

Claire was horrified by the news that her friend, Annette, had been killed in an auto accident — for she had cared little about religion. Unexpectedly, that night Annette paid her a visit, saying:

*Claire, don't pray for me. I am damned. I have come to tell you that and to speak to you at length about it, but do not think I am doing it out of friendship. We who are here in this place, we do not love anyone **anymore**. I am doing what I am because I am forced to. I am acting now as 'a part of that power which always wills evil, yet does good.' To be honest I would like you too to be cast into this place where I am to spend eternity. Do not be surprised that I should say that. Here we all think that way. Our will is irrevocably directed towards evil — at least what you call 'evil.' Even if we do happen to do something good, as I am doing now by letting you know what goes on in **Hell**, we **never do it with a good intention**.*

A Soul in Hell

The Story of Annette

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Booklet compiled and typeset by Robert T. Hart
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A Soul in Hell: The Story of Annette was read at an Ignatian Retreat that a friend of mine attended. He was so impressed with the story that he asked for a copy and shared it with me. I in turn thought it worthy to make available and thus compiled this booklet.

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~Robert T. Hart

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ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI ON

“THE PAINS OF HELL”

Hell is a pit enclosed on every side, where no ray of the sun or any other light ever enters: ‘He shall never see light’ (Psalms xlvi. 20). St. Basil explains it: ‘The Lord will divide the fire from the light, so that this fire will only perform the office of burning, and not the giving of light.’

The sense of smell shall be tormented. What torment would it be to find oneself shut up in a room with a putrid corpse! ‘Out of their carcasses shall rise a stink’ (Ps. xxxiv. 3). The damned must remain in the midst of so many millions of other reprobates, who are alive to pain, but corpses as to the stench they send forth. St. Bonaventure says, that if the body of one of the damned were driven from hell, the stench would be enough to destroy all men! And yet some fools say: If I go to hell, I shall not be alone. Miserable beings! the more there are in hell, the more they suffer (says also St. Thomas)..... They suffer more, I say, from the smell, the shrieks, and the narrowness of the place; besides which, in hell they will be one over another, heaped up together like sheep in the winter season: ‘They are laid in hell like sheep’ (Psalms xlvi. 15).

Thus, as the damned fall into hell at the last day, so will they have to remain, without **ever changing their position**, and without moving hand or foot, **as long as God is God**.

The hearing shall be tormented by the continual howling and wailing of those despairing wretched. The appetite shall be tormented by hunger... ‘They shall suffer hunger as dogs’ (Ps. lviii. 15). So great will be their thirst, that the water of the ocean would not suffice to quench it; and yet they never shall obtain even a drop of water.

...For the day will come in which thy impurities will become as pitch in thy entrails, to increase and aggravate the torments of the flame which will burn thee in hell... ‘thy lust shall be turned into pitch, to feed in my bowels the everlasting fire.’

The damned will be tormented in his memory, by the remembrance of the time which was given him in this life to save his soul, and which he spent in losing it... **He will always be tormented, and never shall find peace.**

A Soul in Hell

The Story of Annette

INTRODUCTION

What is related in these pages is of the greatest importance. Though the events in question took place in Germany, what we give here is, as far as we are able, a faithful translation from the original language. Translations have also been made into various other languages.

The “Nihil obstat” was granted by the Vicar of Rome, and the “Imprimatur” of the Pope’s Vicar for Rome guarantees the text free from doctrinal error.

These frightening pages must sound a WARNING for us, describing as they do a way of life which is very common in present-day society.

The Divine Mercy, in allowing these revelations, lifts for us a corner of the veil hiding those most awesome mysteries which await us all at the term of our days on earth.

WE HOPE THAT MANY SOULS WILL HEAR AND TAKE HEED.

THE STORY

Claire and Annette were two girls working for a firm in southern Germany. They were not particularly close friends, but simply observed normal everyday courtesies towards each other.

However, working as they did side by side each day, they naturally got around to exchanging views on life, etc. Claire confessed openly that she was a Christian and she considered it her duty to instruct her colleague and to call her charitably back into line when she treated matters of religion lightly or superficially.

Thus they spent some time together until Annette married and gave up her job to go and live elsewhere.

