the Oranges", called thus because Godoy permitted himself the flamboyance of sending his "lover", the Queen María Luisa "two branches of the orange tree from the gardens of Gelves".

Elevated to Emperor in 1804, Napoleon dreams of invading England, adding together the naval strengths of France and Spain: Carlos IV will be proclaimed "Emperor of Spain and of the Indies"; Napoleon, Lord of Europe. Nelson destroyed the imperial dream pulverizing the Spanish-French squadron in Trafalgar. Spain, weakened, remained at the mercy of its ally Napoleon; who knew to manage the family feuds of the Court at Madrid astutely: the Crown Prince Fernando who was only twenty years of age and the nobles who were enemies of Godoy intrigued in Madrid, ready to depose the King himself while in Paris they negotiated, the marriage of Fernando with a niece of Napoleon. The Queen and Godoy try not to let the papers of the family conspiracy fall into the hands of Carlos IV: the king imprisoned his son in the rooms of the palace and opened the "process of the Escorial", which did not go too far.

Godoy continued tempting Napoleon with the taking and partitioning of Portugal: the emperor signed an agreement in Fontainebleu in the Autumn of 1807, programming the Hispano-French conquest of the small country, one of disjointed fragments of which, Alentejo and the Algarves, would recognize Godoy as King. Effectively, the "allied army" invaded Portugal, took Lisbon, and forced the flight of the Lusitanian King and Queen to Brazil.

With the pretext of that miniscule war, Napoleon introduced the army corps of General Junot to attack Lisbon; another of General Dupont that pitched camp in Valladolid; one third of the command of Marshall Moncey "to guard the coasts of the Atlantic"; plus the division of Viscount Darmagnac in Navarre, and of Count Duhense in Barcelona.

So much of "help", at first upset the monarchs and Godoy; just at the beginning of 1808 they received an imperial message: Napoleon demanded of them "Portugal with a military path from Irun to the Portuguese frontier; or the line of the Ebro River as frontier with France", that is, it incorporated the whole of Cataluña, half of Aragon and Navarre into the Napoleonic

Empire. Overcome with panic, the King and the court minion decided to retreat to the South, so that in case of danger they could embark towards America.

They stopped at Aranjuez with the desire to continue till Seville: a people's mutiny stopped them at nightfall on the 17th of March.

The rumour that circulated right through Spain was that Godoy was selling our country to Napoleon. The nobles who were followers of Prince Fernando, captained by Montijo called "tio Pedro", organized a mutiny using footmen, peasants from the neighbourhood and soldiers of the royal guard. On the night of the 17th of March a motley crowd assaulted the small palace of Godoy, who hid, as we are told, in a cupboard: the furniture was thrown on to the street and burnt. Carlos IV terrified, sacked Godoy, handed him over to the "fernandistas"; and on the 19th of March abdicated the Spanish Crown in favour of his son.

Fernando VII reached Madrid triumphant through the Gate of Toledo, but simultaneously General Murat entered through the Gate of Chamartín: Carlos IV asked Napoleon for help, and he saw the family discord of the Bourbons of Madrid as just the right opportunity to place his brother José "as King of Spain", incorporating the whole peninsula to the Empire. He soon had various army corps strategically distributed.

Napoleon was delighted to serve as arbitrator between the "deposed" King who was the father, Carlos IV, and the "new" king who was the son, Fernando VII: He called both of them to Burgos, then he proposed Vitoria, and later the frontier; finally, pretending to have an attack of gout, he pleaded of them to travel to the French city of Bayonne. There he played cat and mouse with them, separately, and together, he was persuasive, authoritarian... till he even turned his cards open: Fernando should abdicate in favour of his father; and Carlos IV, once he recovers the crown, should abdicate in favour of Napoleon himself.

This transfer of the crown occurred in the week of the 5th to 10th May: three days earlier, on the 2nd of May, the Spanish people had declared "our War of Independence" against the invaders.

Of what curious material are the great tyrants of history made? Each one supports his own self with the conviction that he has the task of fulfilling an important duty "for the good of humanity"; they have to carry out "their historic mission". Napoleon during the first ten years of the XIXth century made himself "unquestionable lord of the continent" subjecting country after country, being as he was, the indisputable warrior genie. He achieved this objective sowing Europe with dead bodies, pulling down frontiers with blood and fire. But he felt he was "an emissary", a redeemer: it was his duty "to liberate the peoples" taking the message of the French Revolution to them. Till the arrival of the "envoy of the gods", he, Napoleon Buonaparte, the people had lived "in slavery": now, thanks to Napoleon, the traditional yokes would be thrown off, bringing in the modern period, progressive, fountain of happiness. Thus he thinks that as soon as the Spanish know their fortune of being "sheltered" in the shadow of the Emperor, they will jump with joy and will crown him with laurels.

A severe disappointment awaits him.

To give legality to the mechanism of succession, Buonaparte convoked a "Board" of 150 Spanish, "representatives of the three sectors, nobility, clergy and commoners" in Bayonne. Ninety of them went, those called "pro-french" because they accepted the plans of Napoleon; who proposed to write a "Constitution" and accept José Buonaparte as king of Spain. Before the Board of Bayonne, "José I" took the oath of King on the 7th of July: that same day he left to enter Spain. He reached Madrid on the 20th. On the 24th he had understood the situation, and he wrote to his brother:

- *You are wrong; your glory will collapse in Spain.*

He turned out to be a prophet.

The Major Generals of Napoleon were terribly angry faced with the absolute rebellion of a people who supported the limited resources of the Spanish army with unpredictable "guerillas": from the dramatic proclamation of the Mayor of Móstoles denouncing the danger to the country, each rural and urban layer declared war against the invaders on their own. At the end of May a whip of heroism had inflamed villages and cities from the Asturias to Cartagena, from Galicia to Cadiz with enthusiasm. Spain is on its feet. They fight for their dignity; they fight for their independence. The people bypass our disastrous royal family, puppets in the hands of the tyrant. On the other hand, our good simple people idealize prince Fernando VII: they want to pull him out of the clutches of Napoleon, rescue him, and bring him to Spain. They attribute to him the title of Fernando VII the Desired. Poor people, whose tragedy is getting imprinted on Goya's pupils.

Napoleon drew up a strategic plan for his major-generals which would permit them to subdue Spain and "clean it up" of patriots: the problem had to be solved urgently, because the Spanish army, reticent at the beginning when they did not receive orders from their King, had joined up with the popular rebellion.

The French controlled an access border from the frontier of Irun, passing through Burgos, upto Madrid. Besides, they controlled Cataluña, and established themselves in Barcelona with strong devices. Napoleon decided to link Madrid with Barcelona, in order to later unfold a "cleaning" from province to province. His Generals had to fulfill this programme during the month of June, as in July the "new liberator king" José Buonaparte would arrive in Madrid.

The task of strengthening the French positions of Burgos corresponded to General Merle; he won Valladolid and went up the Reinosa upto Santander.

During this time, Marshal Bessières thrust the troops of General Lefebvre through the valley of the Ebro towards Zaragoza. On the 8th of June two thousand Spanish soldiers and three thousand peasants armed with valour had to face them in Tudela: two French batteries supporting the thousand soldiers of the cavalry and five thousand of infantry, finished them up.

On the 15th of June Lefebvre camped his army in front of Zaragoza.

The epic of the sieges was going to start.

What is there inside Zaragoza when the French besiege it?

A little more than forty thousand inhabitants. Yes, they are tenaciously ready to die for the Independence of Spain; both children and old persons, all obstinate Aragonese gifted with indomitable bravery.

And the bizarre young General, who controls an improvised, picturesque army, is inside: two thousand soldiers under seventy officials. Twelve thousand peasants had joined their ranks, those between seventeen and forty years, married, widowers, young men, rich and poor everyone got himself enlisted.

The General is Brigadier José Palafox. Of a noble Zaragozaan family, he was convoked by Napoleon at the "Junta of Bayonne", where disgusted, he tried to convince Prince Fernando to return to Spain; naturally he did not achieve it: the "Desired" did not stop risking his life. Palafox, disguised as a shepherd, escaped to Zaragoza: his fellow countrymen, before the arrival of the French, proclaimed him as the Captain General "liberator of the fatherland". Historians debate the military talent of Palafox, but no one denies he had courage; they exalt his gallantry, his arrogant presence; he was a young official who "scorned the favours of a very high Lady, as famous for her position as for her scandals" (Pérez Galdos); he knew to choose talented

consultants and come near the combatants when they were losing heart; always dressed with brilliant gala uniforms, he handed out reproach and praise; Zaragoza contemplated him with admiration, they felt proud of him.

The military and civil personnel ready for defence, count on a reinforcement: unusual, embarrassing for the generals of Napoleon, who at the orders of the "messiah Buonaparte" comes to "free us from superstition", to sweep away "the old traditions". This type of contradiction travels inevitably linked with the historical progress of humanity: the French Revolution that opens our contemporary world proclaiming the rights of man as the pedestal of the democratic life, imposes its ideas all over the European countries "with the force of the bayonet", how interesting! They bring us "freedom" in the haversack of the soldiers. First they pound us, and then they preach fraternity. And they have decided to liquidate the religious life of the towns, erase forever, "the outdated customs inherited from former centuries". How could they understand the devotion the people of Zaragoza have to the Virgin of Pilar? Buonaparte attacks the sensitive fibres of our people: the patriotic and the religious. Kidnapping the King, imposing on us "another king of their own", and they despise the Christian "old traditions". It has to burst, there is no remedy. The Spaniards will take "their imposed king" as a joke, the laughing stock of the nation; they will drape him with epithets that the poor man does not merit, "Pepe Botella (Pepe Bottle)", "Tio Copas (Uncle Wineglass)", when he did not even like wine... And they will bunch together in defence of their faith; they convert the quarrel into a "holy war".

Of course, the Aragonese have put the Virgin of Pilar on their side, they count on her. This is the "reinforcement" not understood by the strategies of Napoleon. I, as a child, when I was told the stories of the epic of the "sieges" of Zaragoza, the first thing that I learnt was the famous "jota": "The Virgin of Pilar says/ that she does not want to be a French woman;/ that she wants to be a Captain/ of the Aragonese troop". I understood the war perfectly well; I knew that sooner or later the Napoleonic army was going to lose. Palafox began his mandate by going

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by a wall of men ready to die killing; in the meanwhile, the Polish infantrymen, imprudently within the weave of the tiny streets, saw muskets and rifles peep out of every window, of every door, of every corner.

The officials ordered their withdrawal. The troop regrouped outside the walls, Lefebvre gave instructions for the second assault: his soldiers managed to widen the breaches and penetrated a few metres. However, the resistance was such from a second line of barricades that within twenty minutes Lefebvre decided to withdraw his battered units. He had lost seven hundred men.

This first day of the fight was lived by the Zaragozans with ardour and with anxiety; it was useful for them to calculate their own energies and the capacity of resistance against an army that they very well knew surpassed them in number, arms and war experience. Our beloved friend the "chronicler" Casamayor exalts the behaviour of the women:

- From the time the attack started, they took water, wine and liquor to the defenders; they supplied them with bullets, gunpowder, and rags for bungs.

On the 16th, Palafox presided over the offering of "conquered enemy flags" at the Pilar.

Lefebvre asked for reinforcements to mount a fitting siege, as he now knows that Zaragoza will not offer him the dreamt off triumphal entry. On the 21st of June, a new Polish regiment reaches his camp. The French General was well informed that a column of Spanish patriots was nearing Zaragoza, they went out to meet them and taking them by surprise, fell on them: this thwarted the column. In the meanwhile, General Verdier whom Napoleon had sent to relieve Lefebvre reaches the Imperial camp. Verdier brought with him three thousand five hundred more men, and artillery of siege: at the end of the month they were ready to assault the plaza.

The true martyrdom of the Aragonese capital began.

The first operation of the new French Commander consisted in dislodging the five hundred Spanish who defended Mount Torrero, excellent balcony over Zaragoza at the South of the city: Verdier installed his batteries there.

From Torrero, forty-six pieces of heavy artillery initiated, at midnight on the 30th of June, a systematic bombardment, till midday on the 1st of July: twelve hours without a breather. The experts calculate the number of projectiles hurled this day and night over Zaragoza at one thousand four hundred.

