

All red as the Rose of the world set up on the hill
 In the flame of the dawn and the fire of the sunset.
 For berries are brighter in winter
 And stars hung in sable skies
 Pearls are purer espaliered on black velvet
 Red wine in cut-glass and candlelight
 And banners wave better in a stinging wind
 Torn as the Host in the chalice and lifted up
 Lit in the amber light of the morning sun
 You open the hand of God held over a world in travail
 And bring down like showers of blossom
 The grace that renews the world
 With a thousandfold of children faces
 Tilted up to catch the falling petals
 With the grit of the pearl in the heart and the flame of the fire
 Chosen and cut and moulded and mortared together
 Shining white stones to repair the broken battlements
 And keep the devil out of Freedom.
 We wave our thanks to you across the rivers and the mountains
 And through the misty fissures of your silent frontiers.



EDEL QUINN

DAPHNE POCHIN MOULD

WHAT is the use of life and health if we cannot throw them away for so great a King and Lord?' asked St Teresa of Avila, and her words could stand as a kind of headline for the life of Edel Quinn, whose cause for beatification has lately been introduced. For it was a woman fighting a losing battle against tuberculosis who blazed the Legion of Mary's trail over much of Africa. Yet you could meet Edel and not notice anything particular about her, a Dublin typist going to daily mass, spending her free time for the legion; there are thousands more like that. And this gives special interest to her beatification cause; that she was so much of the ordinary stream of Irish

Catholicism and achieved such extraordinary results makes her appear a kind of patron and pace setter for the contemporary lay apostolate.

Edel Quinn was born in Kanturk, Co. Cork, on September 14th, 1907. Her father was a bank official and the family moved about Ireland as he was shifted from one branch to another. Their final settling down was in Dublin. Edel's schooling in England was cut short when, about 1925, she had to return home and get a job as shorthand typist to help out the family finances. The Legion of Mary, founded a few years earlier in Dublin, was rapidly expanding, and about 1927, a friend brought Edel to a legion meeting. It was, Edel said later, a case of love at first sight. The legion quickly realized Edel's ability and appointed her as president of one of Dublin's toughest assignments, for the praesidium 'Our Lady Refuge of Sinners' worked with prostitutes and visited the then-existing low-down lodging houses of the city. The other legionaries of this group were shocked to have a young girl like Edel appointed their president, and protested strongly to the legion headquarters. Headquarters were adamant and very soon the protestors realized that they had got the right woman for the job.

Edel was all her life a working girl with neither time nor inclination for self-analysis or self-description. She was always full of fun and gaiety, pretty, smiling, smartly dressed; but to penetrate her very hidden spiritual life is a harder task. There are scrappy notes in diaries or scribbled on retreats; letters to friends; people's memories of things she sometimes said; but that is all the biographer has to work on. Her Dublin life was full of activity and full of prayer; she went to daily mass and communion, and then apparently straight on to her work, with some sort of a 'piece' for breakfast—this indeed is done by other Irish girls in the towns; after work she turned to her legionary activities and only came home very late at night. The mass, daily communion, devotion to the blessed Sacrament, were central in her life; on Sundays she spent the morning hearing one mass after another in one of the city churches; and friends said that she would never pass a church without going to 'make a visit'. This devotion to the mass is in the full stream of Irish piety from the early centuries of the Celtic saints on, through the mass rocks and back-street chapels of the days of persecution and anti-Catholic

legislation, to the present day. 'There is always a terrible void in the day when mass and communion are missed', wrote Edel, a sentiment Irish people will quite frequently express to one. Again, Edel made the legion's Marian spirit her own; but that too is in the full tradition of the faith in Ireland. Is not the legion's spirit equally that of this conclusion of a traditional Irish prayer? 'O Mother of Mercy, I place under the protection of your own blessed hand, my going out, my coming in, my lying down, my rising up, the sight of my eyes, the touch of my hands, the speech of my lips, the hearing of my ears, so that they may be pleasing to your own beloved Son' (Douglas Hyde: *Religious Songs of Connacht*).

Edel, however, had no intention of spending all her life in a city office. She wanted to be a Poor Clare, and all was settled for her entry into the Belfast convent when it was discovered that she had tuberculosis. She was sent to Newcastle sanatorium in Co. Wicklow in February 1932 and remained there for eighteen months. When she left she was not cured, but she thought that treatment could be continued at home and that she might make a gradual comeback to work and to legion activities. This she did, and by 1936 spent her fortnight's holiday doing legion extension work in Wales. When she returned she was so full of opportunities across Channel that she wanted to take a permanent job in Chester and make this a base for legion work. But just then came a request from South Africa, from the legion envoy there, asking for more help to be sent out. Edel seemed a good choice and it was hoped that the climate in South Africa might do something for her still very precarious health. She said she would go; and then another request came, from the bishop of Zanzibar and Nairobi, asking that if Edel was being sent out, as he heard, that she come to his area. South Africa had at least its one envoy; Central Africa was all virgin territory for the legion. Yet its climate and conditions were no place for a sick woman. Edel, of course, jumped at the plan, and the Dublin headquarters eventually agreed to send her; on November 23rd, 1936, the feast day of Ireland's greatest missionary to date, St Columbanus, who headed the first great Irish missionary drive to Europe, Edel landed at Mombasa.