That was in 1937. In the autumn of the same year Claire was spending her holidays beside Lake Garda when, towards the middle of September, her mother wrote from home with the sad news that Annette had been killed in an automobile accident and had been buried the day before.

Claire was horrified by the news, knowing as she did how little her friend had cared about her religion. Had she been ready to appear before God? What had been the state of her soul at the moment of her unexpected death?

Don't Pray for Me

The next morning Claire heard Mass, offered her Holy Communion for her unfortunate friend and prayed fervently for her soul. But that very night, ten minutes after midnight, the following vision came to her.

“Claire,” said Annette, “don't pray for me. I am damned. I have come to tell you that and to speak to you at length about it, but do not think I am doing it out of friendship. We who are here in this place, we do not love anyone **anymore**. I am doing what I am because I am forced to. I am acting now as ‘a part of that power which always wills evil, yet does good.’ To be honest I would like you too to be cast into this place where I am to spend eternity. Do not be surprised that I should say that. Here we all think that way. Our will is irrevocably directed towards evil – at least what you call ‘evil.’ Even if we happen to do something good, as I am doing now by letting you know what goes on in **Hell**, we **never do it with a good intention.**”

Annette continues: Do you remember when we met four years ago in southern Germany? You were twenty-three, and you had already been there six months when I arrived. As I was a newcomer, you sometimes got me out of scrapes, and you put me in touch with good people, whatever ‘good’ may mean.

flee from His Presence. Just as Cain fled from the body of Abel, all my soul could do was to flee from that vision of horrors.

And that was my particular judgment. The invisible judge pronounced sentence: “Depart from Me!!!”

And then my soul, smothered in sulfur, hurled itself like a shadow into everlasting torment.

(NOTE BY FRENCH TRANSLATOR: We could point out that most of the statement made by this damned soul are identical with the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologica.)+++

CLAIRE'S CONCLUSION

When the Angelus rang next morning, still deeply moved by that terrible night, I got up and hurried downstairs to the chapel. My heart was pounding wildly. The people from the hospice who were kneeling around me looked at me in astonishment. I expect they were thinking that perhaps I had come downstairs too fast and upset myself. But one good lady from Budapest had watched me more carefully, and after Mass she said to me with a smile, “*Froirlein, the Lord would have us serve Him in calmness, not agitation.*” But she soon realized that there was something else at the root of my trouble, and she went on talking to me. And as she went on with her kindly advice, I was thinking to myself, “*Only God is enough for me!!*” **Yes, He alone must be my portion in this life and in the next.** One day I hope to possess him in Heaven, whatever sacrifices it may cost me on earth. **But please, please let me not go to Hell!!!!**

“Let fire and gallows, wild beasts and all the torments of the devil assail me, so that I may rejoice in the possession of Jesus Christ.”

~Saint Ignatius

I felt a searing pain in every fiber of my being, though it was nothing compared to what I am suffering now. Then I lost consciousness.

How strange it was that on that very morning a persistent thought had been nagging at me for no apparent reason. A voice inside kept saying, 'You could go to Mass once more.' It was as though someone were begging me. But I stifled the notion with a decisive 'No'. I said to myself, 'You have got to have done with that nonsense once and for all.' Now I have to suffer the consequences of my resolution.

You already know what happened after my death, what became of my husband and my mother, and of my body, and the details of the funeral. I know all about it with the natural knowledge we are allowed here. In fact we know everything that happens on earth, but only in a dim and confused manner. It is like that, that I see the place where you are staying now.

At the moment of my death I found myself in a misty world, but then suddenly I emerged into an overwhelming blinding light. I was still at the place where my body was lying. It was like being in a theater. The lights go out all of a sudden, the curtain goes up with a terrific noise and you find yourself faced with an unexpected scene. For me that scene was lit up with a horrible light: what I was seeing was the scene of **my whole life!!** My soul was shown to me as if I were seeing it in a mirror, with all the graces I had rejected from my youth up until my final 'No' to God's call. I saw myself like a murderer on trial being confronted in court with his victim's dead body.

Would I repent?? **Never!!!**

Was I ashamed?? **Not that either!!!**

Of course, I could no longer bear to feel upon me the eyes of the God I had finally rejected. All that was left for me was to

I used to praise you for your 'love for you neighbor'. How ridiculous! Your good turns were just a matter of pure form; in fact I was already beginning to suspect as much. Here we know of no goodness in anybody.

