

Louise Loughborough Keyes was born on April 15, 1898, the only child of Henry Elmo Keyes and Mary Louise Ward. Her family on both sides were long established in America, her father's ancestors being English and French, her mother's English, French and Dutch. Of the mother's family we learn little from Mother Keyes's notes beyond the fact that her mother's mother attended one of the Sacred Heart convents in St. Louis. She was Louise Garesche Bennett, and she received the gift of faith during while she was at school. Mary Louise, her daughter, showed talent for art and studied under Chase. While she was still very young she married Henry Keyes. Of this side of the family Mother Keyes's notes tell us considerably more. They were descended from Giles Corey, the last of the "Salem witches", of whom the story is told that when he was being tortured by having stones heaped upon him, he refused to admit that he was a witch, and the messenger at last came to the judge saying: "He hath grown black in the face, and his tongue sticketh out, but he hath not confessed." Several generations later Giles Corey's descendant married Mary Loughborough and the story of that marriage must be told here. Mary's mother had been converted to Catholicism in her convent school but, as Mother Keyes put it, she had more piety than brains. She used to try to convert a Protestant minister with arguments that were so silly that her good Quaker husband, out of chivalry, read many books on the Catholic Church in order to come to her aid, with the result that he embraced Catholicism. The daughter of this marriage entered the Visitation Convent in Georgetown and made her solemn profession there. Afterwards she left the convent but her vow of chastity continued to bind. However, she married and after the birth of a child was reconciled to the Church but with the understanding that on the death of her husband her vow would again come into effect. Her husband died, and now she fell in love with a widower and Civil War general, Erasmus Darwin Keyes, and married him. After the birth of several children of this marriage Mary was again reconciled to the Church, and Mother Keyes's notes, more than fifty people were brought into the Church by these two marriages which should never have been; thus, as so often happens, God wrote straight with crooked lines. Mary's son Henry married Mary Louise Ward whose father was also an officer in the United States Army. When the first child was expected Henry took his young wife off to Nice, away from her anxious relatives and thus Louise was born in France and was baptized in the Cathedral of Nice the seal of which shows a picture of Mater Admirabilis. Shortly after that the family returned to the United States and lived in New York where Henry was an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Columbia University. Less than a year after Louise's birth her parents went out of town to attend a fancy-dress ball. They stayed at a hotel and during the night an accident occurred and Henry and Mary Louise both died of asphyxiation. Louise's grandmother, the former Mary Loughborough, took the child and provided her with the first home that she could remember. She was the only person who was close to Louise in her early years and yet she gave the child a peculiar upbringing -- as might be expected in view of her own life experiences. She was determined that Louise would know nothing of

sorrow or death. But Louise was thinker by nature and in any case it was impossible to keep from her the essential realities of life. Her notes tell us about those lonely childhood years: "What stand out most vividly in the first nine years of my life are thoughts. Small children, I think, all have a metaphysical bent. The thought of my existence frightened me. I am. I am. And the thought of my distinctness from everybody else. I am not my grandmother." ~~She did not (she about) God, perhaps by the grand mother's notes, and that was the~~