On the first of July, 15,000 men of Verdier undertook the assault, which prolonged over three days and nights. The ravages of the artillery had not undermined the morale of the defenders: every corner has its hero, every street its chronicle of glory. At the door of El Portillo, the servants of the Spanish battery died: a young girl of twenty-two, whose work was to take food for the defenders, runs to the foot of the canon, takes hold of the fuse from the dying artilleryman and is ready to fire, she hoists it as though she were a banner, shoots, and fills the soldiers who come to block the opening with enthusiasm. The romance of Agustina de Aragón is born, the young Catalan girl converted into a Zaragozan heroine: she heads the list of feminine names today sculptured in obelisks of honour. The historians put the number of French dead to between five hundred and a thousand in these three days. Spanish, no one knows how many. Wounded, a great number of them, the Hospital overflows.

The Hospital, with its twenty-one Sisters of Charity: the wounded arrived pouring in; they are accommodated in beds in the cloisters, and passages; doctors and nuns all go to help block bleeding wounds, shouts of pain mix with the booms of the grenades; the chronicles relate that the Hospital being situated as it is a few paces away from the door of Santa Engracia, path of penetration that is assaulted by the Polish cavalry, offered a scene fitting of the infernal scenes of Dante: dangerously

wounded, dying, weeping of persons who come searching for wounded relatives....

All through the month of July, Verdier, exasperated on realising the fanatic bravery of the besieged, elaborates a plan of definitive attack for the first days of August. He has corrected the placing of his artillery; he has a first line of infantrymen secured at the foot of the walls themselves. On the night of the 31st of July to the first of August a violent wind of fire is loosened: three assault columns are launched through the breaches which cause tremendous losses to the Spanish, forcing them to retreat; half the city has fallen into the power of the attackers.

And then the French General committed one of the war crimes that make the pages of History bitter: he concentrated his artillery on the Hospital "Nuestra Señora de Gracia", crazily, with no pity whatsoever. Verdier knew what that enormous construction situated in the centre of the city was for. Undoubtedly he thought that pulling it all down he would open up the defences of the sector. He ordered the bombarding, twenty-four hours non-stop. The Hospital burnt...

There is a French witness of the terrible misdeed.

And the story; perhaps he sent his chronicle to Napoleon himself: I am surprised that he dared to do it.

Official of mining engineers, Baron Luis Francisco Lejeune, who after the passage of some time will rise to become a General, came to the siege of Zaragoza with the imperial troops. He had a most curious job to perform: Napoleon had given him the charge of punctually transmitting to him the chronicles of the war in Aragon. When on the 21st of February 1809, the French, who had completed the second siege of the city take Zaragoza, Lejeune will ride off at full speed to inform the Emperor in the Tuileries. That is, he was a conscientious informer.

Well, the old Lejeune, turned and looked back, and wrote:

- That the bombarding of the Hospital openly transgressed the right of peoples.

He explains why Verdier ordered such a barbarity:

- The bravery of the besieged was considered so invincible that fearing not being able to move to pity those chests of diamond with iron and lead, he tried to break them with a spectacle a hundred times more terrifying for them than death itself.

He relates what he saw:

- The bombs were directed to the Great Hospital of Nuestra Señora de Gracia, where foundling children, mentally ill persons, and sick of all kinds had been taken in.

The hospitalized population three to four thousand patients, increased that day with the wounded of the siege.

They were seized by terror:

- The missiles caused such fear that many patients and wounded abandoned their beds and jumped to the street through the windows to save themselves as fast as they could: They could be found wrapped in bleeding rags and dragging along the stream their horribly mutilated members.

Bloodcurdling.

Our "chronicler" Casamayor coincides with the French chronicler:

- The bombs fell almost continuously on the holy Hospital.

Fearing that the domes would begin to collapse, the Regidores of the *Sitiada* asked Palafox for permission to evacuate the patients: the Field Marshal ordered that they be rapidly transferred to the Audience hall, to the Merchant's meeting-place and to private houses.

It corresponded to the Sisters to handle the transfer: this is what is stated in the report of the Provincial Charitable Organization:

- They took the patients out in the midst of missiles: they led the patients and lodged them, they assisted them...

Lejeune marvelled at their speed:

- The Aragonese deployed zeal greater than all eulogy: in a few hours those unfortunate people were almost all gathered in a safe place.

Friars and peasants all went to help the Sisters: this is what Casamayor testifies:

- The patients were taken in arms, in carts and stretchers, even in beds, a spectacle that caused the greatest compassion, increased by laments; they managed to transfer them in a short time and without any misfortune, inspite of the many bombs and grenades that were falling.

To Figols, a historian of the XIXth century, we owe this note:

- The Sisters and other pious persons carried the patients and the wounded on their shoulders; they transported them through the flames.

The hapless load was distributed between the Audience Chamber and the Meeting place of the Merchants:

- They placed the patients with fever in the high corridor of the Royal Audience Hall, the military personnel in the San Jorge Room, those of surgery in the corridor below; the women, in the Meeting place of the Merchants of the city. This melancholic confusion dismayed everybody.

What more could the Zaragozans do? Casamayor notes:

- The people stayed awake, filling the Holy Chapel of Pilar with the local community who devoutly implored her powerful help in this conflict.

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"Holy War": Courage in the barricades, charity in the Hospital, and prayers in the temple...

For me the rosette of charity exercised by María Rafols and her Sisters on that formidable day, 3rd of August, when the canons of Verdier bombarded the Hospital, is narrated by the Frenchman Lejeune, whose words permit imagining him astounded when faced with the spectacle that it was his lot to witness. I think few pages of the long, very long history of goodness fulfilled on our planet, offer similar dramatism.

You will remember that together with the floating population, "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" sheltered five to six thousand patients a year: a steady two thousand five hundred, three thousand. Within this total there existed two characteristic "lots": foundling children and mentally ill patients. Mad people to whom the Hospital dedicated advanced therapies: fifty of them.

Suddenly the fifty mad people of "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" heard the booms of the grenades and saw how the walls of the Hospital came down. I do not know if the madness of the mad people can reach specially intense moments because of external factors: what is certain is that, that third of August 1808, the mad persons of Zaragoza were driven madder. Motives were more than sufficient; they found themselves immersed in an uncommon gibberish.

They did what anyone would have thought of doing: get away running. Terrified. Lejeune saw them:

- In a complete state of frenzy; two or three of them threw themselves into the Imperial canal, in the waters that terminated their long agony.

Even Figols relates it:

- The demented, giving out horrible yells, ran terrified along the Coso.

The band of mad people went all over the streets of the city where full fighting was going on.

And behind them, the Sisters, trying to take hold of them to take them to the Audience Chamber.

It is not easy for a woman, even though she be a young woman like María Rafols, to reach a terrified mad person.

They crossed the Coso, the mad persons: they ran at full speed towards the French batallions, whose positions had passed the door of Santa Eugenia. The soldiers of Verdier saw coming onto them, that band of ragged persons, who must have been deprived of reason to cross the line of fire.

- They shouted, they sang, they recited in a very loud voice, each in accordance with the type of mania that had attacked them; some followed our soldiers towards Mount Torrero.

The "spectacle", Lejeune assures us, impressed the French: "so uncontrollable because of the attacks of laughter and of joy of several of the mad persons".

But the astonishment reached its peak when the soldiers saw behind the mad persons, the Sisters, who tried to gather them together, appear:

- Several religious women who had followed them.

Neither did they notice the danger of crossing the line of fire under a shower of bullets: they wanted to protect their mad people.

The French wondered *whether they too are overcome by madness*. Another kind of madness.

Lejeune, a witness, certainly an impartial one, assures us that the French camp "heaped the nuns and these unfortunante persons with much attention".

For me this page, what was carried out by María Rafols and her Sisters without blinking an eyelid, takes away my sleep: it shows that one can be a hero and not be aware of it.

Behind the curtain of fire of his artillery, Verdier thought that on the morning of the 4th of August, Zaragoza was his: he could not believe that the besieged would have any energy left to stop his troops, who were planted all through the labyrinths of the small streets of the urban centre. He sent an emissary to Palafox with these two unadorned words: "Peace and capitulation". The emissary returned with another two: "War and sword". I think they kept saying operative phrases to each other: while in reality, they were killing each other. At dusk the Zaragozans counter-attacked, hurling themselves to recover their buildings, footpath after footpath, house by house. Several French units found themselves isolated and surrounded: they initiated a slow withdrawal. When night came, a disorganized random shooting flew above the roofs. Both bands piled up the dead bodies of their own men who had fallen. It is said that Verdier felt himself incompetent.

Rightly, Verdier received news that night of the great loss suffered by the army in Bailén: General Dupont had invaded Andalucía prematurely, descending without obstacles until Córdoba; Castaños from Seville and Reding from Granada came out to meet him. Dupont retreated half his troops to Andújar, and sent the other half to close in on Despeñaperros: the division turned out to be fatal for him, and on the 19th of July he had to surrender to Castaños. For the first time Europe knew that the armies of Napoleon were not always invincible on an open field.

As soon as he arrived in Madrid on the 20th of July to make his debut on his new throne, José Buonaparte had to abandon the capital and look for refuge behind the lines of the Ebro, where the French strategists concentrated their units on the defensive.

Demoralized and afraid of the euphoria of the Spanish that announced the sending of help to Zaragoza, Verdier decided to

lift the siege; after exhausting the reserves of their ammunition with a merciless bombarding, on the 13th of August he sent his soldiers marching and off he went. He left four thousand of his men dead in the encounter. Palafox had lost half of his soldiers and many hundreds of civilians. When the French leave, they burn the city. The Hospital, a mountain of smoking debris.

After Bailén a few weeks were enough for Spain, free of the French, to organize their provisional Government by means of local Juntas and a Central Junta in Aranjuez.

But the worst was still to come: Napoleon enraged would come like a hurricane to avenge the insults.

Two provisional hospitals, the Royal Audience Chamber and the Meeting Place of the Merchants, give shelter to the normal patients and several thousand wounded in war. The papers speak about a total of near six thousand hospitalized.

The Sisters do not allow themselves to let their strength fail. Mother María sees how they have their health ruined; she guesses that several of them will die, and soon. They sleep very little. The food reaches them, scarce and deteriorated. Hunger threatens to invade Zaragoza. The Sisters have invented a congenial word "despintes": it is used to mean "the part of their own food rations that they save to give to the patients"; they distribute the food that they take away from their own mouths. With the cloth of their white headdress, they make bandages...

On the 10th of August, attending to suggestions of the *Sitiada*, Palafox signs an order that installs the hospitals in the "Real Casa de Misericordia" (Royal House of Mercy). The Sisters will have the responsibility of this second transfer; without the danger of the bombs now, but very painful when moving the wounded. The Field Marshal wanted to visit the new installation after just a few days; the Act of his visit says he showed satisfaction at the service rendered to the sick; and that "His Excellency tasted the soup": he communicated to the patients "that they could very

well have it, because it was well condimented". Well, that was a good thing. The Act says more:

- He noted that the wards of the department directed by the Sisters were neater and tidier; he didn't think it was strange that the ones looked after by the men were not the same, because of the gender factor.

And, with your permission, may I say, my General, with the mischief of the "servant urchins", the beggars.

As to the *Sitiada*, with the war their economic reserves vanished. Basic food is lacking in Zaragoza, the meat shops hardly sell meat: the Hospital feels this lack, most of the patients and the wounded, inspite of the individual ration of ten ounces being reduced to six, consumes three hundred head of cattle per week. The *Sitiada* asks the authorities and the citizens for help. In the shadow, always discreet, now appears the figure of the "passionero" Don Juan Bonal, who during the days of the siege backed the work of the Sisters: he appeals to the Parish Priests and to the Municipalities of the province, requesting for alms.

The House of Mercy didn't offer sufficient space to distribute the wards rationally between the wounded and the sick. Palafox ordered that the wounded military personnel continue to be lodged at the *Misericordia*; and the normal patients, civilians be transferred to the old "Hospital of the Convalescents", close to the *Puerta del Carmen*. The building "Convalescents" is neither as ample as was the "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" nor did it possess that appearance; however, it presents a most beautiful picture, welcoming, with a Church and artistic facades, it makes one feel good: the historic "Royal and General Hospital 'Nuestra Señora de Gracia', of Zaragoza" of course it still there; it remains situated there for centuries to come. Even till today.

From the autumn of 1808 this building will be witness to the silent heroic feats of charity accomplished by María Rafols and her Sisters: achievements that seem legends, but which are history.