Sins of the Parents

You already know something about my early life, so now I will tell you the rest. If my parents had had their way, I should never have been born. They felt my birth was somehow shameful. My sisters were already fourteen and fifteen when I appeared on the scene. Oh, if only I never had been born!! Why can't I just stop existing now and get away from these torments? No pleasure could compare with that of being able to reduce my being to dust, like a layer of ash that the wind blows away! But I have to go on existing. I have to exist like this, the way I made myself, an existence I wrecked!

My father and mother were still young when they left the country to go and live in the town, but both of them had already stopped going to church, and a good thing too!! They got friendly with other non-churchgoers. They first met in a dance hall, and at the end of six months they 'had to get married.' They brought away just enough religion from the marriage ceremony to take my mother to Sunday Mass maybe twice a year. She never really taught me to pray. The only things that interested her were the day-to-day material tasks that had to be done, even though we did not have to worry about money.

Those words — 'pray', 'Mass', 'religious instruction', 'Church' — I find it unspeakably revolting to utter them. I loathe it all. I hate people who go to Church. In fact, for that matter, I hate everybody and everything.

Everything is a Source of Pain

The fact is that everything is a source of pain for us. Everything we learned before our death, every memory of things

we saw or knew is like a cruel flame. And in every one of these memories we see the graces that were offered to us, the graces we **spurned**. **Oh what agony!** We don't eat, we don't sleep, we cannot walk upright. We are spiritually in chains, and we look with horror, with 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', on the ruins of our lives. All that is left for us is hate and torment; do you understand? Here we drink in hate like water, even among ourselves. Above all we hate God, and I will tell you why. The elect, in Heaven, cannot help loving him, because they see Him unveiled in all His dazzling beauty. That gives them indescribable happiness. We know it and that knowledge drives us into a fury. Here on earth, those who know God through creation and Revelation can love Him, but they do not have to. The believer — and it makes me grind my teeth to say it — the believer who in his meditation contemplates Christ with His arms outstretched on the Cross will end up loving Him. But the man to whom God comes like a hurricane, a Chastiser, a Righteous Avenger; the man who God has rejected as He did us, that man can only hate Him eternally with all the audacity of his ill-will. Yes, **hate Him**, with all the strength of a freely-made decision to be cut off from Him. We made that decision with one dying breath. Even now we would not wish to change it, nor shall we ever wish to do so.

Do you understand now why Hell is eternal? It is because our obstinacy will go on forever.

Because I am forced to I must add that God is merciful, even to us. I say I am 'forced' because, although I am in control of what I tell you, I am still not allowed to lie, as I should like to. I am telling you many things against my will, and I have to hold back the flood of abuse I should like to spew forth. God was merciful in not giving us time to do all the evil that our ill-will would have had us do. Had we done it, it would have added to our faults and so to our punishment. In fact, God either caused us to die young, as I did, or He brought in some other kind of extenuating circumstances. Even now He shows Himself merciful towards us by not making us go any closer to Him than

refused more graces and more enlightenment. The man who had more knowledge in his lifetime suffers more severely than the one who knew less. If one has sinned through malice one suffers more cruelly than if it had been through weakness. But nobody suffers more than he has deserved. Oh, if only that were not true! Then I should have a reason to **hate!**

You told me one day that it had been revealed to some Saint that nobody goes to Hell without knowing. I laughed, but afterward I reassured myself by saying secretly, 'In that case, if the need arise, I can always do an about-turn.' That is true. Before my sudden end I did not know Hell for what it is. No human being knows it. But I was fully aware that it existed. I said to myself, 'If you die you will go into the life beyond straight as an arrow aimed at God, and you will have to suffer the consequences.' But, as I have already told you, despite such a thought I did not change my ways. Force of habit pushed me on and I let it take control of me. For the older one gets, the stronger the power of habit becomes.

