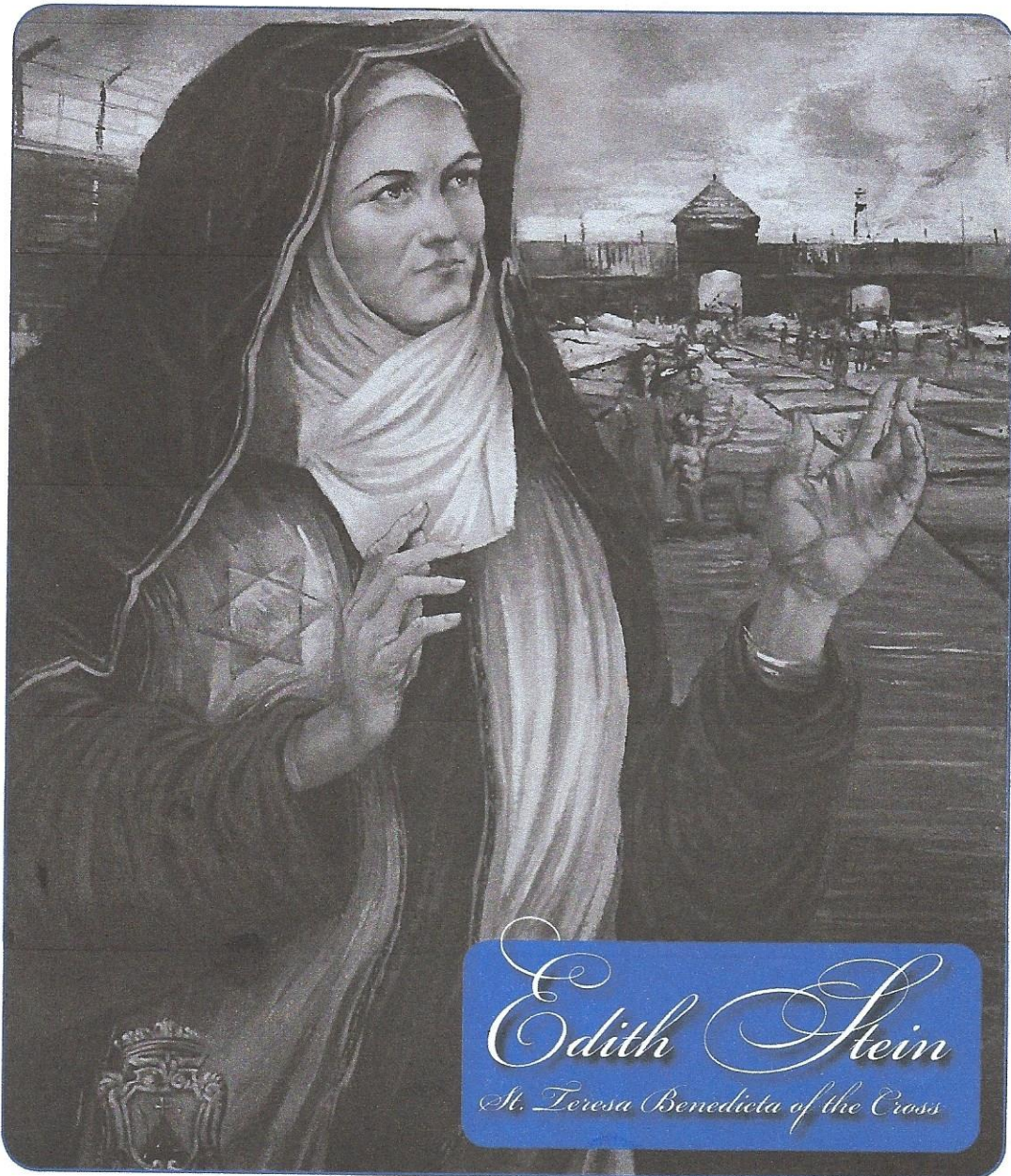


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*Edith Stein*  
*St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross*