9

THE NUN AND THE MAJOR GENERAL

Zaragoza
1808-1809



Very valuable and rare painting of the nun: "before the Major General", preserved in the Novitiate of Santa Ana, Zaragoza.

Napoleon is furious; he decides to take his revenge on Spain. Let us clarify, in the next tricks of his strategy what weighs on him besides his hurt pride, is the urgency to rebuild the damaged image of an Emperor who was invincible but was just conquered by the Spanish: Dupont had been annihilated in Bailén, Moncey abandoned Valencia, Schwartz fled from Barcelona after the battles of the Bruch, Verdier lifted the siege of Zaragoza. Portugal followed the footsteps of Spain; in the middle of the summer of 1808 the imperial troops have been on the point of being hurled out of the Iberian Peninsula. Bad news for the image of the "Lord of Europe". Before it spreads, he wants to change the situation.

Mistrusting giving orders from a distance, the Emperor, at the head of his Grand Army, three hundred thousand soldiers, and surrounded by his best Major Generals, arrived in Spain in the autumn of 1808. At the start of the march, Napoleon addressed his soldiers with this celebrated speech: "Soldiers, after having triumphed on the banks of the Danube and the Vístula, you have crossed Germany with all speed. Soldiers, I need you: Let us take our triumphant eagles to the columns of Hércules". They went from victory to victory, on the second of Decemeber they were taking Madrid: he had promised to celebrate Christmas drinking French champagne in the Palacio de Oriente. The news of a new European coalition against him, advised him to return to Paris. Before leaving, he left behind well-detailed strategic plans to conquer the whole of Spain destroying the Spanish army and the English units that had come from Portugal to help us.

Major General Moncey, who waited for the reinforcement of two Generals, Mortier and Suchet to present himself on the 10th of December at the Gates of Zaragoza had to march, with the Ebro in front, on to Zaragoza: he brought thirty-four thousand

infantry, three thousand cavalry, three thousand sappers and artillerymen, one hundred and forty pieces of artillery, and a formidable siege retinue.

Within the city, Palafox, according to military experts, had committed the tactical error of concentrating excessive forces, with a great number of peasants who formed the fortifications. When the French appeared, Palafox counted on thirty four thousand regular soldiers and ten thousand armed peasants together with the 160 cannon. They had accumulated provisions, but insufficient to feed a civil and military population of eighty thousand persons for a long time. If the French struck a vice-like siege around the city, Palafox would have very serious problems of food and health.

The French closed the iron enclosure, and the problems devoured Palafox.

Fifteen days after the siege, Moncey proposed surrender to Palafox; the Spaniard replied: "I do not know how to surrender, after death we will talk".

Christmas was threatening. On the 20th of December Moncey assaulted Mount Torrero to repeat the installing of his artillery there. The French attacks on the city were delayed because Napoleon needed Major-General Moncey, who was replaced by General Junot. On the 10th of January the artillery began their bombarding destroying Fort San José, in front of the Puerta Quemada; after a few days Junot took the Fort of Pilar, at the foot of Puerta Santa Engracia. The imperial sappers laid out footbridges over the Huerva and deployed four batteries at two hundred metres from the walls. The intense bombarding destroyed houses, temples and convents, taking the city to a state of ruin. On the 23rd of January Major-General Lannes replaced General Junot, an appointment that revealed the interest of Napoleon for the success of Zaragoza: Jean Lannes finds himself among Napoleon's best strategies.

On the day after taking charge, Lannes proposed surrender once again to Palafox: the Field Marshal replied, "the Spanish never give up". Zaragoza was going to repeat the epic achievement of Numancia.

Lannes unleashed a terrible bombarding on the 26th, and on the 27th rehearsed a general assault. A French official noted in his diary: "We are fighting palm to palm, body to body, from house to house, from wall to wall". The last days of January and the whole of February were a nightmare.

Hunger and illnesses decimated Zaragoza. As Lannes tightened the siege every day, the Zaragozans found themselves caught by the throat: the health conditions deplorable, the scarcity of food and medicine converted the city into half hospital, half cemetery. The paragraphs of the "chronicle" of Señor Casamayor, from January to February, are blood-curdling/hair-raising: "Every day dead people falling in the streets was noticed... there was no meat for the patients, nor white bread... much need was felt in the hospitals, where many would die because of scarcities... so much fire in the air, so much ruin, so many sick, so many dead taken from homes and hospitals in carts for burial... the picture presented by the Holy Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Pilar has created the greatest impression on the most valiant spirits, seeing the neighbourhood taking refuge there, even putting beds next to the tabernacle...; the whole immediate circle of the Holy Chapel of Pilar was full of beds and so also were the adjoining chapels, which drew the attention of His Excellency (Palafox) and he ordered that they retire and freshen up themselves...; these days there wasn't meat, not even for the patients...; as many of the troops died as did the civilians, this caused the greatest distress...; the dead increased, making it necessary to send them to be buried so as not to see them piled up in the streets and at the doors of the Churches...; they were sent in carts to the cemeteries of the convents and parishes as they could not leave the city".

The Sisters of María Rafols would also die. Of fatigue, of hunger, of contagion... They fell, first one of the new ones, Sister

María Teresa. The day of her burial there were six other Sisters dangerously ill. We see the final balance, fatal.

They did not mind dying; they stayed firm in their trenches. Zaragoza women fought cheek to jowl with their men, rifle in hand; the Sisters defend the life of the wounded and caress the dying. This is how they fight their war. They get exhausted, they get consumed minute by minute. They go from house to house asking for alms for their sick, clothes, food, money, rags, whatever they could get. Each family gives what it can. There is so little in the homes... The official papers note that the Sisters "some days of the week leave all their ration in favour of the poor sick". How are the Sisters going to eat if their patients are dying of hunger?

With regard to this, not knowing how to proceed, Mother María Rafols took a decision. Risky, crazy. A heroic remedy in favour of her hungry patients.

She reminded her Sisters that during the earlier *siege* "it was not that difficult" to reach the French camp following the mental patients who had run away.

Why not go now and ask for help...?

- Mother, to the French?

Yes, to the French. The besiegers receive the logistic support of their rearguard without obstacle: they supply them with medicines and food. María Rafols thinks they will not have the guts to refuse her the scraps from their leftovers in favour of the patients.

Is it madness?

A heroic remedy.

She would pray, this nun: she resolved to carry out her adventure.

I'm not telling you all a tall tale; I'm only putting in order the reports of that epoch:

- More than once, when the Hospital had no meat and other food necessary for the patients, Sister María Rafols had the courage to leave the city in the midst of the firing...

She did it. She chose two Sisters to accompany her; they tied the white cloth of peace to a stick, and went onto the street, taking the path of the Puerta of Santa Engracia straight towards the French positions, without worrying about bombs or shots... I would have liked to have contemplated the faces of the shooters of the Siege when they saw them passing, without stopping; and the faces of the French soldiers when they saw them arrive: three nuns with their black habit hoisting a white flag. Never had such a spectacle been witnessed in any European battle. I wonder whether among the French the same wonder of the earlier siege would be circulating when these nuns crossed the line of fire behind the mad persons.

Safe and sound. They asked to speak to the "Major-General Sir". They were taken up to the control post, situated on Mount Torrero.

Lannes heard them. The oldest account underlines that "at the beginning" the Major-General looked at the nuns "with rancour and resentment": because, according to Santiago Figols, of the "tenacious resistance" of Zaragoza. They, "at the feet of Lannes" requested "aid for the love of God: medicines and provisions for their unfortunate dying persons". I copy within inverted commas the pristine terms: María Rafols "spoke with such fervent words", that "the rough Major-General" gave in: he ordered that they be helped. Lannes well knows the miserable situation of the besieged Zaragoza....

From that first visit, the Sisters went and came "several times" from their Hospital to the French camp: They brought

"scraps" of the heads of cattle that were sacrificed for the French army, "heads of livestock, feet, other food", an unbelievable joy "for their patients at the Hospital agonizing with hunger". Lannes ordered that they be given a "passport" so that "when they pass the French lines they would not be molested". Besides, the Major General permitted them: to visit "the Spanish patients, the wounded and the prisoners who were in their power". Our classic historian Don Vicente de la Fuente, comments reporting the episode:

- They went (the Sisters) to ask the French, in honour of whom one has to say that they used to give them some help.

Honour to Lannes, the "Lord Major-General".

The nun... adorable nun.

Lannes had learnt his lesson well and avoided repeating the tactical error committed in the first siege by Verdier: who had launched his vanguard into the labyrinth of the streets and they saw themselves surrounded and hounded by the defenders. Lannes advanced slowly, methodically, and mined each block of buildings before attacking.

A present-day scholar of strategy has written "the scenes of the siege of Zaragoza seem like the battle of Stalingard itself in the last World War". Certainly. The defenders generously handed over their lives.

In the first week of February, Zaragoza was filled with ten thousand dead and fourteen thousand wounded. Typhus that caused a number of victims in the civil population appeared. In the middle of the month the French attacked the San Lazaro Fort to the North, up the Ebro: thus the last possibility of withdrawal by the Bridge of the Pilar was cut.

Palafox fell ill: the epilogue of the epic is nearing. The Junta that acts in the name of the Field Marshal decided to capitulate; it was the twentieth of February. On the 21st, the ten thousand surviving defenders left from the Portillo Gate to parade before Major-General Lannes: they handed over their arms in the Aljafería. The conquerors took a city in ruins. The final calculation showed about twenty thousand victims among the defenders and about eight thousand assailants. Lannes wrote to Napoleon:

- Lord, this war is horrible, victory gives pain.

The official informant of the Emperor, Baron Lejeune, travelled at full speed to the Tuileries. Napoleon, on the 27th of February received him immediately as soon as he arrived. Lejeune communicated to Napoleon the stocktaking of the victory:

- Seven weeks of entrenchment is how long the siege lasted; forty-one days with their nights the bombarding; the bodies went up to fifty-five thousand, six thousand still unburied rotted on the streets; half the city in ruins, the other half burning.

In this total number of the victims is included a small patrol of nuns. While recording episodes of the siege of Zaragoza, either Lejeune or Lannes would surely have narrated to the Emperor the remarkable case of the nuns who crossed the lines of fire just like that, first following mad persons and later in search of food.

Nine Sisters, that's what Mother Rafols lost in the sieges: of the 21 they were at the start of the war, nine of them died.

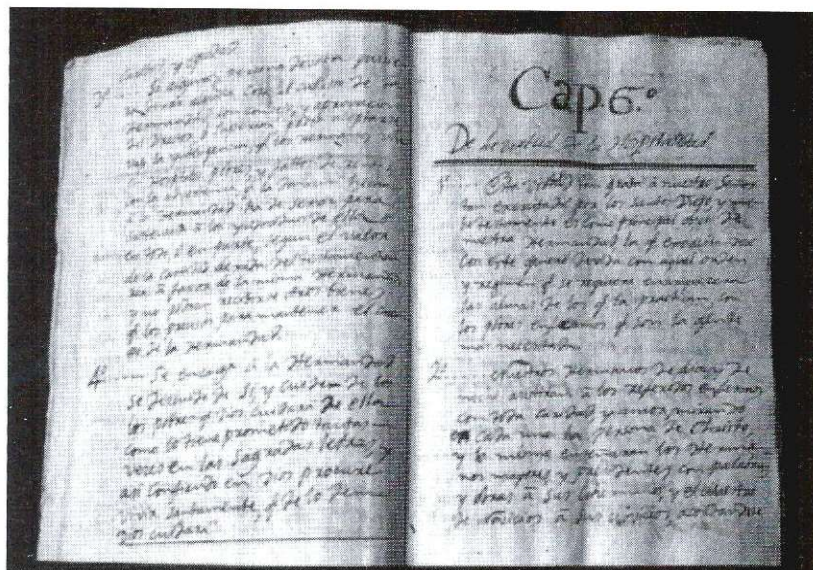
Her tribute to charity.



10

IN ZARAGOZA THE FRENCH GIVE ORDERS

Zaragoza
1809-1813



Above, the celebrated "charity box" used by Father Juan in his "veredas" of almoner (begging for money) in favour of the Hospital. Below, a page of the first "Constitutions", or "little notebook" of the founding father.