But she could not speak of this to anyone. Louise had not been told that her parents were dead and she used to wonder why they did not write to her if they were really travelling, as she was led to think. With no one to answer her questions prayers became meaningless formulas to her. When Louise was not quite ten years old, death took from her the person who was closest to her, her grandmother. After the death of General Keyes Mrs. Keyes had taken Louise to Europe and was living in Rome. In a hotel there she was suddenly taken ill and soon died. It was necessary to break the news to her little granddaughter, so a Mrs. MacArthur, mother of the future famous general, and a friend of Mrs. Keyes, told Louise the news and in doing so used the expression "She is no more." Louise sat the whole of that morning before an open fire puzzling over what had been said to her. Her notes tell us: "Later I was taken to see a priest who had given my grandmother the Last Sacraments. He said to me: 'This won't mean much to you now, but I tell you because it will be a comfort to you later. Don't forget what I tell you: your grandmother died a very good death.'" Almost immediately Louise was sent to the Convent of the Assumption in Rome where she made her First Communion on May 28, 1908, having been confirmed in the Church of St. Isidore on May 10. An audience with Pope Pius X added to the grace of this time and it was then that she knew that she had a religious vocation. The spiritual insight that she received also enabled her to understand that it was not true that her grandmother "was no more". She was with God. Of these spiritual experiences of her early years Mother Keyes said: "It is not a type of education that I would recommend for anyone else, but for me it was a great grace to have had that first part of my life with that terrifying existential experience of my own being, my being without God; and then to have had God come into my life almost at the very moment when all that I had was taken away from me. I knew that I was not alone. Our Lord was with me, closer than I was to myself. At this same time Louise learned to read and began the habit of meditative reading that was always to be a part of her life. From the age of ten until she entered the Society Louise made her home with her aunt and uncle, Dr. and Mrs. Edward L. Keyes. Their daughter Agnes played the part of an older sister to Louise, contributing much to her education both in cultural matters and in the practical aspects of life. The fact that Agnes entered the Noviceship at Kenwood and left after a few months never ceased to surprise Mother Keyes, because, as she said, "Agnes was in every way my superior." Louise went to school at Maplehurst but was withdrawn when she showed signs of having a desire to enter religious life. She spent some happy years at the convent of the Holy Child in Suffern where her vocation for our Society was discreetly and kindly encouraged. Previously she had spent a couple of years at Marymount in Tarrytown. After graduating from Suffern Louise entered Trinity College, an excellent institution conducted by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Here Louise's brilliant intellectual gifts were given full scope and her college years were happy ones for her. Her originality, disregard of convention, lively intellectual interest and her gay charm won her ~~many~~ many friends. She never forgot the debt she owed to Trinity College and also remembered with great affection and esteem the ~~many~~ Religious who had played a part in her education. After receiving her degree Magna cum laude Louise asked permission to enter at Kenwood but was told to continue her studies at Oxford

since she was one of the first women students to be accepted there. A few months later Reverend Mother Moran sent Louise word that she could enter immediately, so, without consideration of the fact that withdrawal meant forfeiture of the possibility of doing honors work at Oxford, Louise took the first steamer back to America. She ends her own notes with the words: "I entered at Kenwood on March 19, 1921 and lived happily ever after". We have written rather fully about her antecedents and early life, as an understanding of them is necessary if one is to appreciate the sufferings and very notable achievements of her religious life. From this point on we shall supply the facts regarding the various stages of her religious life and take all our comments on them from the many letters that have come to us from ~~pupils~~ Religious and seculars who have known Mother Keyes at the different periods of her career. The variety of viewpoints regarding her will manifest the rich complexity of her nature and will allow us to see the many levels on which she established rapport with ~~various~~ people, the impression she made on them and the character of her apostolate.

Sister Keyes received the habit on September 29, 1921 and made her First Vows on September 29, 1923. Her Mistress of Novices, who was later her Superior Vicar, loved her and understood her. One day when she was a postulant Sister Keyes appeared with her beautiful hair drawn tightly back and wearing a sack-like garment. This was her idea of contempt of the world, but the Mistress of Novices sent her to dress properly. She always chose the most disagreeable work, and sought opportunities of being of service. She was full of life and energy and most generous with her talents. On one occasion she was told to dress as an angel and play the harp in a play. Afterwards she remarked that this was her idea of being a fool for Christ's sake. She was considerably more learned than most of her companions, having a fine classical background and even a little Hebrew which she had studied with a rabbi in New York in order to better understand the Scriptures, but she was simple and unassuming and showed what one of her Sisters of that time refers to as a supernatural enthusiasm for baseball. This writer adds the comment: "She may have had a tendency to extremism, but her generous fervor was inspiring." Another tells us that she was one of a class in Greek taught by Sister Keyes. The pupils included the Mistress of Novices. One day when Mother Bodkin answered "I don't know" to a question, the teacher said: "But Mother, think!", and did not share the horror of the other Novices who were present. A Religious who was later to know Mother Keyes very well describes thus her first sight of her: "I saw Mother Keyes for the first time in August, 1921. One evening during a brief visit to Kenwood, I was on the terrace waiting for Office to begin and the novices and postulants were in two long lines before me. A postulant was removing her rubbers in that very deliberate manner which I later learned was so characteristic of Mother Keyes. It was as if the removal of her rubbers was the most important thing in the world. After carefully placing the overshoes beside her she chanced to look up, and I found myself gazing into a face of extraordinary other-worldly beauty."