# Love for Love:

## The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Jesus

*By St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)*

### Part 1 in a 3 Part Series

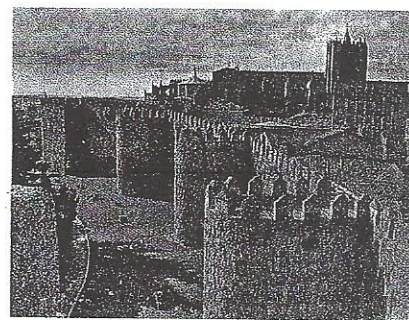
#### Foreword

Yesterday in our monastery church we had perpetual adoration [forty hours devotion]. On such days, the faithful who are associated with our Carmel gather around the altar singing and praying from about six o'clock in the morning until about ten o'clock at night. Then the church is closed and during the night the sisters take turns keeping watch in the choir before the Blessed Sacrament. While outside in carnival's frantic tumult people get drunk and delirious, while political battles separate them, and great need depresses them so much that many forget to look to heaven, at such still places of prayer hearts are opened to the Lord. In place of the cold, the contempt, that he receives out there, they offer him their warm love. They want to atone for the insults that the divine heart must endure daily and hourly. By their steadfast supplications, they draw down God's grace and mercy on a humanity submerged in sin and need. In our time, when the powerlessness of all natural means for battling the overwhelming misery everywhere has been demonstrated so obviously, an entirely new understanding of the power of prayer, of expiation, and of vicarious atonement has again awakened. This is why people of faith crowd the places of prayer, also why, everywhere; there is a blazing demand for contemplative monasteries whose entire life is devoted to prayer and expiation. Also suddenly there is talk in all corners and parts about the silent Carmel that just a few years ago was a little known country. The desire for new foundations is surfacing in the most varied places. One almost feels transported into the time when our Holy Mother Teresa, the foundress of the reformed Carmel, traveled all over Spain from north to south and from west to east to plant new vineyards of the Lord. One would like to bring into our times also something of the spirit of this great woman who built amazingly during a century of battles and disturbances. May she herself bless this little picture of her life and works, that it may capture at least some of the radiance of her spirit and convey it to the hearts of readers. Then surely will people desire to know her better from the sources, from the rich treasure of her own works. And whoever has learned to draw from these sources will never tire of gaining courage and strength from them again and again.

#### 1. Native Land and Family Home

As a contemporary, spiritual relative, and native of the same country as that famous champion of the faith, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa's impact unfolded in a century marked by religious strife and a great schism in the church. When she came into the world, a mere twenty years had passed since the last of the Moors were driven out of Spain and the whole peninsula united in the Catholic faith. Eight centuries of continual warfare between the Cross and the Crescent lay behind the Spanish people. During these battles they blossomed into an heroic people, into a legion of Christ the King.

Teresa's more immediate homeland, the ancient kingdom of Castile, was the strong fortress from which in resolute struggle the cross was gradually carried to the South. The Castilian knights formed the special troops of the army of faith. Teresa, bold warrior for God, came from such a race of heroes. A town built on cliffs, the fortress of Avila (called "Avila of the Saints") was her native town. Her parents, Alonso Sanchez de Cepeda and his second wife Beatriz de Ahumada, were of the old nobility.<sup>1</sup> According to the custom of the times and of her country, she was called by her mother's surname, Teresa de Ahumada. Just as she saw the light of day on the morning of March 28, 1515, the bell of the newly built Carmelite monastery invited the faithful to a great celebration, to the consecration of its chapel.<sup>2</sup> This was the house that later was to be her home for decades, where the Lord intended to form this vessel of his election. Teresa was the sixth child of her father, the third of her young mother, who had taken charge of the daughter and two sons from her husband's first marriage. Six younger siblings were later added to these five older ones. Alonso Sanchez de Cepeda was a man of deep piety and strong virtue. He carefully watched over the upbringing of his children, sought to keep all harmful influences from them, guided them to everything good, and himself presented them with the best example of a serious Christian life. Delicate Dona Beatriz, mild and humble, ill at an early age, and dependent on the help of her stepdaughter Maria for the upbringing of this great band of children, was fervently devout. The love of God and of prayer bloomed spontaneously in the hearts of the children who shared her life.