What I say is, how is it that the Bishop did not let his mitre fall in shame. You will think I'm telling a lie, but may I tell you that this did happen, it is the plain truth. You remember all that fell on Zaragoza between 1808 and 1809... Well, General Suchet, elevated by Napoleon to Major-General and designated Governor General of Aragon, wanted to celebrate the taking of Zaragoza at the Seo Cathedral; in the cathedral a Te Deum of thanksgiving was celebrated; and the Bishop was called to sing it! He would display his Mitre and Staff, to throw splendour on the act.

From the autumn of 1801, Bishop Don Ramon José de Arce "officially" occupied the Zaragoza See; only "officially". The courteous man that he was, Arce visited Zaragoza once, in August of 1802; he returned to Madrid, where he exercised as "inquisitor general" and as ecclesiastic "pelota" (someone who gratifies another to obtain favours) of their majesties. What an evangelical example for the people of the diocese who never ever saw him again; he never stepped into Zaragoza again.

Arce delegates the government of the diocese to an auxiliary Bishop; he chose his own trustworthy person, from Santander like himself: a certain Capuchin friar, excellent preacher, and friend of the famous Fray Diego of Cádiz, loved so well in Andalusia. The friar, Miguel Suárez, was designated by the name of the land of his birth: Fray Santander, Fray Miguel Suárez de Santander. Fray Miguel started his office as auxiliary Bishop of Zaragoza in the spring of 1803. The chronicles relate that the Bishop Fray Miguel fulfilled his pastoral tasks in an exemplary manner till 1808: the Napoleonic invasion turned him upside down: with the "pro-french" he shared an admiration for Napoleon, "liberator of enslaved consciences".

When in June 1808 the illustrious Bishop came to know that the troops of Lefebvre advanced along the valley of the Ebro on their way to Zaragoza, he could foretell what was coming. Instead of remaining to suffer calamities with his diocesan children, he escaped to a little village of the province of Teruel where he remained hidden like a rabbit in his burrow.

After Zaragoza was taken, Suchet called him: he pulled on his mitre, took hold of his staff and intoned the Te Deum.

I know that fray Miguel was an illustrious and refined type of person, one of the hispanic intellectuals desirous of modernizing our country, with sufficient sense of smell to sniff the march of the times that they would have to support themselves on the democratic principles of the French Revolution. That's fine. But it is not the same to accept the charter of the rights of man as to applaud the Generals of Napoleon when they unfortunately bombarded Zaragoza: the Bishop should have been at his post, together with his own diocesan *baturricos* (*Aragonese peasants*). But no, hidden he was like a rabbit in his burrow of Teruel.

Worse still: Suchet calls him, and he goes, to sing the Te Deum... Most Illustrious! Te Deum of thanksgiving? For so much pain? For so many dead? I have not been able to trace the account to know who assisted at the Te Deum. Two dozen distinguished persons would go. "Pro-french" like the Bishop; some canons, whether they wanted to or no; and the battalions of Suchet who would fit in the Pilar, filling it to overflowing...

Zaragoza lived under the occupation of the French army for four years.

During the first stretch, the sad spring of 1809 till the summer of 1801, occupants and Zaragozans dedicated all their efforts to burying the dead, healing the wounded, looking for food, cleaning the streets.... The city, desolated, appeared covered with an immense cloud of pain: the heads of the resistance, first Palafox, were deported; the prisons

were overflowing with prisoners; the hospitals, with wounded and sick. The plague appeared, inevitable, which took with it almost ten thousand hapless persons.

Mother María and her Sisters of the Hospital did not flee to any burrow. They were 21 when Lefebvre sieged Zaragoza in June 1808; now, when Suchet and the Bishop sing the Te Deum, only nine Sisters are living; twelve have died. Of tiredness, of exhaustion, of hunger, of contagion. The nine survivors continued in the path of charity, without looking back: They will have their hearts grieved, but their hands continue cleaning wounds, putting bandages, caressing dying old people and anaemic children. Father Juan Bonal has promised to bring Mother María new aspirants; he will bring them, sure; he doesn't abandon his trench either.

And the great lords of the *Sitiada*?

Before any thing else, let us say: conquerors and conquered plead for the assistance of the Sisters; what a pity that at this time they are not yet one hundred in Zaragoza; they will be, and even more, with the passing of time.

The Hospital is bursting at its seams, the patients don't fit in. General Suchet is pleased with the idea of expanding the old building of the Convalescents, annexing a neighbouring Carmelite convent: he signs the order in the beginning of 1810.

Space and food, the two dark shadows against which the Sisters fight. The chronicle reminds us of the enormous pockets of Mother María, full of medicine and food; pockets that serve as medicine chest and pantry. A serious danger for the health of the Sisters consists in the famous "despintes (the food that we are unworthy of)". That "cut" which they make in their food to remedy the hunger of the patients: pounds of meat, rations of bread. Charity, love, is like this...

If looking after the Hospital is not enough, the Sisters keep taking charge of certain works of urgency these months;

from the prison there is a plea for help and from the military Hospital installed in Torrero. They don't have the guts to refuse them. Two Sisters go up to Torrero to render assistance during the day and return for the night.

The Spanish prisoners under the vigilance of the French troops are thousands and thousands, spread out in several buildings. Father Bonal works for them, looking for clothes and alms. It must have been he who proposed the name of the Sisters to the French Commander of the fortified town: "let them be in charge of cooking and distributing the food to the Prisoners of War." Such a commission in those circumstances was difficult to fulfill, but the system worked. Till the very end Mother María managed to distribute "among the weakest and most needy" a sweet morsel considered then as an excellent remedy: ounces of chocolate.

There is a curious piece of information; and there is a legend circulating.

The historical data reveals the efficiency of Mother María and her Sisters when taking charge of the food of the prisoners. The French command had enclosed the Spanish officials, respecting their rank, in the Aljafería, "castle of this City". They knew how the Sisters spiced the food at the mess of the prisoners deliciously and distributed it on time. In the castle on the other hand, their "distinguished" prison, the rations of food reached late and bad, "they cannot eat it, it is wasted because of lack of condiments": they decided to entreat "your Lordship, Lord Commandant of the town" that "the gentle Sisters of Charity of the Hospital of the countrymen of this City" also to serve the officials their food. In the name of their companions, three Lieutenant Colonels sign the petition. The Commandant of the town gave his approval, the Sisters then cooked another shift for the mess...

I consider news that is not concrete to be "legend"; only "alluded to" in the documents, as though those who knew them

wanted to keep it to themselves: "the legend " says that Mother María "helped some of the prisoners to escape". Escape was not impossible in that uproar, no, it wasn't; but yes, it was very risky: the French formed firing squads very fast, the ones that Goya painted dated second of May...

It seems sure Father Bonal was upto his neck in these escape operations. He looked for clothes and money for the prisoners, the Sisters helped him to ask for alms. If he paid ransom or not, if he bribed the wardens, only God knows. What is certain is that "some prisoners", already "disguised", already dressed with new clothes, left the city laughing at the French vigilance posts.

There was more: certain witnesses relate that Sister María dared to utilize a method worthy of Television programmes "to free from prison and prepare for the escape of some prisoners", "she hid the prisoners in the coffins" and managed to take them up to the cemetery "in the cart for the dead".

Maybe this testimony has to be studied seriously, we will soon see Mother María involved in the escape of the Carlistas when liberals were condemned to death.

The work of assistance to the wounded and prisoners undoubtedly gained the confidence of the French occupants towards the Sisters, confidence and respect: these sentiments of the military authority permitted Mother María on one occasion "to present herself before the French General and get pardon for the death penalty in favour of an accused who was already in the chapel". At other times the authorities refused her negotiating, and "the Sisters accompanied women condemned to die upto the scaffold itself": the fearlessness of some Zaragozaan heroines who had fought in the barricades ended thus, dramatically.

The big shots of the *Sitiada* while the French ruled in Zaragoza: this was the true Calvary of Mother María, of Father Bonal and of her Sisters.

On the 29th of April 1811, the Governor General of Aragon, General Suchet signed the appointment of the new Junta, with the names of "illustrious" Aldermen of the *Pro-French Sitiada*. It makes one very angry to write the history of this stage of the once glorious, now miserable, Hospital. The difficulties and the shortages of the house, supported firmly by the Sisters, could constitute a resplendent chapter as an example of Christian charity in an epoch of pain. But the management of the pro-French *Sitiada* darkened the heroisms.

The elected "aldermen", new big shots of the Sitiada, logically belonged to the narrow circle of pro-French friends of Bishop Fray Miguel Santander, who appropriated the Presidency. This Bishop, to whom his admirers pay merited eulogies, presents a disastrous image on his pro-french side. In contradiction to the exercise of the virtues that his writings exalt, there appears his getting onto the triumphal Napoleonic bandwagon: he accepts that the "King" José I Buonaparte designated him as Bishop of Huesca without giving up the "auxiliary" government of Zaragoza; and he manages to introduce into "the Royal heart of His Majesty" his election as Archbishop of Seville, to which post he will not have enough time to reach because he will have to flee Spain when the Imperial troops are defeated.

He did the Sisters of Charity an almost mortal harm; he was at the point of annihilating them from the nest of the Zaragozan Hospital.

Why? Because of his dicatatorial mania that frequently assaults the "authoritarian democracies" when it is their turn to execute power.

Fray Miguel and his pals of the new *Sitiada* consider the Sisters as representing an age that has been left behind, retrograde, they see them as enemies of modern ideas, of progress. Not for nothing does "his king" attack head-on the religious congregations. They tolerate their presence "by force"; let's see, who would be able to take the Hospital forward without them? The Bishop will see to it that the Sisters do not grow, avoiding the danger that frightened the earlier *Sitiada*: who

thought of compiling "Constitutions" to regulate the existence of the Sisters and cut their wings definitively.

This objective could never be achieved as long as Father Juan Bonal as Founder of the Fraternities of men and women, and Sister María Rafols, as Foundress and "President" of the Sisters, exercise their functions. Hence, they will have to be removed, humbled; in judicial language, "suspend" them.

Tell me if I am not justified in my aversion to Bishop Santander, however "modern", "liberal" and magnificent a preacher he may be.

The strategy against Father Bonal and Sister María used coarse, vulgar means, more appropriate of louts than of "select pro-french". On the other hand, the priest and the nun corresponded with noble, elegant attitudes. Patience, this usually happens....

Food, clothes, medicines, money were all lacking in the Hospital. Bonal and the Sisters asked for alms in the streets, at the door of the Churches, entering homes. But just check out the shameless aldermen of the *Sitiada*: they "demanded" accounts, they demanded detailed accountability of the use of the donations, and they accused the Sisters of extravagance. Do I have to say this, the Acts of a session of the *Sitiada* details the suspicion of an alderman: that the Sisters have set up without permission, "a hen house, a pigeon loft, a rabbit hutch"; and that they do not give an account of the maintenance expenses of the animals, nor of the products obtained.

Sister María got fed up: "their lordships" received a writ at the following session where with some ironical tint they undid the tales, born "of the gift of six hens" received from the Sisters of Huesca: they served to give flavour to the soup of the Hospital for one day.

They were also accused of eating the chocolate....

The "Mother Sister" María, had more than enough talent, and noticed their trying to split the union within her community: some aldermen, who knows if they even had episcopal blessing, showed special appreciation for Sister Tecla Canti, who on the other hand was well worthy of applause. Sister María understood that "the first impediment" was she: next would come Father Juan. She decided to facilitate the change, that could serve to stretch a bridge of better understanding with the quibbling *Sitiada*: adducing health failures, certainly justified, presented her resignation as Superior; if she was substituted by Sister Tecla, who seemed to get along well with the aldermen, she could avoid a confrontation. Above all, her resignation would stop any crack within the community of Sisters at the roots.

The big shots of the *Sitiada* were perplexed; they passed on the writ to the Bishop, who gave a Solomon type response: they accept the resignation, but they order Sister María to continue with her duties till a new order is passed.

The parenthesis lasted one whole year, during which the Sisters continued their work. And their shortages, without the *Sitiada* paying them for the lack of money with the ridiculous salaries agreed upon- fourteen duros (Spanish coin = 5 pesetas) a year, they have a couple of payments still pending-; and with not a single slice of bread for breakfast: they get up at four in the morning, have lunch at 12, "hence for these eight hours, they request the *Sitiada* to concede them something for breakfast".