The Circumstances of Her Death

This is the way my death came about. A week ago — a week, that is, as you would reckon time, for from the point of view of the pain I have suffered I could well say I have been burning in Hell for ten years already; however, a week ago, last Sunday, my husband and I went out for what was to be our last drive. It was a beautiful morning, and I was feeling on top of the world. A foreboding sense of happiness came over me and stayed with me all day. On the way home my husband was blinded by the lights of a car coming in the other direction, and our car went out of control.

Automatically I uttered the name 'Jesus', but it was just an exclamation, not a prayer.

match under your nose and said sarcastically, ‘Does that smell like Hell?’ You put the flame out quickly. **Well, nobody puts it out here.**

I assure you that the fire the Bible talks about is not just the torment of conscience. It is real fire. When He said, ‘Depart from Me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire,’ He meant it literally — **yes literally!!**

You will say to me, ‘How can spirits be affected by material fire?’ But on earth, doesn’t your soul suffer when you put your fingers in the fire? The soul doesn’t actually burn, but what agony your whole being goes through.

Likewise, we in this place are spiritually bound to the fire according to our nature and our faculties. The soul is deprived of its natural freedom of action. We cannot think what we should like, nor as we should like.

Do not be shocked at what I am telling you. This state means nothing to you, but I am being burned here, without being consumed.

Our greatest torment is the certain knowledge that we shall never see God. How can that torment us so much when we were so indifferent about it on earth? As long as a knife is left on the table it does not worry you. You can see it is sharp, but you are not afraid of it. But just let it cut into your flesh and you will be writhing in pain. It is now that we are actually feeling the loss of God, whereas before we only thought about it.

Degrees of Suffering

Not all souls suffer to the same degree. The more maliciously and systematically a man has sinned, so much the more heavily will the loss of God weigh down upon him.

Catholics who are damned suffer more than members of other religions because usually they have been offered and have

we are here in this far-off place of Hell. That lessens our torment. Every step closer to God would cause me greater pain than you would feel walking up close to a red hot brazier.

You were shocked once when we were out walking and I told you that a few days before my First Communion my father had said to me, ‘My dear Annette, do get a pretty dress. All the rest is just a farce.’ Because you were shocked I was almost ashamed. Now the whole thing seems laughable.

Furious at the Decree of Pope St. Pius X Lowering the Age of First Communion

The only sensible thing about the whole business was that children were not admitted to Communion before they were twelve. Well, by that age I was already crazy about worldly pleasures, so I did not worry at all about not taking religion seriously and I did not attach much importance to my First Communion. It makes us furious when we see that nowadays many children of seven go to Communion, and we do all we can to persuade people that at that age their powers of reason are not yet sufficiently developed. They must have time to commit a few **mortal sins**. Then that white disc won’t do as much damage as it would if their souls were still living by faith, hope, and charity — **bah!** what a thought — that they received at baptism. If you remember, I was already thinking along those lines when I was on earth.

I have already mentioned my father. He often used to fight with my mother. I did not say much to you about it because I was ashamed. How ridiculous, to be ashamed of something evil!! It is all the same to us in this place.

My parents no longer even slept in the same room. I was in with my mother, and my father had the room next door, so that he could come in as late as he liked. He used to drink heavily, and he was squandering all of our money on alcohol. My sisters

both went out to work because they said they needed the money, and my mother took a job to bring something in as well.

During the last year of his life my father often used to beat my mother when she would not let him have any money. On the other hand, he was always kind to me. One day, — I told you about this, and you were shocked at my capriciousness (come to that, was there anything about me that did not shock you?) — anyhow, one day my father bought me a pair of shoes, and I made him take them back at least twice because the style and the heels were not up-to-date enough for me.

An Incident at the Death of her Father

The night my father had the stroke that killed him something happened to me that I did not dare tell you about for fear you would take it the wrong way. But now you have to know about it. It is important because it was then that I was first attacked by the spirit that torments me now.

I was asleep in the bedroom with my mother. I could tell from her deep breathing that she was sound asleep. Suddenly I heard someone calling my name. A voice I did not know was saying, ‘What will happen if your father dies?’

Since he had been treating my mother so badly, I had stopped loving my father—in fact from that time on I did not love anyone anymore. I was just fond of a few people who cared about me. Outright love, a love that does not expect any reward, that only exists in souls that are in the state of grace, and mine certainly was not.

I did not know who was asking me this strange question, so I just said, ‘But he isn’t going to die!’