*The walled city of Avila, Spain*

## 2. Childhood and Youth

The fiery heart of the little Teresa became attached to her noble parents in ardent love and devotion and to her siblings in affectionate trust. Her most beloved companions had to be, primarily, her brothers. Serious Maria, burdened with the duties of the eldest, was not regarded as a comrade, and the baby, Juana, was many years younger. Rodrigo, four years older than she, became her confidant during her childhood. Her mother's pious tales, her first instruction, ignited in the little Spaniard a holy zeal. Despite her liveliness and joy in merry company, she liked to withdraw into a quiet corner of the garden to pray alone. It gave her pleasure to give alms to the poor. And one day the seven-year-old let her favorite brother in on a secret plan that she had thought up. She tells about it herself in her autobiography. "We were reading the lives of saints together. When I saw what torments the martyrs endured for God, I discovered that they had earned the joy of seeing God for a low price, and I burned with the desire to die a similar death" [L, 1, I].<sup>3</sup>

- 1 [In fact, recent studies have shown that Teresa was of Jewish ancestry; see Teofanes Egido, "The Historical Setting of St. Teresa's Life," *Carmelite Studies* 1 (1980): 122-182. Throughout this essay, Edith Stein writes in light of the historical data available to her at the time. Some minor corrections (of dates, etc.) have been inserted into the text of this translation, but the basic presentation remains as she wrote it.—Tr.]
- 2 [According to recent research, the dedication of the chapel of the Monastery of the Incarnation took place in the same year (1515) as Teresa's birth, but not on the same day; see Efen de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y Vida de Santa Teresa*, 2d ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1977), pp. 22-25, 90.—Tr.]
- 3 [Throughout this essay, to help preserve its original flavor, citations of St. Teresa's works have been translated directly from the comparatively free German translation that Edith Stein used. In addition, for the convenience of the reader, we have inserted cross-references (in brackets) to the ICS translations of the same texts, whenever these could be located. The latter may be found in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, vols. 1-3 (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976-1985). The following system of abbreviations is used: F = Book of Foundations; L = Book of Her Life; C = Interior Castle; W = Way of Perfection; ST = Spiritual Testimonies. Ordinarily, the two numbers following the initial letter indicate chapter and section, respectively; for the Interior Castle, however, the first number indicates the "dwelling place." Thus, "C, 1, 2, 3" refers to the third section of the second chapter in the first "dwelling places" of the Interior Castle.—Tr.]

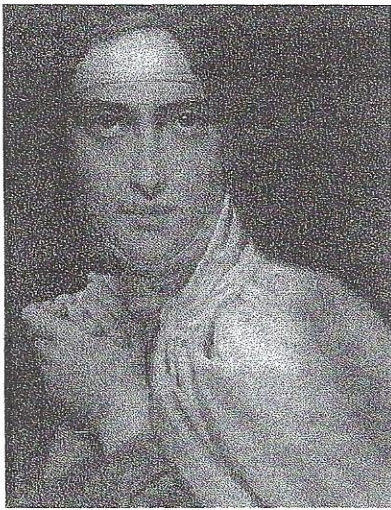
She did not have far to go from the wish to the decision to act, and her brother was also enkindled by her enthusiasm. "We decided to travel to the land of the Moors to get our heads cut off. It seemed to me that God had given us enough strength to carry out our plans in spite of our tender years. What was the most difficult for us was parting from our parents." But the thought of eternal joy won over the pain of separation. "Forever! Oh Rodrigo, think of it, the martyrs gaze upon God forever. We must become martyrs." The very next morning they secretly set out on their way. But they did not get far. They slipped through the town gate happily. But soon afterward they met an uncle who took the little fugitives back to their parents. They had already been missed and were greeted with reproach. "I left," Teresa replied, "because I want to see God and because one must die in order to see him." She was very hurt that her lovely plan had fallen apart. Her zeal did not abate. She built hermitages with Rodrigo in the garden, she preferred to play monastery life with her friends, and she continued her lengthy devotions.