Sister Keyes began her aspirantship at Maplehurst where she lived from September, 1923 to March, 1928. She taught first the Sixth Class, then the First Academic, then the Third. She had recreations, wrote addresses, got up plays, illuminated cards for feastdays and in general made herself useful. ~~She was intense about everything sh-~~

She was intense about everything she did and sought perfection in her work. One of the children of that time gives her impression of Mother Keyes's apostolate in the school: "She taught Christian Doctrine, French, Latin and mathematics as well as her English classes. French irregular verbs were to be mastered accurately and at top speed. In doctrine class the Mass was studied and the children learned the Ordinary by heart -- either in Latin or in English. Under Mother Keyes's influence the majority chose Latin, of course! The doctrine of the Eucharist was taught from the Lauda Sion. We had to find every detail of the Church's teaching on the Sacrament in that poem! The writer of these reminiscences concludes: "Her effect in the school was, as I see now more clearly in time's perspective, quite unusual for a young nun. She drew us after her irresistibly but never held us for herself. Her own flight to God was so swift, the pace so fast and the vertical angle so steep that any kind of unhealthy or even conscious attachment to her was out of the question." Another child of that period remembers that at the age of eleven she learned two great philosophical lessons from Mother Keyes during the (quite hilarious) recreation period. One was that there is such a thing as a moral imperative that is binding even when one can physically do what is wrong, and the other was that all things are simultaneously present to God. The idea that came through was that there is no time at which thinking is not in order. While carrying on her multiple works in the school, Sister Keyes began to study for her Master's degree and then for her doctorate in philosophy at Fordham University. Her companion was the Mistress of Studies. The intensity of the work eventually made the latter fear for Sister Keyes's health, so in March, 1928, both Religious went to live at Manhattanville in order to give their full time to completing their studies. Sister Keyes developed arthritis in her knee but the malady was incorrectly diagnosed and the leg was put into a cast. After two months of great pain she began to be treated by another doctor who discovered the mistake and effected a cure. During that time the Religious who was Sister Keyes's companion in her studies also took care of her and speaks thus of what she learned of the Aspirant's habit of mortification: "She never complained. One evening when I was unable to go to her, she kept her shoe on all night rather than bother the Mistress of Health to have it removed. She never asked for anything and used the most worn clothing. Even when she was in the hospital the nurses had to use intuition to find out what she needed. Apparently she accepted all inconveniences as a means of practicing her vow of Poverty." She received her doctorate in 1928 and in August of that year went to the Mother House for Probation.

In Mother Keyes's information papers, in her neat small hand, there is a characteristically precise notation to the effect that ~~she~~ she had as her Mistress of Probation "R. M. Vicente, 2 1/2 months, R. M. Dupont, 2 weeks, R.M. Datti the rest of the time." Her Sisters of Probation noted that she did not put herself forward in any way, although she spoke much better French than most of the Americans. One tells us that when R. M. Vicente was introducing the Probanists to R. Mother Datti who was taking over, the only thing she could think of to say about Sister Keyes was that during R. M. Moran's visit Sister Keyes spent a great deal of time standing at her Vicar's door. Afterwards Sister Keyes commented: "Never before was I characterized as being always at my superior's door. If she only knew, the reason I was standing outside was that Sister X was sitting inside!" She spent much time studying the history of the Society, and she made use of every opportunity to learn all that she could about the life around her. She managed to say a few words of Italian which gained entrance into the crypt of St. Peter's for a

group of the Probanists. The day after profession, Bishop Gibbons of Albany visited the Mother House and asked whether any were coming to Kenwood. The probanists had been told not to say where they were going, but R. M. Dupont made a sign to Sister Keyes and another to say their destination. They said "Kenwood" simultaneously, then, forgetting the Bishop's presence, fell into each other's arms with great joy. The kind Bishop was delighted and used to love to tell the story to the novices in later years. One of her fellow probanists summed up her impression of Sister Keyes at this period in this way: "She did not want to attract attention. There was a quality of simplicity about her fervor. Our Lord was all to her. She said after profession that the long retreat meant more to her than all that she heard at Exercises".