There was silence for a while then I heard the same question again. Again I snapped back, ‘**He is not going to die!!**’

Once when I was a child I heard a priest say in a sermon that God rewards us for every good work we perform and that when He cannot reward us in the life to come He does it on earth. That is very true. Out of the blue I inherited some money from my Aunt ‘Lotte’, and at the same time my husband started earning a very good salary, so I was able to fit out my new home very nicely. By this time the light of religion had become for me something very distant, a pale light, dim and flickering.

The cafes in the towns, and the inns we stayed at on our travels certainly did not point us towards God. All the people who went to those places lived like us, getting their pleasures from external things first and foremost instead of living primarily an interior life. If we did sometimes visit churches when we were traveling around on holidays; we only did so for their artistic interest. There was a religious atmosphere emanating from those buildings, especially the medieval ones, but I could neutralize it by making some criticism which seemed to the point at the time. For instance, I could have a go at some lay-brother for making a bit of a mess of showing us around, or for being sloppily dressed, or I would think how scandalous it was that monks who pretended to be holy should sell liqueurs, or perhaps I would think about the endless bell-ringing calling the people to services when all the Church was interested in was making money. That is how I turned away from God’s grace each time it knocked at the door of my soul.

Mistakes depicting Hell, but no Exaggeration!

I gave free reign to my bad temper, especially on the subject of certain medieval paintings of Hell in cemeteries and other places showing the Devil roasting souls over glowing coals while his companions dragged other victims down with their long tails. **Oh Claire!** People might make mistakes in the way they depict Hell, **but they never exaggerate!**

I always had my own ideas about the fires of Hell. You remember we were discussing the question once and I struck a

Yes, the fact was that I had rebelled against God. You did not understand. You thought I was still a Catholic, and I wanted people to think I was. I even went as far as paying my tithes — I told myself a bit of insurance could not do me any harm.

Sometimes your reactions struck home, but they did not have any lasting effect on me: I had made up my mind you were wrong. It was this strained relationship that made neither of us sorry to say ‘goodbye’ when I left to get married.

A Year of Married Life

Before the wedding I went to Confession and Communion once more, as was required. My husband thought the same way as I did about that — why should we be made to go through those formalities? Still we did go through with it like everyone else. You people would call a Communion like that ‘unworthy’. Well, after that ‘unworthy’ Communion my conscience was a lot cleared. In any case, I never went to Communion again.

By and large we were very happy in our married life. We agreed about everything, including the fact that we did not want the responsibility of having children. At a stretch my husband might have wanted to have just one, but in the end I managed to get even that idea out of his mind. I was far more concerned with clothes, fancy furniture, meeting friends, going out, taking trips in the car and other pleasures. The year between my marriage and my sudden death was a year of sheer pleasure for me.

Every Sunday we went out in the car, or else we went to visit my husband’s parents, who lived just as superficially as we did.

At heart of course I was not happy, even though I put on a smiling face for the world. All the time there was something gnawing away inside me. I should have liked to believe that death, which I naturally thought was many years away, would be the end of everything.

There was silence. Then a third time the voice asked me, ‘What will happen if your father dies?’ I began to think of how my father often came home drunk, shouting at my mother and beating her. I remember how he had humiliated us in front of our friends and neighbors. I got angry and blurted out, ‘That will just be his hard luck!’ After that there was silence.

In the morning, when my mother wanted to go in and tidy up my father’s room she found the door locked. Around midday they forced the door open and found my father’s body lying half-dressed on the bed. He must have had some sort of accident while he was going to fetch beer from the cellar, and he had been in bad health for a long time.

You and Martha persuaded me to join the young people’s association. I never hid the fact that I considered the talks given by the organizers as pretty parochial sort of stuff, but I liked the games. As you know I became one of the leaders straight away, which was typical of me. I liked the outings as well. I even went as far as going to Confession and Communion occasionally, although I did not have anything to confess. I did not consider thoughts and words were of any importance, and at the time I was not sufficiently corrupted to go in for any really immoral actions.