In the meanwhile, Bishop Santander was writing the great work of his life; he must have thought he was conquering the title of "founder" for himself: some "Constitutions", or rules of existence, for the Sisters. He did not consult either them or Father Bonal; neither did he take the trouble of asking them if there existed any "internal rules", private constitutions, at the rhythm of which the community of Sisters functioned. Fray

Santander in his own inimitable style went full steam ahead along the path of interference. Happy with his work, he presented it to the session of the *Sitiada* of the 9th of December 1811. The aldermen extolled them; in the session of the 18th of June 1812, they were approved.

Mother María raised a writ indicating the points she considered inconvenient for the system of life of the Sisters. Her protest served no purpose at all, the Bishop took no heed. The "Constitutions" committed two cruel injustices against the Sisters.

First, they considered the Sisters as simple servants or maids of service, who instead of earning money, worked for charity: every future path towards their dreamed of religious congregation was closed to them, leaving them tied down to the *Sitiada* for ever. The Bishop writes without the slightest blush, so arrogantly: "I have completely closed the door for any aggrandisement of themselves".

The second injustice, it subjects the Sisters to the spiritual authority that he indicates; robbing them of the presence and the assistance of Father Juan Bonal, their founder.

The Bishop and his assistants, I was about to write "their henchmen", rapidly rounded off the battle against Father Juan: "The Most Illustrious" Fray Santander signs a decree naming the priest Don Miguel Gil "the only deputed" episcopal representative "for the regime and the interior benefit of the Sisters". Some months later, the *Sitiada* officially communicates to "Mosén Juan Bonal" that not only should he abstain from hearing the confessions of the Sisters, but also that he should avoid as far as possible, talking to them about the matters of the Fraternity". They recommend to him of course, that he go all along the paths of Spanish geography asking for alms in towns and cities for the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital.

A Beggar of the Hospital, ambassador of the poor, people's missionary: Juan Bonal goes along the "veredas" (travelling

preacher) with a basket in his hand, trying to remedy the ruin of a Hospital whose bosses ill-treat him. Tireless "travelling preacher", years and years of silent humiliation.

I wonder: Why didn't Don Juan Bonal tell the *Sitiada* and the Bishop to go to blazes, why did he not return to Barcelona?

I have the reply: he was a saint; and he did not want to distance himself from those Sisters in whose future he had absolute faith.

His Constitutions imposed, Bishop Fray Santander now had only to preside over the election of "a new Superior", leaving the "dangerous" Sister María aside.

Under the presidency formed by himself, his strongman Dean Segura - so pro-french that he would have to run away together with the Bishop when Napoleon withdraws his troops from Spain -, and another alderman of the *Sitiada* called Herranat, the Sisters profess their Vows, twelve of them on that date: as was foreseen, Sister Tecla is elected.

This new Superior proceeds with the distribution of duties, which correspond to each Sister besides their duty of looking after the sick; as duly "advised", Sister Tecla assigns Sister María Rafols... the sacristy.

The Bishop heaves a sigh of relief: He has the Hospital under control, with the founder of the Sisters sent off to collect alms; and the foundress, looking after a sacristy.

He hadn't counted on the Sisters themselves: depression overpowers them; they feel they have been manipulated. Ten days after the election of Mother Canti, Sister María Josefa leaves the Hospital and asks the nuns of the convent of the Enseñanza for place. One month later, Sister Teresa falls ill; the doctors prescribe breathing pure air in a village accompanied by our Sister María Rafols: when they return, in the beginning of April

1813, another two Sisters have gone from the house. Two more abandon it in May....

Sister María vacillates, it is asked whether she too should emigrate, so that Mother Tecla could recompose the patrol with absolute liberty. On the 14th of April she sends a writ to the Bishop asking for his permission to go to the School of Enseñanza of Zaragoza, known to her because she was a student with them in Barcelona. Bishop Fray Santander must have been overtaken with a tremor: if the foundress goes, what consistency could the group have? He calls her, he talks to her, he pleads for her, and he convinces her: to withdraw her petition, and that she should not go....

Those who go are: José Buonaparte, the armies of Napoleon, the pro-french, the bishop, the dean, the aldermen of the *Sitiada*, all of them go, they all flee, all go to hell!

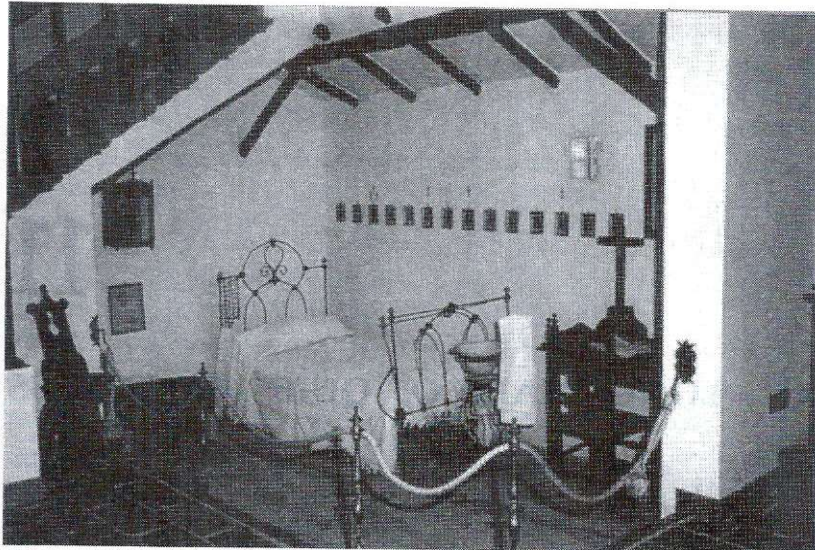
What a relief, good God!



11

LONG YEARS OF QUIET GOODNESS

Zaragoza
1813 - 1829



Above, objects preserved from the room of Mother María. Below, sanctuary Nuestra Señora del Saltz, where Don Juan Bonal died.

The Napoleonic disaster in Spain had begun during 1812. Marshal Suchet, Governor of Aragón, carried out his victorious campaigns of Levante, establishing his staff in Valencia. But the expedition the Emperor sent to Russia demanded entire formations of the best and outstanding French troops in Spain, which left open ground for the Hispano-British army who under the control of the Englishman Wellington penetrates from Portugal towards Madrid. The famous Muscovite withdrawal of Napoleon, initiated in Moscow on the 19th of October 1812, presaged the rapid French destruction: José, I understood that his ephemeral Spanish reign was concluding.

In May 1813 Wellington advanced his lines: without waiting for the result of his offensive, José Buonaparte abandoned Madrid seeking refuge near the French frontier. On the 21st of June, Wellington won the decisive battle of Vitoria. José Buonaparte fled on horseback losing even his personal effects: on the 28th of June he established his residence on the other side of the border-line, in San Jean de Luz.

Major-General Suchet withdraws his troops strategically from Aragon and Levante towards Cataluña, on the path of the frontier of Figueras, where on the 22nd of March 1814 he will witness the return of Fernando VII in the midst of popular acclamations.

The French marched away from Zaragoza on the 9th of July 1813. Three days earlier the Bishop Fray Santander and his Dean Segura escaped to take refuge in France. On the 12th of that same month of July, an official of the new political head of Aragon deleted from the Sitiada of the Zaragoza Hospital, "the persons named by the intrusive Government" and handed over the control "to the legitimate aldermen who formed it before the French occupation of this capital".

The new stage begins for Zaragoza, whose sufferings will be symbolically lightened by the visit of the King during Holy Week of 1814: Fernando VII completed a triumphal section from Gerona towards Valencia, but he wanted to deviate from his route and enter first in Zaragoza.

What a pity, the good people whom we call the Spanish people jubilantly applauded the presence of their "Desired" king: but before reaching Madrid, the King already weaves complications and reconcilable things with the political parties, discussing whether to maintain or not the Constitution elaborated by the Courts of Cadiz. In the capital of the Turia, Fernando signs, on the 4th of May, his celebrated decree repudiating the Cortes and annulling the Constitution: "As though such acts had never taken place". Spain knew bitter days were ahead. After so much pain.

The "new" *Sitiada* of the Hospital "Nuestra Señora de Gracia", definitively installed in the building of the Convalescents, recovers well-liked names for the Sisters. But the aldermen maintain themselves far from Father Bonal, in part because of fear of his influence on the Sisters, and in part because they need compellingly the alms contributions got by the good priest, the "travelling preacher": the Hospital is drowned in misery.

The Bishop Fray Santander having fled and the pro-french aldermen having been eliminated, Mother Tecla Canti, Superior of the community, shows with facts and signs of affection that her "apparent submission" in the game against Sister María and Father Bonal had signified a minor evil derived from adverse circumstances.

Her first gesture of friendship consisted in naming Sister María Incharge of the Foundling Hospital, the infant sector of the Hospital, the department most in need of tenderness. María had during several months as sacristan spent the margins of free time making cloth flowers with a mould, for the Church of the Hospital. Now she will hand over her entire workday, days and nights, to these fading flowers that are these unfortunate children.

I consider it a relief for her to see herself immersed in the passionate infantile task: it corresponds to Mother Tecla to confront the lamentable state of the community after the drop of last year. We don't even know if there are more than five sisters left... Certainly the Fraternity stepped on the line of its disappearance, it was saved because God wanted it that way; Divine Providence had future plans for the grain of mustard. Father Juan Bonal will gather in his "travelling preaching" besides alms that enliven the coffers of the Hospital, young girls who have decided to recognise the presence of Jesus Christ in the sick.

In the sick... and in the "foundling" children. There is no word in the dictionary that can communicate greater helplessness: "foundling", a term that has fortunately disappeared from today's language.

"Foundling" child was the newly born "exposed", abandoned, in a public place. The woman who had recently given birth who had resolved to free herself of the child, she let go of it, she abandoned it, leaving it at the door of a Church, or on the street, with the hope that "someone" would take it.

The "Foundling Homes", houses created to take in these children, foundling children, confronted this problem in a sensible way; they had a revolving window, characteristic of the cloistered convents that permitted introducing objects from outside without the persons of either side seeing each other: the woman would leave her bundle in the revolving window, nobody saw the handing over of the baby. Either through the system of the revolving window, or taken in from the door of the church or of the foundling home itself, "Nuestra Señora de Gracia" has been looking after foundling children from the beginning of the Hospital; this paragraph from its primitive "Orders" stands out:

- *All the helpless baby boys and baby girls, who are thrown at the door of the Hospital, will be received and brought up with much charity and care at the cost of the House.*

Of course, in the middle of the XVIIIth century the number of foundling children in Zaragoza was small and the resources of the Hospital were large. Now, with the disturbances of troops before and after the Sieges, Sister María finds in her foundling home an annual average of 500 to 1000 children, figures oscillating because of the deaths: hundreds of creatures arrive in disastrous hygienic conditions, even without having the umbilical cord tied up well, and they die not too long after entry. The Hospital has unfortunately lost that wide space of its first installation, damned be the French canons: there is no place for the children.

At thirty-three years of age, with her heart full of love, María Rafols finds herself the mother of five hundred unfortunate children: her lavish tenderness has left forever its marks on the history of the Zaragoza Hospital.

Tenderness, and practical talent: she carefully studied the aspects of the problem and enters into a pacific fight trying to extract supports for her infantile flock. In the spring of 1818, with five years of direct experience, Sister María draws up a beautiful report of the needs and suggests solutions. The big shots of the *Sitiada* respect her, they know with whom they are staking their cards: they will become open-mouthed with the marksmanship of the document.

The Hospital looks after foundling children with two well-differentiated systems: they have some as interns; others are outside, that is, entrusted to "mothers-in-charge".

Before anything else, Sister María reclaims for the "interns" greater space, the children are piled up: she urges that they be separated in groups according to age, state of health, dangers of contagion. The documents underline what the complementary sacrifices, the intolerable odour of the children's rooms, narrow, hardly ventilated, represented to those who serve the Foundling Home. Sister María spends "at the moment" fifteen years, permanently breathing that air made foul by the little ones.

These children that the Hospital has as interns "are normally the weakest, of poor physical condition and infected"; to give them to breast-feed and to clean them, Sister María has a group of "foster mothers" and servants, badly paid every six months. Poor women of limited formation, María treated them affectionately, asks for an "increase of ration and salary" for them, special compensation to the ones who breast feed infectious children with the risk of getting the contagion: "some have normally lost their breasts and their sight and contracted other ills". She suggests that these infected children be fed "with goat's milk, with sugar, and with cereals (mashed cereal baby food)", little details that can be recommended to "the women who did their duty well and now do not have milk, well, a greater number of children can be fed this way than by feeding just one at her breasts".