The early death of her mother cut deeply into Teresa's youth. She was then thirteen years old.<sup>4</sup> She herself says about it, "I threw myself down in despair before an image of the Mother of God. With many tears, I implored the Holy Virgin to become my mother now. Uttered with the simplicity of a child, this prayer was heard. From that hour on, I never prayed to the Virgin in vain" [L, 1,7]. The young person certainly surmised that she needed special protection, having lost her mother just when she especially needed her. Teresa

had blossomed into a young beauty. Black curls framed her white forehead; luminous dark eyes revealed the passion of her soul; her movements and posture had natural grace and dignity. The liveliness of her spirit, her charming amiability, gave her attractiveness in her social life that almost no one could resist. The dangers already inherent in these natural gifts were increased by an inclination that had already awakened in the young girl during her mother's life. Dona Beatriz, who was constantly house-bound by her suffering, liked to find a little distraction in romances of chivalry and was weak enough to allow her children to read them, too, even though this was not the father's intent. After her death, Teresa gave in to her passion without restraint and devoured one book after the other, busying herself with them day and night. Those novels are forgotten today, but we know their character from the magnificent satire, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which exposed for all time such writings and their impact. The "Knight of the Woeful Countenance" who mistook windmills for giants and a peasant girl for a princess, is the victim of such caricatures of real life. Teresa's active imagination was also enchanted by such entrancing portrayals of the deeds of heroic knights. The gentle attraction of the pious legends of her childhood paled against these colorful exploits. With bitter regret, she herself later looked back on these youthful mistakes.

Oh, how I suffer now when I recall how I forgot the longings of my childhood! My God, since you seem to have decided to rescue me, let it be your glorious will to do so.... Why did this soul, which you have selected for your habitation and showered with grace, become spotted like this? I feel great pain remembering it, for I know very well that I alone was guilty. You, Oh Lord, have left nothing untried to open my eyes ever since my youngest days. [L, 1, 7-8]

It was not surprising that the young girl began to compare herself with the heroines of her beloved novels.



*Teresa of Avila by François Gérard*

<sup>4</sup> According to the saint. Fourteen in the latest research. [Ed.]

There came a time when I understood the natural gifts that heaven had bestowed on me.... Soon I acquired a taste for beautiful clothes; I wanted to appear well-dressed; I took many pains with my hands and my hair; I resorted to every lovely scent and beauty aid that I could lay hands on. Above all, I loved meticulous cleanliness. I really did not have any ulterior motives at all in my heart, and for all the world I did not want anyone to get an idea of offending God. [L, 1,8; 2, 2]

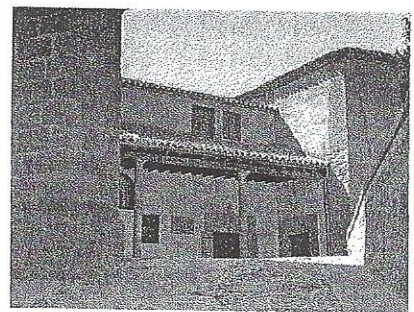
The young beauty did not lack admirers. However, her strict father would not permit her to associate with young strangers, but cousins of the same age were allowed in the house. "They liked me, and we spent time together. I let them talk as they would. I enlivened their conversation and, to please them, I took pleasure in their dreams of the future, in their childish misdeeds, and other useless things. However, the worst was that I learned about feelings and attitudes that were later to be unfortunate for me" [L, 2, 2]. The influence of one young relative was particularly unhealthy.

She was so frivolous that my mother, as if guessing the bad results, tried everything to keep her away from me. But it was in vain. She always returned under this or that pretext. Soon we were close confidantes. We talked together constantly. She gave me as much pleasure as I wanted, allowed me to share in hers, and confided her secrets and conceits to me. I couldn't get enough of listening to her. I believe I was a little over fourteen years old when our unhealthy friendship started. I believe that in this first period of my life I did not commit even one mortal sin. What saved me was the fear of God and, I must say, the even greater fear of staining my honor; for my honor was everything to me, and nothing in the world, no earthly good, could have shaken my decision to keep it pure. [L, 2, 3]

Nevertheless, the effect was deep enough. "This friendship changed me so much that soon there was nothing left of my good nature. My relative and one of her equally frivolous girl friends seemed to have imprinted the frivolity of their characters on me" [L, 2, 4]. Her father and older sister, who tended the younger siblings with motherly concern, saw the transformation with serious alarm and made a definite decision. When Maria left her family home to go to the house of a pious nobleman as his wife, Don Alonso sent his darling to an Augustinian monastery to be educated. Suddenly and without saying good-bye, she vanished from the merry circle of which she had been the center.

