

A SAINT IN ALGERIA

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A saint in Algeria by Lady Herbert

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LADY HERBERT

**A SAINT
IN ALGERIA**



A SAINT IN ALGERIA.

BY
LADY HERBERT.



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A SAINT IN ALGERIA.*

PART THE FIRST.

THERE are few visitors to Algeria who do not make a pilgrimage to the beautiful basilica of "Notre Dame d'Afrique," either for purposes of piety or to see the glorious views from the mountain on which it is placed.

Probably few of the former leave the place without stopping for a few moments at the little shop or stall which abuts on St. Joseph's Chapel, and where, accord-

* To conform to the laws of the Church, the writer declares that, in this biographical notice, she only uses the name of "Saint," or speaks of revelations and miracles, in the sense in which it is permitted to do so, while humbly submitting all judgment on such matters to the Holy See.

ing to French custom, a multitude of pictures, medals, crosses, and photographs of "Notre Dame d'Afrique" are to be sold. But to those who frequented this stall in past years, one of its great attractions was the sweet face and winning manner of the lady who sold those little objects of devotion.

Now that the grave has closed over the earthly remains of this humble but saintly woman, we venture to give our readers a short account of her life, drawn from authentic sources, to which, through the kindness of the Father Superior of Notre Dame d'Afrique, we have had access.*

Margaret Bergésio was born in Piedmont, at Conio, near Turin, in the year 1809, on the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of our Blessed Lady, that Mother whom she so devotedly loved,

* The greater portion of the facts in this biographical notice is taken from a series of articles in the *African Revue de St. Augustin et de St. Monique*, signed "L. J. Christus."

and to whose honour she was hereafter to contribute so much.

She was an only child, for her father died soon after her birth, and her mother having married again, the little Margaret was intrusted to the care of her grandparents, who were models of virtue and practical piety. They devoted themselves to training the heart and soul of this little child ; and the seeds of faith and holiness sown by them were to bear fruit hereafter a hundredfold. Yet they were only allowed this consolation a short time, for their grandchild was but eight years of age when her mother determined to leave her native country and settle in Lyons, on which occasion she insisted on taking her little girl with her, having no children by her second marriage. Bitterly as her grandfather felt this separation, he was happily unaware how terrible the change would be to poor little Margaret. There is in those quiet villages of Piedmont a manly earnest piety, an unquestioning faith, and a tender reverence for all holy

things, which stamp a peculiar character upon its inhabitants. It is the same atmosphere as is felt, even by Protestants, in the Tyrol. Our Lord and His Church form the main points, so to speak, in their daily lives. Every house, every field, is placed under holy protection, and to miss Mass on days of obligation or to neglect Easter duties would be an unheard-of sin, visited by the reprobation of the whole community.

In this sort of religious atmosphere had the little Margaret been trained, and we can therefore form some idea of the feelings with which she suddenly found herself transplanted into a big town, where every one was a stranger to her, where no one seemed to think of or care for our Divine Lord and His Mother, and where all the pious practices of her childhood were ridiculed and contemned. Her mother was her greatest trial. Utterly frivolous and worldly, and without any religious principles herself, she embittered every hour of her child's life, and all the more

as, with the strong feelings of filial reverence which had been implanted in her, Margaret did not dare remonstrate or argue with her mother, even on certain points in which she knew she was right. It was indeed a special grace which preserved the poor child's faith at so tender an age from the effects of her infidel surroundings. But it does not appear that our Lord ever allowed the smallest doubt to sully this pure and virginal soul. Thwarted in all the religious practices in which she most delighted, and exposed to the reproaches and ridicule both of her mother and stepfather for what they called her "prudish ways," Margaret only suffered in silence, and, whenever she could, escaped to her little room to cry and pray. Even her name was changed by her mother to please her new French friends, and the child was henceforth known only as Agarithé Berger. Then began her tender devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. She had a little picture of the Seven Dolours, which her grand-