"It would be convenient to have a special dining room" for the foster mothers, "so that they can eat all together at a determined hour and in the presence of a Sister": so that they *really eat*, and do not sell the ration that is given to them, as sometimes is done, even with cooked food"; and this of course is with certain harm to the child they are breast feeding.

She wants more cradles, new and painted. She also wants a place to wash within the Hospital. She wants the foster mothers be authorized "to go out for a walk some days, each one with her child, accompanied by the Mother in charge"...

With everything, the greatest problem of the Foundling Home arises from "the children brought up outside, by women remunerated by the Hospital funds": a world with everything lacking, edifying tales interwoven with other stories of cheating, robbery, bad treatment, ill-treatment to the children. The handing over of a child is done after endorsements of a Parish priest; two babies to be breast-fed are never given to the same woman; never to beggar women. The "mothers-in-charge" receive a monthly stipend. Sister María has to maintain "some control"

over the hundred, two hundred, some years three hundred families of Zaragoza and its villages put in charge of bringing up a child; they receive frequent consolation and also colossal blows: the little girl Juana, seven years old, had to be pulled out from the house where "her adoptive father" submitted her to sexual maltreatment. Our nun weaves during long years, an immense tapestry of charities: that widower prisoner entrusts his eight-day-old daughter to her...

How she manages to do everything, no one knows; but the aldermen of the *Sitiada* certify their joys because of the Foundling Home, in their inventories, plagued by bemoaning references to the deficiencies and the dirt, at other times, to the wards governed by "young servants": "The beds and cradles well done up, the children well looked after".

Sister María asked for the corresponding permission: she sleeps with the children.

Little by little time heals wounds, and the Sisters enrich their community with new vocations, propitiated by the discreet hand of Father Bonal. They need reinforcement; one after the other; how curious, the three who still remain of the group that came from Barcelona, have had to recover: the Superior Sister Tecla took bed rest; Sister Torellas convalesces in Torres de Gállego; Sister María Rafols has been authorized some days of rest in Villafranca, the village of her birth. As an example: only in the year 1815, seven new entrants were registered. An air of optimism is breathed by the Sisters, whose internal resentments have disappeared once the pro-french had fled and harmony was restored between Sister Tecla Cantí and María Rafols. Father Bonal receives petition letters: to transfer his women to Burgos, to Canarias... Our good priest hides the letters: one day, God willing, but as for today, the *Sitiada* has them tied down. Neither can he push the project of the fusion of the Fraternities of the various regions "into one big religious corporation...".

The Sisters took a remarkable step: they visited the new Archbishop of Zaragoza, Manuel Martínez, and they asked him to draw up new definitive Constitutions, based naturally on the old ones which, were confidential, and were fulfilled by them always. They did not even want to remember those written during the French *Sitiada* by Bishop Santander, they take them as non-existent; a just punishment.

The Archbishop entrusted the task to two of his most brilliant clerics, expressly asking them "to adjust to the spirit, the usages and the customs of the Fraternity", that is to say, to *the little confidential notebook* of Father Juan. Sensible Archbishop.

In November 1818, the *Sitiada* could examine them: solid, resplendent "Constitutions", with the religious essence of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne. They carry that perfume of the first years:

- Considering each day that at the time one least expects it, Jesus Christ may arrive at the ward in the person of some patient; they will be always ready and always have an extra bed...

... and they will treat him like a king: the two talented clerics of the Archbishop will have written the words, but here goes all the love of Juan Bonal and María Rafols.

Spain finds it difficult to raise its head, the wounds of the war have been very deep, both physical and spiritual. Fernando VII has neither the talent nor the strength to hold the reins of the country in his hand. He lacks political sensitivity: his absolutist government penetrates into the ideological pit created in the citizenry by the coexistence of the War of Independence which rejected Napoleon, with the Courts of Cadiz, registered among us as the revolutionary French ideology. The split into "two Spains originates from the political errors of an incapable king", a dramatic pendulum that scourges the Hispanic generations till our days.

The "clashes" and counterclashes began immediately.

Rafael del Riego lead the first triumphant conspiracy against Fernando VII at the beginning of 1820, the other earlier ones had failed. His rising inaugurates a period called "the liberal three years": our national magnetic compass needle goes haywire mad, because the cycle of very hard absolutist government exercised by the King followed a shameless lot of liberal politicians confronting each other in factions, which in fact unleashed a civil war, strongly tinted of course by anticlericalism; to the music of Riego's anthem, the people sang these naughty words: "If the priests and friars only knew/ the thrashing they are going to get/ they will climb up to the choir singing/ freedom, freedom, freedom".

Our Sisters of the Zaragozan Hospital weathered the storm well: the liberals substituted the traditional *Sitiada* with a "progressive" Council of Public Beneficence, who declared them to be "functionaries" and demanded of them "an oath of fidelity to the Constitution". They replied that they were "religious" not "functionaries"; they reject the oath; they ignored the law that suppressed habits, they continued with their own.... The new rulers left them in peace, in spite of some "mozos" taking advantage of the political storm to trap them.

One woman was very perverse: she accused the Sisters of having infected the bloodletting of a patient, it seems that she herself collaborated in the trick. Mozos and administrators raised a hullabaloo "asking for the phlebotomy to be reserved exclusively for the male doctors". The Sisters confronted them, they brought out their exam papers as proof, and they tried out the exercises practiced constantly during the *Sitios* "not only on sick women but also on the troops and on civilians; well, there were some days when they hardly had a chance to put down the lancet", and in all those experiences " they never had any mishap ever". The Liberal Junta accepted their reasoning.

How wouldn't the Junta defend them? They had just asked them to take charge "of the contagious women patients sheltered

in the Lazareto": "a service that we cannot impose on the Sisters if they do not accede by their own free and spontaneous will". They "both together and individually, offered themselves to lend assistance to any person affected with a contagious illness, in the Lazareto or in the city".

Liberals and conservatives were all afraid of the plague. Those women were not!

In April of 1823, *A hundred thousand sons of San Luis*, commissioned by the European powers and sent by the Duke of Angulema, entered Spain to "liberate" King Fernando VII, "captive" of the liberals. From among the Institutions of the Old Regime, *the Sitiada* of the Zaragozan Hospital resurrected.

The Sisters kept getting used to the political ups and downs, the illness that they combat lack colour. At the beginning of the summer of 1824, the Archbishopric recognized their "Constitutions" officially, in the name of the Church: the then thirteen Sisters prepared themselves to solemnly pronounce their religious vows and hold an election. These were two years when they excitedly mixed the outside work of care for the sick and the intimate looking into their personal commitments to God.

The inevitable happened: at the first election, "the one who was always the Mother", captain from the time she was young, "President" advocated by Father Bonal, Sister María Rafols was elected. She wanted to defend herself, but it didn't work. The excuse she gave was her weak health; the Sitiada was worried that this office of hers would oblige her to leave the children of the Foundling Home.

From this moment on, it is sufficient to say "the Mother" to know that they referred to her. She is now forty-five years of age. She carries within her a mysterious presence of God. She has been capable of "seeing" Jesus Christ "in the flesh" of each

patient. The others discovered below the habit of the Mother, a special closeness of the mystery:

- She had the true love of a Mother for everyone...

A Mother who gave serenity to the daughters closest to her, the Sisters.

The Aldermen of the Sitiada look up to her with a tremendous respect; they try not to interfere with what she does. She stands by the established norms, she handles uncomfortable episodes that inevitably arise at every step in the Hospital, but at this stage nobody would dare to question the good judgement of the Mother. She drafts the entry conditions of the new Sisters - with no dissimulation; this vocation requires robust souls:

- Courage to expose their life to disease that could easily be contracted, love to serve the sick women with affability, making no distinction with the contagious ones; disdain for self-interest, comforts and worldly attentions.

She receives eight aspirants during the three-year period of her mandate, and places Sister Teresa Perú as the Novice Mistress. With the pretext of accompanying a Sister, she travels to Huesca and visits "those Sisters....".

The three years slide past gently, the Sisters gift hands full of goodness. Her daughters see the Mother during moments of the days and hours of the night, glued to the lattice that looks from above to the altar of the Hospital.

In April 1829 she completed her three years as Superior, the Constitutions ordered the election of another new Superior: Sister Teresa who had been entrusted by the Mother to form the new aspirants, was justly elected.

There is a "Superior"; but the title of Mother as recognised by the Sisters is deposited on the Foundress, for always.

In the thick of summer of the same year, 1829, Father Don Juan Bonal died. The news, very painful, came unexpectedly.

Don Juan, with his sixty years, was completely worn out: he had consumed the energies of his body, travelling on his infinite "*veredas*" with the alms box in favour of the Hospital, in his hand. Misfortunes, anxieties, injustices, he bore his cross of every day with the stong courage of men marked by the finger of God. Fifteen years asking for alms, preaching, hearing confessions, consoling... keeping silent. In his comings and goings he had discovered a hermitage of our Aragonese soil, half way between Zaragoza and Huesca, municipal limits of Zuera: Nuestra Señora del Salz, built on a hill that dominates the plain of the River Gállego. Father Juan became an enthusiast of the quiet white solitude of that suggestive horizon. There he died, on the 19th of August.

I went up to the hermitage to venerate the memory of that righteous "*mosén*".

I was completely entranced as was Don Juan when he discovered this marvel. I swear to you, John of the Cross would have envied it. What ecstasy: spending the last eventide of your life here, closing your eyes for the last time when dusk falls.

The hermit granted him a tiny little room, a miniscule room on the side of the hermitage, a kind of pigeon's loft. Just a few spans, a tiny little bird's house.

With two very tiny windows; one which gave on to the rich lowland area; the other in front, faced the Tabernacle.

If I did not know the data of his life, the foundational impulse of the Sisters, his correct choice on finding María Rafols, the courage to bear up in silence winters and summers, if only I had only known that it was here that he took refuge and that it was here that he came to die, it would have been sufficient for me

to recognize in him a Biblical person, a priest of the order of Melchisedech, a witness, a prophet.

"He is dying", the news reached Huesca and Zaragoza unexpectedly: the Sisters went desolately to be at his side.

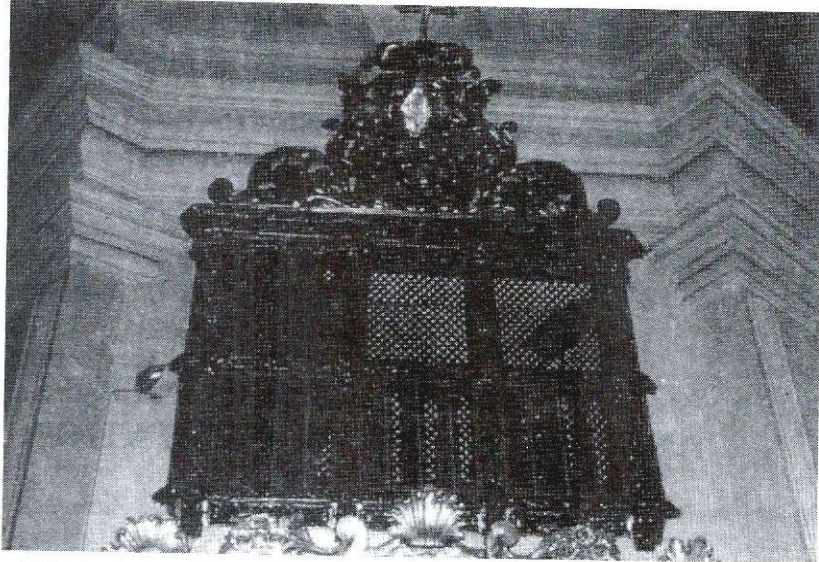
In the silence of that night, twenty-two persons who had come from the wide world caressed with gentle tenderness the trees of the water meadows.



12

PRISON, BANISHMENT.... AND THE HOUSE OF THE FATHER

Zaragoza, Huesca, Zaragoza
1830 - 1841



This is the latticework window that looked from the Hospital on to the Church, the place where María had silent hours of personal dialogue with her Lord Jesus Christ.

Who would think that our nun, Mother María Rafols would be put in prison? It's funny, Sister María participating in the political complications of her era. She with her habit was even in jail.