### 3. The Monastery Pupil

The monastery of Our Lady of Grace was highly regarded in Avila. The first families of the city entrusted it with their daughters. Teresa felt as if she were in prison during her first days behind the monastery walls, but soon the solitude aroused strong repentance for the past months. She was tormented by pangs of conscience. But this painful state of affairs did not last long. She again found her peace of mind and also quickly adjusted to boarding school life. With grateful love she attached herself to the boarding school directress, Maria Bricerio, a devout nun and an outstanding educator.



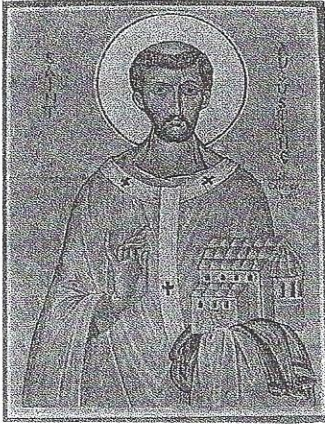
*The Monastery of Our Lady of Grace*

Among the nuns I found one who was especially designated to supervise the pupils. Her bed was in our dormitory. It was she whom God designated to open my eyes. Her conversation seemed beneficial to me. She spoke so beautifully of God! I loved to listen to her. She told me how, upon reading the words of the Gospel, "Many are called but few are chosen," she made the decision to leave the world. She also reflected for me the joy that God reserves for those who leave everything for the love of him. While listening to her, I forgot the recent past. I felt the thought, the longing for eternal things awakening in me. My great aversion to monastic life more and more disappeared....

I only stayed in this monastery for one and one-half years, though I had made great progress in goodness there. I asked the nuns for their prayers that God would show me a way of life in which I could best serve him. In my heart I was afraid that it could be a call to a monastery, just as I was afraid of marriage. Toward the end of my stay in the monastery, however, my inclinations turned more and more to the religious life. Since I believed that I was nevertheless not up to some of the practices of this monastery, I could not decide on this order. Moreover, I had a dear friend in a monastery of another convent. Uppermost in my mind was choosing a house where I could be with her. I was thinking less of the salvation of my soul than of the inclination of my nature. These good thoughts of becoming a nun arose now and then, but left again without my making a definite decision.... [L, 2, 10; 3, 1-2]

#### 4. Vocational Decision

Still unclear about her future life's path, Teresa returned to her father's house. A serious illness occasioned her return. During her convalescence, she was sent to the farm of her sister Maria, who surrounded her with tender love and would have preferred to keep her permanently. But her father was unwilling to be deprived of her company any longer. He picked her up himself but left her en route with his brother Pedro Sanchez de Cepeda in Hortigosa for a few weeks, since he himself had to finish some pressing business.



St. Augustine

Teresa's stay with her uncle was to be of decisive importance for her. His life was devoted entirely to prayer and to being occupied with spiritual books. He asked Teresa to read to him. "Actually," she writes, "this bored me a little. However, I gave the impression that I did so gladly anyhow, because I was overly compliant in order to give others pleasure" [L, 3, 4]. This time it was not to her detriment. Soon she was very much taken by the books her uncle gave her. The *Letters* of St. Jerome and St. Gregory's *Morals*, and the writings of St. Augustine captivated her active spirit and reawakened in her the pious enthusiasm of her childhood. The reading was often interrupted, and the pious old man and the young reader discussed the questions of eternal life in connection with it. Teresa's resolve ripened in this environment. She took a glance at her past life. What would have become of her if the Lord had called her from life during the time of vanity and infidelity? She does not want to expose herself to this danger again. From then on, eternal salvation is to be her goal, and, in order not to lose sight of it again, she will heroically conquer her aversion to religious life, her love of freedom, and her tender attachment to her father and siblings.

