

17.

Apparition of September 13, 1917

The Tinsmith may have lost the battle, but he was still waging war. Shortly after the August apparition three agents of the Administrator of Ourem came to talk to Lucia and her cousins.

“After their questioning, which was anything but pleasant,” Lucia said, “they took their leave with this remark: ‘See that you decide to tell that Secret of yours. If you don’t, the Administrator has every intention of taking your lives.’”

“Jacinta, her face lighting up with a joy that she made no effort to hide, said: ‘How wonderful! I so love Our Lord and Our Lady, and this way we’ll be seeing Them soon!’”

“The rumor got round that the Administrator did really intend to kill us. This led my aunt, who was married and lived in Casais, to come to our house with the express purpose of taking us home with her, for as she explained, ‘I live in another district and, therefore, this Administrator cannot lay hands on you there.’ But her plan was never carried out, because we were unwilling to go, and replied: ‘If they kill us, it’s all the same. We’ll go to Heaven.’”¹

Other threats were made, not against the children but against the parish priest of Fatima, Father Ferreira, for his alleged complicity in the kidnapping of the children. Things got so hot for Father that he wrote a public letter exonerating himself. The letter, which was published in two newspapers, is interesting because Father Ferreira finally seemed to affirm that something supernatural was occurring at the Cova da Iria (the full text of the letter is reproduced in “Father Ferreira’s Public Letter Regarding the Fatima Apparitions” on pages 253-255 of this book).

In August the Lady had told the children, with a tinge of sadness, to pray very much and make sacrifices for sinners, to save those headed for hell. While walking the sheep one day Lucia found a length of heavy rope in the road. Wrapping it around her arm, she discovered that it hurt.

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

"Look, this hurts! I said to my cousins. We could tie it round our waists and offer this sacrifice to God.

"The poor children promptly fell in with my suggestion. We then set about dividing it between the three of us by placing it across a stone and striking it with the sharp edge of another one that served as a knife. Either because of the thickness or roughness of the rope, or because we sometimes tied it too tightly, this instrument of penance often caused us terrible suffering.

"Another day we were playing (said Lucia), picking little plants off the walls and pressing them in our hands to hear them crack. While Jacinta was plucking these plants, she happened to catch hold of some nettles and stung herself. She no sooner felt the pain than she squeezed them more tightly in her hands, and said to us: 'Look! Look! Here is something else with which we can mortify ourselves!' From that time on, we used to hit our legs occasionally with nettles, so as to offer God yet another sacrifice. If I am not mistaken, it was also during this month that we acquired the habit of giving our lunch to our little poor children..."²

Visitors now came almost daily, wishing to speak with the children about the beautiful Lady. Ti Marto and Olympia, wearied of having to send for Jacinta and Francisco to satisfy the curious, kept them at home. Although Lucia missed their company,

"I can truly say that these were really happy days. Alone, in the midst of my sheep, whether on the tops of the hills or in the depths of the valleys below, I contemplated the beauty of the heavens and thanked the good God for all the graces He had bestowed on me. When the voice of one of my sisters broke in on my solitude, calling for me to go back home to talk to some person or other who had come looking for me, I felt a keen displeasure, and my only consolation was to be able to offer up to our dear Lord yet another sacrifice."³

The relishing of quiet and solitude was new for Lucia. Surely the chaos and intrusion caused by irritated family members and continual visitors gave Lucia a new appreciation of quiet, but perhaps this period was also the

Sister Lucia

birth of her vocation to Carmelite spirituality.

As day broke on September 13 the dos Santos and Marto homes were besieged by pilgrims who sought to inform the children of their burdens and afflictions. The traffic to Fatima was remarkable. By noon there would be thirty thousand people in and around the Cova da Iria.

One of them remarked: "It was a pilgrimage really worthy of the name. It was a profoundly moving sight. I had not in all my life seen such a demonstration of faith. At the place of the Apparitions, all the men had removed their hats. Nearly everyone knelt and said the Rosary with clear devotion."⁴

Many had heard about the Tinsmith's persecution of the children, and their courage in withstanding it. Others had heard of the atmospheric phenomena that occurred even without the children present, particularly the exquisite phenomenon of what appeared to be real flower petals floating to the earth, only to disappear inches from the ground.