Failure to Pray

You warned me once, ‘Annette, if you do not pray more, you are headed for Hell.’ Well, you were right when you said I did not pray much, and when I did it was in a casual sort of way. You were all too right. All of these now burning in Hell were people who did not pray, or did not pray enough. Prayer is the first step towards God, and it is always the decisive step, especially prayer to **Her who was Christ’s Mother**, and whose Name we never speak.

Countless souls are torn from the Devil's clutches by the spirit of prayer, souls that would otherwise be bound to fall into his hands as a result of sin.

To tell you all this is burning me up with anger; I am only going on because I am forced to.

There is nothing easier in this world for a man than to pray, and it is precisely upon prayer that everyone's salvation depends. That is the way God has arranged things. Little by little He gives to everyone who perseveres in prayer so much light and strength that even the most hardened sinner can pick himself up once and for all, even if he is sunk in sin up to his neck!

During the last years of my life I no longer prayed as I should have done, and so I deprived myself of the grace without which no one can be saved. Where we are now we no longer receive any grace, and even if it were offered we should scorn it. All the ups and downs of earthly life stop when you get here. You on earth can pass from a state of sin to a state of grace, and then fall back into sin again, often through weakness, sometimes through malice. But once you die all that comes to an end because it is only the instability of earthly life that makes it possible. From the moment of death our state is final and unchangeable.

The Effect of Habit

Already on earth, with the passing of the years these changes in the state of one's soul become rarer and rarer. It is true that up to the moment of death one can always return to God or turn away from Him. But it does happen that the habits a man has followed during his lifetime all too often affect his behavior at the point of death. Habit becomes second nature to him and he goes to his grave still following it.

That is what happened to me. For years I had been living far from God, and because of that, when I heard the final call of

I had learned how to use words to turn him against her. On the surface I would seem to be saying nice things but inwardly I would be spitting venom. Feelings like that and that kind of behavior are an excellent preparation for Hell. They are diabolical in the strictest sense of the word.

Why am I telling you this? It is to explain how I cut myself off once and for all from God. Oh, it was not that at that stage Max and I had become very 'intimate' in our relationship. I knew I would have gone down in his estimation if I had let myself go all the way too soon, and that knowledge made me hold back, but deep down I was ready to do anything if I thought it would further my aims, because I was out to get Max at any cost. I would have given absolutely anything to have him.

In the meantime we were slowly learning to love each other. We both had valuable personal qualities, which we were learning to appreciate in each other. I was clever, capable, good company, and at least in the last months before we married I was his only girlfriend.

Making an Idol of the Human Creature

My desertion of God consisted in this: that I made an idol of a human creature. That kind of thing can only happen when you love someone of the opposite sex with a love which remains bound by earthly considerations. It is this kind of unbalanced love that transfixes you, obsesses you and finally poisons you. My 'worship' of Max was really becoming a kind of religion for me. That was the time when, at the office, I started saying everything bad I could think of about churches and priests and rosary-jabbering and all that kind of tom-foolery.

You tried to defend it all, more or less subtly. You obviously did not realize that deep down I was not so anxious with insulting those things as with finding something to bolster up my conscience **and find some justification** for my desertion of God.

had been going out with was ill in the hospital. He had realized I had my eyes on him, though I hadn't then thought of marrying him. He was obviously well off, but he was too nice to all the girls, and up till then I had only wanted a man who did not think of anyone but me. I did not just want to be his wife: I wanted to be the only woman in his life. I was always attracted by well-mannered men, and when we were out together Max went out of his way to be nice — though you can imagine we did not talk about the pious stuff you and your friends go in for!!

The next day at the office you were telling me off because I had not gone with the rest of you on the outing, and I told you what I had been doing that Sunday. The first thing you asked was 'Did you go to Mass?' Idiot!! How could I have gone to Mass seeing we had arranged to leave at 6:00 A.M.? And no doubt you remember how I lost my patience and said, 'God doesn't make a fuss about these little things like you and your priests do!!'

But now I have to admit that despite His infinite goodness, God weighs things up much more exactly than all your priests put together.

After that first outing with Max I only went back to the young people's association once more. That was for the Christmas Celebrations. There was still something that attracted me to ceremonies of that kind, but at heart I was not one of you anymore.

Movies, dances, outings—it was one thing after the other all the time. Max and I sometimes had rows, but I could always get him to make up.