After the interior battle came a difficult outer one. In spite of all his piety, Don Alonso does not want to be separated from his favorite daughter. All her pleas, and the advocacy of her uncle and siblings, are in vain. But Teresa is no less decisive than her father. Since she cannot hope for his consent, she secretly leaves home. As in her earlier childish adventure, one of her brothers accompanies her. It is not Rodrigo, for he no longer lives at home, having taken a post in the Spanish colonies in America. Antonio, who is two years younger than Teresa, takes his place. She herself says:

While I was settling on my leaving, I persuaded one of my brothers to leave the world by pointing out its frivolities to him. We agreed to set out early in the morning and that my brother himself would take me to the monastery... But when I stepped over the threshold of my family home, such fear gripped me that I believed I could hardly be more afraid at the hour of my death. It was as if my bones were being separated from one another. The love for God was not strong enough in me to triumph over the love for my relatives. My natural feelings arose with

such force that, in spite of all my deliberations, without God's support I would not have taken one more step. But God gave me courage in spite of myself and I set out. [L, 4, 1]

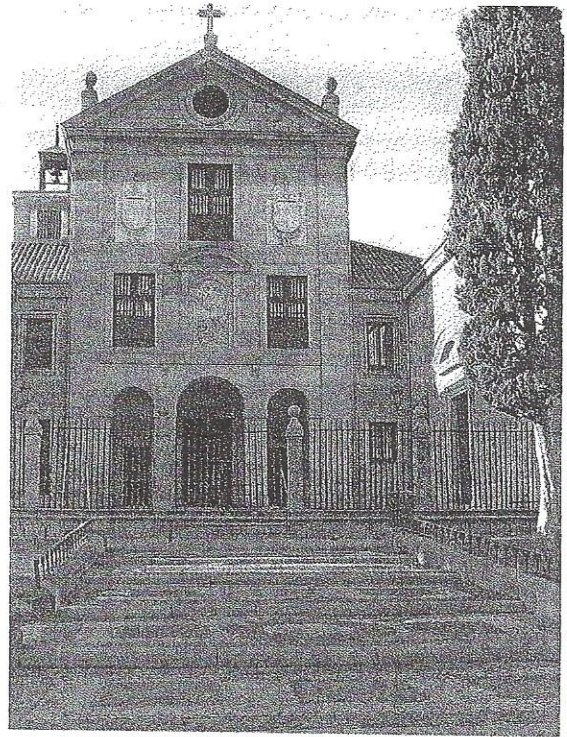
Antonio took his sister to the door of the Carmelite monastery. Then he himself went to the Dominican monastery of St. Thomas and asked for admission. This was on All Souls Day of the year 1535.

## 5. In the Monastery of the Incarnation: Novitiate

The house that in her childish reflections Teresa preferred over the Augustinians because a dear friend lived there (Juana Suarez, the blood sister of her teacher Maria Briceno) was the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation. It also had a number of other material advantages that could prejudice a receptive disposition: its magnificent location, its beautiful, spacious buildings, its expansive garden through which flowed clear streams. But these earthly motives were no longer decisive. "In spite of my preference for the monastery where my friend lived, I felt ready to enter some other one should I have had the hope of serving God better there or should it have been my father's wish. For I was seriously seeking the salvation of my soul and placed little value on quiet living" [L, 2, 2]. So it was clearly God's mysterious grace guiding her that gave her the inner certainty of where to direct her steps.

The *Order of the Most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel*, to which Teresa now belonged, already looked back on a long and glorious past. It revered as its founder the Prophet Elijah who led a hermit's life of prayer and fasting with his disciples in the caves of Mount Carmel. When his prayer freed the land of Israel from a drought that had lasted for years, then (according to the Order's legend) in a little cloud that signaled the saving rain, his prophetic vision recognized the image of the Virgin who would bear God, she who would bring grace.

He is said to have been the first to revere the Mother of God, and the first shrine to Mary is said to have stood on the lovely heights of Mount Carmel. During the time of the crusades, the hermits of Mount Carmel were organized as an order. At their request, Patriarch Albert of Jerusalem gave them a Rule for their Order around 1200. In solitude and silence, they were to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, to observe strict fasts as of old, and to obtain what they needed to live by the work of their own hands, as the apostle Paul exhorted. The persecution of religious by the Moslem conquerors of the Holy Land led to the transplantation of the Order to the West. Here the destiny of other orders at the beginning of the Middle Ages befell them also. The strict discipline of old gave way to a certain mitigation. Pope Eugene IV moderated the original Rule; and the first women's monasteries of the Order were founded in the fifteenth century on the basis of these moderated regulations. They also were observed at the Monastery of the Incarnation. It had only been in existence for a few decades before Teresa entered, and one could not accuse it of abuses. The existing regulations were being followed. Nuns of



*The Monastery of the Incarnation, Madrid*