King Fernando VII died, so "desired" when Spain had him far away, and so stupid when he came. The last ten years of his reign imposed once again an absolutist overwhelming government. And when he died, he left us a dynastic rumpus of great proportions. At the last hour he had promulgated "the old law that calls to the throne the women in direct lineage, with preference over the males in the collateral line": hence his daughter Isabel was declared inheritor of the throne excluding her brother Carlos María Isidro.

The little girl Isabel was sworn in as Princess of Asturias in July 1833; the king died in September. One month later the Courts proclaimed Isabel II as Queen, under the Regency of María Cristina.

On the first of the same month of October don Carlos María publishes a "manifesto" making use of his prerogatives: the carlists took to arms.

In a hurry to fête the Queen, the whole of Spain was in celebration, with no time nor desires to cry for the defunct king. Poor Spain, once again beginning another war. For years now we have been whining for a king, "Fernando the Desired". He came, and it's a good thing that he is dead. Now we sing to "the little angelic child Isabel". We will see, there will be war... And the plague: an eruption of cholera enters through the doors and is going to get installed on our own soil as a permanent guest. The epidemic sows desolation and death.

The war between the liberals, defenders of Isabel II, and the carlistas, supporters of her Uncle Don Carlos, is going to polarize the "two Spains": on the carlista side those who sustain an order founded on traditional values and postulate an absolute monarchy as the form of government gather together; on the liberal side, the supporters of the queen defend a progressive policy that carries forward the ideological reforms of the French Revolution.

These proclamations throw both sides to the winds; the truth is that they hardly have clean wheat to take to the grinding mill of their fatherland.

The scars of the civil war soon reached Zaragoza: four demarcations of the province give shelter to strong carlista contingents, such that the government from Madrid unleashed on Aragon a violent pursuit of phantoms with very severe fines to families and municipalities. These persecutions, which for the slightest carelessness bring about deportation and execution, exasperated the personnel and provoked a vigorous reaction: Zaragoza set up several attempts at carlista insurrections.

The most serious was organized in the autumn of 1833. An aristocratic lieutenant general and hero of the War of Independence, Count Penne-Villemur, seconded by high military authorities, officials, sub-officials and soldiers, won over civil personages, business persons, lawyers, university professors, several barracks, the general captaincy; the rising will then be extended to strategic localities of Aragon; and they established contact with the carlista battalions of Zumalacárregui.

The date of the first of March 1834 was fixed: the authorities were invited to a musical concert, they thought of seizing them there.

The plan was whispered to the police, who reacted swiftly: on the night of the 27th of February when some detections were carried out. Count Villemur escaped at full speed towards

Navarre early in the morning of the 28th. Don Carlos rewarded him by naming him Minister of War.

In a few days a conscientious police network took one hundred and forty-seven implicated persons to prison, those who supposedly had the backing of ten thousand committed people all over Aragon. Among the detained, figured two canons, the administrator of the Archbishop, friars and Fransiscan lay brothers, Carmelites... several of them effectively involved, others had nothing to do; the government was afraid that the carlista fire would spread all over the country. Who certainly appeared as a leader was "mosén" Antonio Nerín, "senior wardrobe attendant" of the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital: the police labelled him as "the right eye of the carlistas and personal consultant of Count Villemur".

Our surprise was with the detention of the eleven detained on the evening of the eleventh of May, headed by these two women:

- Sister María Rafols, Superior and in charge of the founding children of the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital.
- Countess de Penne-Villemur, wife of the deserter ex-Lieutenant General, Count of the same name.

What happened?

At mid-afternoon of that eleventh of May, the prosecutor of the military Commission orders the "Trustworthy Guardian" Joaquín Carbonell to capture Mother María Rafols in the cause against those guilty of the sedition "plotted and discovered in this city". The Guardian, accompanied by the police, arrived at the Hospital, demanded the presence of the Mother, communicated to her the prosecutor's order; and he took her with him to be interned in the Villahermosa palace, called "prison of the Inquisition", as it had been the last seat of the

now extinguished tribunal of the Holy Office: now it served as a "provisional prison" because of the great number of prisoners confined to prisons in the city.

The news that police had come to take Mother María prisoner quickly caused a commotion in the Hospital; nobody could believe it. The Alderman on duty that week and the Sisters went there, frightened: surprised, pained, "they wished her good-bye with tears". They left a written memoir saying "they saw her leaving the Hospital smiling and serene"; she said "words of consolation" to her daughters. Two Sisters accompanied her to the prison, at the door of which the Guardian handed her over to the jailer.

Even among the women prisoners the entry of a nun would cause a sensation. Not for just one night, she was kept imprisoned two entire months, which makes a total of sixty days and nights. There are few scattered testimonies referring to the women prisoners who were interned with her, I of course would like to know whether the Countess Villemur was held in the same ward; and if she, the Countess wrote or related her memoirs of the episode. The fact that the other detainees listened attentively to the nun seems normal; that she directs operations together with them, also; "it was a pleasure to hear the sermons she gave them", recorded the daughter of a recluse: "there were two young girls, sisters; one of them benefited very much from the counsels, the other continued to lead a bad life".

Two months as a prisoner.... And what's so great about that, Great Lords of the Sitiada? At other times they had imposed their social importance in defence of the Sisters, this time they couldn't. For two motives. One was that the detention of the Mother occurred within the framework of the policial responses to the carlista conspiracies, a red-hot topic, on which the Governing Queen María Cristina had by Royal Order, suspended the interference "of any privilege or exemption" of the suspects; canons of the Cathedral go to prison, the Archbishop himself will flee hurriedly when he is accused of being a carlista, Palafox

will be detained for supposed conspiracy: who could care tuppence for the life of a nun?

Besides, the aldermen know another disturbing motive: the "Senior Wardrobe Keeper" of the Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital, Mosén Antonio Nerín was up to his neck into the plan. That is, the documents of the process involve the name of the Hospital, where Mother María occupies the place of greatest importance.

The essential question remains: of what is she accused, why is she detained?

We know it in part, but with quite a strong basis.

The declarations of a conspirator, the mason Quintana, explained to the judge that on the floor of the mad patients of the Hospital, Mosén Nerín "made bullets and cartridges, he even employed three arrobas (measure of weight = 11.502 kgs) of gun powder and two arrobas of lead", and he added:

- that Mother María, in charge of the foundling children, handed over lead to Mosén Nerín.

The police entered the room of the Mother and found: a lead plate and several steel moulds! - utilized by her to make cloth flowers when she did the work of Sacristan.

The judge had verified a series of falsehoods in the declaration of the mason Quintana, so this "removed lead (weight)" from the accusation.

The serious pieces of evidence proceeded from another better-founded sector: that Mother María hid conspirators sought by the police.

What happened at the time of the French, is now stated that our nun "hid the persecuted", "she helped prisoners to flee".

This time, whom did she help? Who did she hide? If she did do it, there is no statement of when or to whom. Maybe just a "rumour" reached the judge, who came across "lack of proof".

They detain Mother María "together with Countess Villemur". Did some connection exist between the two? It is surprising that the Countess would be let free after her husband fled: they kept an eye on her, hoping perhaps her contacts would serve as a clue to the other accomplices. Did the countess visit Mother María, did she ask for some help, could the simultaneous detention of the two women be explained?

She guessed the perplexity of the judge as he took down the declarations of the nun. Neither did the Countess give out too much. Hence, after two months, the two of them, nun and Countess, were set free under bond. Even the coincidence of this judicial decree suggests that the detention of Mother María "had something to do with Countess Villemur".

From this time on, the investigation got complicated for the judge, because the women followed divergent paths. A personage called Rosendo Lapuerta had constituted the surety of the Countess; the surety of the nun, was Don Manuel Sevil, secretary of the *Sitiada*.

Two months later the said Rosendo and the Countess fled to the Basque country, to the carlista camp. In the list of the procedures pending justice, the judge added the name of María Rafols: "in a state of sentence"; to that of the countess Villemur: "fugitive, wanted".

And how long would their Lordships take to pronounce sentence?

At that time our justice system functioned very calmly...

Mother María Rafols returned to the Hospital and to her children "just on time": Just when cholera struck Madrid with rage and threatened to reach Zaragoza. The Government tried to minimize the danger, but at the end of July the press mentioned 5,230 victims of the epidemic; the royal family had

taken refuge in the Granja, surrounded by the most stringent safety measures.

The Nuestra Señora de Gracia Hospital prepared a ward for men and another for women, with twenty five beds in each. For the children there is no arrangement made; if cholera reaches the Foundling Home, Mother María will have to confront it with her foster mothers and servants: she has prepared them mentally for the possibility.

From August to September, the epidemic killed almost five hundred males, a thousand females and eighty-nine children in Zaragoza.

The Sisters and the whole Hospital did their duty with such abnegation that the Sitiada decided to grant all the personnel "extraordinary salary and more rations". The Foundling Home was forgotten, and Mother Rafols made her claim in favour of her assistants, who had during the year 1834 looked after the impressive figure of 1,382 children, of which four hundred and one died.

The Sitiada recognized her petition as just, and rewarded, of course modestly, the personnel of the Foundling Home.

Innocent, she was condemned.

Now let's see how that sentence was understood.

The Most Illustrious Lord Judge, good heavens, how much time he took, ten months for an absolutely innocuous case. We know the text of his sentence because of a piece of news in the Acts of the Sitiada, tenth of April 1835.

- The Royal Chamber of Crime having studied the cause for which Mother María Rafols was accused, exiled her even though no complicity of any kind was found....

Evil judge like him: “no complicity has been found”, that is, in other words, innocent; and “she is banished”, that is, in other words, punished.

At a distance of a century and a half we pose questions to the judge, a job done in vain. And listen, to have posed questions then would have been risky, with the tribunals acting as in a situation of war. Look at the sentences devolved upon those implicated in the design of the Zaragoza uprising of the 27th of February 1834, to which Mother María was seen “as linked”: six condemned to death by vile flogging; twelve condemned to life imprisonment in Cuba; another twelve, ten years in Puerto Rico; five, to three years of Spanish jail... We’d better keep silent; in the long run the nun was rather easily let off.

“She is banished...” Where to?

Very funny, Lord Judge: “She is banished to the town of her birth”.

To her town, to Villafranca del Penedés.

Sister María, disconcerted: To Villafranca, now, at this stage... Here in the Hospital her children, her Sisters. To Villafranca?

She appealed, using as her base a demonstrable reality: her shattered health. She asks “to be banished” close by, to Huesca.

On the 6th of May the Crime Chamber communicates to the Governor of Zaragoza:

- That María Rafols, Sister of Charity of the Holy Hospital of this City, against whom procedures on suspicion of complicity in a conspiracy against the rights of the Queen Our Lady, should for the moment go to the Hospital of the City of Huesca.

There she went to live, for how long, Lord Judge, will she live with the Sisters of Huesca. Her presence will serve to reinforce the links between the two communities that are “one same family”.

Six years, that's how long she was banished in Huesca. They could signify for her, six happy years: but they turned out to be unfortunate because of her ailments and because of the repulsive meanness of the great lords of the Zaragozaan *Sitiada*.

The Sisters of Huesca accepted the Mother jubilantly, considered by them not as a nun, but together with Father Juan as a providential instrument causing the birth of the Fraternity, which at this moment of time is already a religious institute, a new congregation.

The Hospital of Huesca suffered from economic anaemia, as serious as that of Zaragoza. Mother María arrived confident that she would not burden her Huescan Sisters: an unusual characteristic of the big shots of the *Sitiada*, recognizing on the one hand the injustice of the banishment, and on the other the services lent by the Mother to the Hospital, she was assigned 400 reales (coin of 25 centimes) of vellones (tufts of wool/sheepskins) for travelling expenses; plus "six reales daily during her absence", that is to say, something like the salary of an ordinary worker: it wasn't much, but the nuns administered it marvellously. The bad thing was that after six months the great lords of the *Sitiada* suppressed this allowance. Without explanations. Mother María bore up half a year in silence; at the beginning of June 1836, she wrote a humble little letter to Zaragoza explaining that it was absolutely necessary for her to have that economic aid: because "the Hospital of Huesca is a very, very poor house" and her illnesses impose special expenses on her; she gently reminds the Zaragozaan aldermen of her many years of service to the Hospital, and is confident that "while her confinement lasted they would contribute towards the food corresponding to her needs".