I had a lot of trouble with his other girlfriend, who went after him like a mad thing as soon as she got out of the hospital. That was a bit of luck for me because my 'noble calm', which was quite the opposite of her behavior, made a big impression on Max, and he ended up opting for me.

grace, I turned away from Him. What was fatal for me was not that I sinned a lot, but that when I had sinned I had not the will to pick myself up again.

Several times you told me to go and listen to sermons or to read spiritual books, and I usually said I had not the time. And yet what you said increased the uncertainty I felt inside like nothing else.

I must admit that by the time I left the young people's association I had already learned so much that I could very well have changed my ways. I was ill at ease and unhappy with my way of life. But always something stood between me and conversion.

You never suspected what was going on. You thought it would be so easy for me to come back to God.

One day you told me, 'Just make a good confession, Annette, and then everything will be alright.' I felt you were right, but the world, the flesh and the Devil already had too firm a hold on me.

At that time I never believed that the Devil was at work, but now I can assure you that he has an enormous influence on people who are in the state I was in then. Only many prayers, from myself and others, together with sacrifices and sufferings would have been able to tear me from his clutches, and even then it would have been a slow process. There may be few who are openly possessed, but many are inwardly. The Devil cannot take away the free will of those who put themselves in his power, but as a punishment for what you might call their calculated desertion, God permits the Evil One to settle within them.

I even hate the Devil, though at the same time I like him because he is out to destroy you people. Yes, I hate him, him and his hangers-on, those spirits that fell with him at the beginning of time. There are millions of them prowling about

the earth like swarms of gnats, and you do not even notice them. It is not us, the damned souls, who tempt you. That job is only for the fallen angels.

The truth is that each time they bring a soul here it increases their torment; but what limit is there to hate?

God's Calls

I was wandering far from God, yet He followed me. I opened the way for grace by natural acts of charity which I performed quite often, simply because I was naturally inclined to do so.

There were times when God drew me towards a church, and then I felt a kind of home-sickness. When my mother was ill and I was looking after her at the same time as doing my job at the office I was really making a kind of self-sacrifice. Those were the times when God's calls were especially strong.

Once when you took me into a hospital chapel during the lunch break something happened which led me to the brink of conversion — I wept!! But immediately the pleasures of the world flooded back into my mind and overshadowed God's grace. The good seed was choked by the thorns.

They often said at the office that religion was just a matter of emotion, so I took that excuse to reject that call of grace as I had all the others.

I Made Up My Own Religion

You told me off one day because instead of making a proper genuflection in church, I just did a half-hearted sort of bob. You thought I was just being lazy. You did not even seem to suspect that I had already stopped believing in Christ's presence in the Sacrament. I believe in it now, but only in a natural way, as you believe in a storm when you see the damage it leaves behind. Already I had just made up my own religion to suit myself. I

agreed with the others at the office that when you died your soul went into someone else so that it went on a kind of everlasting pilgrimage. That solved the agonizing question of the 'beyond' and you did not have to worry about it any more.

Why did not you remind me of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, where Christ sends the one to Paradise straight after his death, and the other to Hell? Oh, sure, you wouldn't have got anywhere with it, any more than with any of your other pious old maids' stories.

Bit by bit I made up my own god — a god who was properly dressed up to be called god and was sufficiently remote for me not to have any dealings with him. He was a vague sort of god, to be made use of when I needed him. A kind of pantheistic god if you like, the sort of abstract god who might come in useful for poetry but who wouldn't have anything to do with my real world. This god had no heaven to reward me with and no hell to punish me. My way of worshipping him was to leave him alone.

It is easy to believe what suits you. For years I got on very well with my religion and so I was happy.

Only one thing could have shattered my stubbornness — one lasting and deep sorrow. But it didn't happen. Now do you understand the meaning of the saying, '**God punishes those He loves**'?

Max instead of Mass

One Sunday in July the young people's group arranged an outing to somewhere. I would have quite liked to go but those old-hat talks, those old maids' ways of carrying on all put me off. Besides, for some time I had been keeping a very different picture from that of the Madonna on the altar of my heart! It was that good-looking Max N. in the shop next door. We had already cracked a joke together a few times. Well, as it happens, that very Sunday he had invited me to go out with him. The girl he