From then on her life was a kind of adventurous journey over Africa, riding rough on trucks or in the ancient Ford she eventu-

ally purchased for her work; getting to one centre after another to explain legion ideals and objectives, to get it started in each place; struggling with the 'language barrier' in Africa's variety of tongues, and the translation of legion prayers thereinto. In brief outline, her campaign began from Nairobi, capital of Kenya, to which she travelled immediately on arriving at Mombasa. Nairobi was her first centre from which she travelled far and wide over the surrounding country; in May 1937, she shifted back to Mombasa; in February 1938 to Zanzibar and in July 1938 to Uganda. Only at the very end of 1938, did this woman, who was virtually thought to be dying when she left Ireland, have her first serious bout of illness and have to take a brief rest. After the outbreak of war she went to the island of Mauritius in January 1940. Leaving in the autumn of that year, she broke down and cried as she took leave of some new friends she had made there, a sudden revelation of her lonely apostolate. 'As soon as my work becomes really interesting and I have made real friends, I must break away and face the unknown again', she said.

War-time shipping routes took her back, very sea-sick, via Durban and Beira, to her African work; she set off for Nyasaland at the end of September. But only in March of 1941 did her continual travelling, her ceaseless round of legion work, result in complete physical collapse. Six months in a South African sanatorium followed. It was not a Catholic hospital and Edel could only receive communion once a week; she said that gave her an idea of what hell would be like. Later she was transferred to a Catholic hospital. Finally she crawled back to work in January 1943, making Nairobi her base of operations. She was still very ill, obviously dying, but determined to do what she could as long as she could. The end came about a year later, on 12th May, 1944.

'Vive in Christo, ut Christus in te', 'Live in Christ, that Christ may live in you', wrote St Columbanus (died Bobbio, Italy, 615) back at the very start of the long stream of Irish 'exiles for the love of Christ'. Edel's scrappy notes express the same idea. 'To live in Christ, through the Spirit, and through Mary', she writes. 'In Christ and led by his Spirit, we can offer through Mary to the eternal Father the infinite merits and satisfactions of Christ to make reparation for our sins and for the sins of the world, to give thanks and glory to God.' 'Let us ask the grace to live in realization

of our life in Christ, through Mary, adoring the Trinity.'

'My vocation', she noted on another occasion, 'is a legionary one, envoy and praetorian—consecrated to work for the Father by the Holy Spirit of Jesus and by Mary.' 'I must be a channel of grace to every soul, or rather, Mary through me.' 'Mary, my Mother, help me to do God's will, daily; as perfectly as possible.'

One of the communion antiphons from the oldest Irish liturgical book, the antiphony of Bangor (compiled between 680 and 691) runs:

'Corpus Domini accepimus, et sanguine ejus potati sumus.

Ab omni malo non timebimus, quia Dominus nobiscum est.'

And this sense that, having taken the body and blood of the Lord, we need fear no evil, for the Lord is with us, is expressed just as strongly in the contemporary Irish idiom of Edel Quinn. From Africa come accounts of how she would fast all day on the chance of arriving at a mission station where she could receive communion. Fighting her own physical ill-health and weakness all the time, she was more vividly aware than the physically fit of even the bodily benefits of communion. 'We must do what we can for him and rely on him to give us each day the strength for the work he expects from us. The weakness which he leaves in us must not hold us back from our desires. It is our share in his sufferings. What a grace to be let bear a little for him! Each morning at holy mass, the bread of life will help the body as well as the soul, if we have faith. If we but touch the hem of his garment . . . and how much more have we than that!' 'Always as many masses as possible', she resolves on another occasion. 'Mary loves Jesus in me, caresses and compassionates him for all his wounds. But, above all, she speaks her gratitude for the eucharist, and gives thanks to the eternal Father for that gift. Without the eucharist, what a desolation life would be!'

Edel's 'spiritual reading' was firmly based on the new testament. She seems to have had a special liking for the works of Dom Marmion. Other authors whose books she is known to have studied include De Montfort's *True Devotion*, obviously enough for a legionary, Dom Vonier, St John of the Cross, St Thérèse of Lisieux (to whom she had very great devotion), Mother Julian of Norwich and Elizabeth Leseur. She read some of St Teresa of Avila's works but stopped short in the course of reading *The Interior Castle* on the grounds that she did not see the

use of reading about extraordinary graces and visions! Indeed Edel's own spiritual life, so far as can be judged, runs steadily in the darkness of faith, a clinging to God without any extraordinary spiritual experiences. Or so it appears, for like the Little Flower whom she so admired, she kept her own experience of God a closely guarded secret. 'Consider extra holiness as necessary', she resolved, but leaves us in the dark about her struggles to attain it. But while some people she met did not notice anything out of the ordinary, a great many others were at once impressed by her personal sanctity. Her methods and personality seem always to have avoided rousing criticism or dislike. She seems to have had a great power of getting the legion idea across and the legion started in the face of the many African difficulties, apathy, a people unused to such an idea of lay apostolate, language difficulties, even the fact that she was a woman. 'You know it is contrary to all our ideas in Switzerland for a woman to do these things', an old Swiss priest told her, but he set to work to cooperate with her all the same!

St Teresa of Avila wrote that when one acts solely for God, without self-interest, then 'be sure the Lord will never forsake those who love him when they run risks solely for his sake'. Edel Quinn's achievement in planting the legion in Central Africa is almost a commentary on those words. 'What is impossible for us is possible for him', she notes; 'take him at his word.' 'Ask Mary to secure these graces for us. Expect great things, a burning love. It is the Holy Spirit who breathes these desires into us.' 'We must prove our love by fidelity to prayer', for Edel realized that prayer was the essential activity, the source of all else. When things suddenly sorted themselves out, she used to say she wondered who'd been praying.

'Whatever the opposition we may encounter, he has the power to make the weak strong and the infirm well. And if he should not do this, it will be the better for our souls if we suffer, and forget ourselves, but fix our eyes on his honour and glory. What is the use to us of life and health if we cannot throw them away for so great a King and Lord?' (St Teresa of Avila in *The Book of the Foundations*.)