I am tempted to put before you once again the list of canons, marchionesses and counts, most illustrious personalities that make up the *Sitiada* to insult them one by one. Mother María would pull me up when we meet in Heaven; she bore up the

humiliation without complaint. The big shots resolved to send her once and for all five hundred 'reales', as a gift to a distinguished person - they owed her a thousand of the pending ones -; and pay her three reales daily instead of the six agreed upon.

She did what she could: suffer because of the burden on the Sisters of Huesca; to smile; and to keep silent. They felt sorry to see her like that:

- Languid with complete exhaustion and weakness.

She spent weeks and weeks quietly on her bed; she was permitted to leave her room only for Mass and to receive Holy Communion.

She thought that her hour of death was near. She perceived the pull of return; she desired to close her existence "in the beloved Hospital Nuestra Señora de Gracia". She addressed a request to the *Sitiada*:

- The motive for which she was made to leave Zaragoza having ceased, she requested for permission to return to this house...

What motive made her leave?

Political effervescence. Zaragoza had supported mutinies and killings as had all the Spanish capitals. The handshake of the Vergara in August 1839 brought a certain peaceful living together of the Isabelinas and the Carlistas, even though the two Spains co-existed with tremendous bitterness. In 1840 Espartero inaugurated a new progressive stage, definitely anti-clerical. Once again the Municipal Association of Beneficence dominated the *Sitiada*. Complaints had reached the new aldermen about "an Association of Ladies" created to protect the children of the Foundling Home: the ladies demanded the return of Mother María, the only person capable of governing that ship.

The Aldermen decided: Sister María Rafols should return from Huesca.

She returned on the 19th of June 1841, "she entered into the Hall of Sessions and made it known how grateful she was because of the benefits the Sitiada had dispensed towards her during her long stay in Huesca...".

What do you all think? Don't ask me if I think Mother Rafols was a saint....

She was; she began to work at the Foundling Home with the fervour of the first day.

But she was already very far from that first day. Strength fails her, and she understands that having gone through jail and having fulfilled her banishment, she is reaching, she has reached, the threshold of the House of her Father.



GOODBYE

Zaragoza
1842 - 1853



*Portrait done in our times by the illustrious painter Isabel Guerra:
a stroke of light illuminates the heart of María Rafols.*

She did her duty till the last hour, she was a righteous nun.

Looking after her children at the Foundling Home.

She returned from Huesca consumed, torn to pieces.

The Sitiada still had the Sisters tied to iron obedience, a true dictatorship, without consenting to their raising the veil to create new communities; but the buzz of the hornet's nest already announces that "the congregation" exists: the number of their houses will inevitably begin to multiply, near and far from Zaragoza. The Sisters have become aware of their own identity; they venerate Mother María and Father Juan as authentic "founders". It was logical that Mother María, old for that period of time about sixty to seventy years of age, and older because of the wear and tear of an existence consumed in the silent service in favour of the patients, she would have allowed herself to be loved and fussed over by her daughters.

But no. Once more in the trench on the front line, she wanted to continue.

From 1842 to 1845, once again she governs the Foundling Home with its brood of children made prematurely sad because of the cruel injustices of life. The ladies of the "Association" value the presence of Sister María as indispensable, even unsubstitutable. Her efficacy distributing tenderness to the children and governing the complex patrols of lady servants, foster mothers and external mothers, has converted her into a legend. Seeing her fatigued, the ladies asked, almost demanded that the Junta assign Sister María "a helper" for the less personal work: the number of foundling children continues increasing.

Helped by her assistant and venerated by all the persons who circulated around her, she did her work day after day. The Ladies of the Association, who had troubled the Sisters very much while they substituted Sister María, who was exiled in Huesca, accepted her with no discussion and with no quibbles. Tensions and silly fuss disappear from the Foundling Home. It was not easy, with so many "baronesses", "marchionesses" and "lady countesses", poking their nose into the functioning of the centre: some Sister got fed up and threw the "ladies" out, ... hook, line and sinker. It was the role of Sister María to bring back peace and adjust the work of all of them.

In the spring of 1845, María Rafols enters her sixty-fourth year - she seems exhausted, defeated. She doesn't have enough strength for the rhythm of the Foundling Home, truly frantic. They decide, the Sisters, the Board and the Ladies, to retire her; and give her "some time" of rest in the little village Bellver de Cinca, in the province of Huesca. "The family of the surgeon" Don Juan Ruiz, doctor of the place received her as guest. The Ruiz couple had a student son; who would later become a priest, and who summarised thus the impressions about the guest nun:

- She was a person of few words; but when she spoke she was very expressive, one sentence of hers served as a sermon; she also had a very large heart.

A generous heart capable of moving even the bureaucratic prose of the Junta, a mixture of "Beneficence" and "Sitiada", that governs the Hospital when her retirement is signed; it is only just that I copy the entire paragraph of the Act signed by the great lords:

- That Mother María should retire, and of course seeing her advanced age, assigning her duties compatible with her age; the Junta being fully satisfied with her zeal, her refinement and her intelligence which has unfolded in

the many years she has been lending her services, not only at the Foundling Home, but also in the General Hospital.

It is you who say so, big bosses of the Junta. You have no idea, Sirs: none of you was here in 1804 when she arrived, nor in 1808 when the French Major-General had them all on tenterhooks....

Sixty-four years, sixty-five years. In that period, a very old lady. This is an appropriate moment to evoke some questions about the existential trajectory of María Rafols.

Why at twenty-three, would a "slender and attractive" young girl, intelligent, congenial and charming, that's what those who knew her said, why would she renounce the love of a man, begetting children of her womb, creating a home of her own, then there would probably have been many children - five, seven, ten or twelve, many children -, never of course as many as the thousands of children who passed through her Foundling Home, but her own children, born of her innermost being; why renounce and put reins on her sexuality changing the tracks of the amorous capacity of her heart, she had a really big heart, when there was place for so many misfortunes; why has she kept the kisses on her lips intact, the caresses of her hands, and the embrace, why? How does she resolve to dedicate her energies, her blood and her smile, entirely without reserves, in favour of men and women maltreated by life, ulcerous patients, half dead of disgust, she bandaged their wounds, she made soups and gave it to them nice and hot, she turned their mattress, she removes their lice, she cleans their dribbling and their bottoms, she, a girl of twenty-three, slender and attractive; why does she hug the foundling children on her lap, these children born of unknown mothers and fathers, maybe unhappy parents, maybe rogues, probably rogues, probably disreputable; how is it that she cleans and kisses these children, cries if they die, children with the plague, children with leukaemia, starving kids....

Why, this young girl. What's wrong with her, what has happened to her on the inside? With Whom does she dialogue? Who does she hear? Who has she fallen in love with...?

My political friends of today, my writer friends, don't believe it: that from twenty to sixty years a woman fulfils this commitment to live poor, to obey when she is ordered, to remain chaste, virgin her whole life, well, they do not understand it, they do not accept it; and they ask in confidence if there are any tricks, to tell them; we, after all belong to the same gang; they suspect that Boccaccio was a faithful chronicler when he narrated the naughty shady affairs of the medieval friars and nuns.

I respond to them that María Rafols was a woman in love. And as those who do not know that Lord, could never understand her ...

To me, who also believes in God and tries to love Brother Jesus Christ, the mystery of pain spread around the world is disconcerting, being as He is God the Creator who is good and who is the Father. I am arriving at the conclusion that perhaps pain exists rightly so that María Rafols fulfills this other mystery of lovingly watching over those who suffer.

It didn't seem true to them, but Mother María returned from the village invigorated: and once again her helping hand was taken to look after the children of the Foundling Home. Spanish politics was in confusion; however, the big bosses of the Junta, some conservative and the others progressive, admired the mettle and the talent of the little old nun "who bore her maladies with joy", without resorting to dispensations or privileges. She metes out wisdom to her "sister daughters":

- Stay calm....

They complained to her, because the groans of a patient interrupted their moment of prayer:

- Stay calm, Sister, prayer is assisting a patient.

For the love of God, for the love of our brothers. For love.

Even in 1849, when Mother María had suffered an attack of progressive hemiplegia, "that little by little, affected her activities", the Junta reiterated its confidence in her as the "official" director of the Foundling Home.

She couldn't continue, it would be necessary to make the children independent of the Hospital and pass them on to the House of Mercy, looked after by the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, "the paulas".

From the year 50 to 53, the Sisters accompanied the final wearing out of the Mother; they know that she is dying; they try to give her joys, the first use of a "private oratory" within the precincts of the community, the increase of vocations, the normal changes of the Superiors, a beautiful feast of the Immaculate....

The progressive paralysis keeps her down on the bed. Every night, at the end of the day, the Sisters go to her, to tell her and to listen to her. It was "a school", they say. Learning lessons from their best teacher.

The paralysis advances, Mother María is dying:

- of the last moments of her life little can be said, because hours before dying, she could not speak.

The Sisters who were present at "her transit" to the other bank, "only observed that she looked at all of them with such affection and smiling".

It was the 30th of August 1853; María Rafols was going to complete seventy-two years of age and half a century as "Sister".

With pleasure I would ask her Guardian Angel if smiling she saw in her daughters the growing trail of Sisters of Saint Anne, one by one, till the almost three thousand who today venerate her memory by imitating her example....

And who could care less if we do not know.

We would like to have available bulky archives where year after year the documents testify to the work of María Rafols and her Sisters in the first stage of the Institute. They made history, they did not write it. Later we have wanted to "know everything" about the Mother. Her daughters and her admirers try to put together the oral traditions, drawing up some writings that attributed to Mother Rafols lessons and prophecies: writings charged, no doubt, with good intentions. It has been a difficult job to sieve that historical data line by line, backed by sure documentation. One of the most serene, and severe historians of the Spanish Church, José Ignacio Tellechea, with the help of some Sisters of the congregation, carried out this thankless task.

I have the duty of certifying to the readers that my "report and eulogy" dedicated to the nun María is based word by word on the critical investigations of Ignacio, my very dear friend, and of the Sisters Aznar and Eguía. Thanks to him and to them, we have available an impressive critical biography in two volumes of three hundred and fifty-nine pages with the title "Report on the virtues of the Servant of God María Rafols" which was presented to the Holy See in the year 1989.

The experts of the Congregation of the Saints studied the impressive volume; they passed their judgements to the assembly of Cardinals; the Cardinals informed the Holy Father.... And John Paul II pronounced:

- The proofs of her virtues are clear.

María Rafols has been canonized. Well, at the moment she has been declared "blessed". Blessed is she; and happy are we: we admire her and love her. With her three thousand daughters spread all over the world.

Blessed, Sister María.

María, saint: goodbye.

Translator's note to the Reader: The author talks about a period of time very different to ours and has used very specific language that will not be done justice to if translated with just one English word. Hence I have kept the same word, most of them very specific to that period of Spanish history, and here you will find explanations of these words below:

Regidor	= Magsistrate, alderman (civic dignatory next in rank to the mayor), director, governor, prefect
Sitiada	= Literally Siege but in this context, the Board of Directors of the Hospital
Real	= coin of 25 centimes
Mosén	= Sir, title given to clergymen in Cataluña and Aragon
Zoqueteros	= beggars/ poor/ indigent
Mozos	= young men/ boys who work at the Hospital
Jota	= Spanish dance and tune of Aragon region
Junta	= Board of Directors
Despintes	= "to be unworthy of"
Passionero	= chorister who sings the Passion, an expressive word with which the priest who was "destined to assist" spiritually - sometimes even materially - the patients of a hospital were designated.
Veredas	= route of travelling preachers
Limosnero	= almoner (going begging for money)
Pelota	= slang for "fussing over those in power to get favours for oneself"
arrobas	= measure of weight = 11.502 kgs/ 25 lbs.
vellón	= fleece/sheepskin/tuft of wool; copper & silver alloy; small coin



No one was able to subdue them. They began to run helter-skelter on the streets. Unfortunately they moved towards the line of fire and crossed the first line of the French Soldiers. The Soldiers of Verdier seemed to see apparitions..... because of some half dozen nuns running in haste behind a band of these mental patients. Sr. Maria and other Sisters caught up with these patients. They gathered them together and pacified them. The riflemen of neither party shot at them.

The patients and the Nuns were taken to the place of Command in the Camp of General Verdier who could hardly believe what he was seeing.