Here is Lucia's account of the apparition of September 13.

"The roads were packed with people, and everyone wanted to see us and speak to us. There was no human respect whatsoever. Simple folk, and even ladies and gentlemen, struggled to break through the crowd that pressed around us. No sooner had they reached us than they threw themselves on their knees before us, begging us to place their petitions before Our Lady. Others who could not get close to us shouted from a distance:

"'For the love of God, ask Our Lady to cure my son who is a cripple!' Yet another cried out: 'And to cure mine who is blind!...To cure mine who is deaf!...To bring back my husband, my son, who has gone to the war!...To convert a sinner! To give me back my health as I have tuberculosis!' and so on.

"All the afflictions of poor humanity were assembled there. Some climbed up to the tops of trees and walls to see us go by, and shouted down to us. Saying yes to some, giving a hand to others, and helping them up from the dusty ground, we managed to move forwards, thanks to some gentlemen who went ahead and opened a passage for us through the multitude.

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

"Now, when I read in the New Testament about those enchanting scenes of Our Lord's passing through Palestine, I think of those which Our Lord allowed me to witness, while yet a child, on the poor roads and lanes from Aljustrel to Fatima and on to the Cova da Iria! I give thanks to God, offering Him the faith of our good Portuguese people, and I think: 'If these people so humbled themselves before three poor children, just because they were mercifully granted the grace to speak to the Mother of God, what would they not do if they saw Our Lord Himself in person before them?'

"At last, we arrived at the Cova da Iria, and on reaching the holm oak we began to say the Rosary with the people. Shortly afterwards, we saw the flash of light, and then Our Lady appeared on the holm oak.

"What do You want of me?"

"Continue to pray the Rosary in order to obtain the end of the war. In October Our Lord will come, as well as Our Lady of Dolours and Our Lady of Carmel. Saint Joseph will appear with the Child Jesus to bless the world. God is pleased with your sacrifices. He does not want you to sleep with the rope on, but only to wear it during the daytime."

"I was told to ask You many things, the cure of some sick people, of a deaf-mute..." Lucia began.

"Yes," the Lady replied. "I will cure some, but not others.⁵ In October I will perform a miracle so that all may believe."

"Then Our Lady began to rise as usual, and disappeared."⁶

As in other apparitions, there were atmospheric phenomena. Many saw the ball of light approaching, others saw it leaving. White flakes floated down from the sky, disappearing before they touched the ground, the sun seemed to dim, causing a pleasant coolness. Others saw a white mist surrounding the holm oak tree while Our Lady talked to the children. It was also at this visitation that they saw the stars at noon.

There were more clergy present than at any of the other apparitions, like Monsignor John Quaresma, Vicar General of the Diocese of Leiria.⁷ He saw the globe of light depart to the east, and asked a companion what he thought. "That it was Our Lady," he replied without hesitation.

Sister Lucia

“It was my undoubted conviction too,” said Mgr. Quaresma. “The children had contemplated the very Mother of God, while to us it had been given to see the means of transport – if one may so express it – which brought Her from Heaven to the inhospitable waste of the *Serra de Aire*. I must emphasize that all those around us appeared to have seen the same thing, for one heard manifestation of joy and praises of Our Lady. But some saw nothing. Near us was a simple devout creature, crying bitterly because she had seen nothing.

“We felt remarkably happy. My companion went from group to group in the Cova and afterwards on the road, gathering information. Those he questioned were of all sorts and kinds, and of different social standing, but one and all affirmed the reality of the phenomena which we ourselves had witnessed.

“With immense satisfaction we set off for home after this pilgrimage to Fatima, firmly resolved to return on the 13th of October for further confirmation of these facts.”⁸

Notes

1. Second Memoir, p. 77.
2. Second Memoir, pp. 75-76.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
4. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
5. Several accounts have Our Lady saying, “I will cure some, but not others, because the Lord does not trust them.” See for instance, Barthas, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
6. Fourth Memoir, pp. 167-168.
7. Mgr. Quaresma would later be a member of the Canonical Inquiry of Fatima.
8. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, p. 115.