Sister Keyes was at Kenwood from March to September, 1929, then at Edan Hall until February, 1930. After a few months at Manhattanville, she went to Oxford where she lived from July, 1930 to August, 1934. She took her B.A. in two years and then her B. Litt. and in the latter worked in the field of philosophy. One of her companions says: "She seemed to me very mature and learned. As I was interested in philosophy, we got permission for what she called discussions but for me they were precious lessons. At first I was too ignorant and shy to make the most of her kindness, but gradually I came to realize that she loved to teach. Her reserve broke down somewhat and allowed me to see something of her deep unemotional spiritual life. Her study of St. Thomas fed her meditation. The attributes of God especially filled her mind with wonder and admiration and sunk her deep in prayer. In her daily life she accepted the inconveniences of those early days at Oxford, adapted herself and her working routine to the desires of others, and of course took her full share in the scullery and other household work. Whatever she was doing held her in its grip, so that with her depth of learning there went a simplicity of spirit, of a soul who seeks and longs for God." Another recalls something Sister Keyes said at recreation: that she often felt that she could manage for herself in practical matters but that she sometimes thought it was more humble to let another do the thing for her or show her how to do it. And the writer adds that there was something so big, broad and free about Sister Keyes's views of life and such an absence of feminine pettiness about her. Another of her companions at Oxford remarks on the freshness and directness of her outlook, and "a certain originality which was very pleasing and made her an inspiration to her fellow students" And the writer adds; "Her great sincerity and ever lively interest in people and things together with a deep religious spirit carried her through what might have been a difficult time in such very English (as opposed to American) surroundings, a very small community and no direct apostolate". As a matter of fact in later years Mother Keyes said in confidence that this was the most difficult period of her life. Because of her earlier withdrawal from the university, she was not eligible for honors, but she did brilliant work and was in fact readmitted to the university as a result of the pressure brought by her former tutor who thought that she was too fine a scholar to be sacrificed on the altar of university regulations. Upon her return to the United States she went to Manhattanville where she remained until September, 1939, and where she did outstanding educational work.

Several students of that time have given us their impressions of Mother Keyes as a member of the Manhattanville faculty. One of them says: "Her learning was like a fountain that overflowed and she communicated without apparent effort in such a charming spontaneous way her deep wisdom. At Warden's meeting she used to comment on St. John's Gospel in such a luminous way that I used to write notes about it while going home in the subway, lest I would forget. She was a realist in thought and in teaching, but I think that Our Lord did

not give her the consolation of knowing what a marvellous influence she had on souls. She was so Christ-like and we knew that she accepted suffering as part of her everyday share in redeeming the world, not in a burdensome fashion, but rather like Campden and More in a cavalier spirit, giving her heart's blood as though it were the dust of the road." Another says: "A little group gathered in her office quite regularly to hear her read aloud. She chose passages from works that she herself loved -- Juliana of Norwich, Mother Stuart, St. Augustine, St. Thomas. We did most of the talking while she sewed a costume for a forthcoming play, looking up every now and then with her shy smile and a knowing look which spoke more eloquently than words. Even before one knew anything about religious poverty and humility, one sensed them; and one noted the real joy with which she looked at the clock in the late afternoon and found that it was time to "go to the Lord." Another of her Manhattanville students says: "Her primary purpose seemed to be to call people to the reality of God. She seems to have succeeded in anchoring the supernatural in the natural and the natural in the supernatural but never by depreciating the value of the human, the necessity for effort, the importance of perfection in any employment she was given. Instead of talking about generalities in philosophy class, she laboriously re-read the philosophical texts just before coming to class and taught responsibly with a sense of doing justice to the truth, to give more human insight to the students. Instead of just going to India as an American missionary, she spent months learning the philosophy and language of the country. The extremism that characterizes the theological virtues was a quality of her relentless charity." Another student of that period remembers that Mother Keyes inculcated the love of the truth and above all else taught her students to think. She encouraged them to rise far beyond what would otherwise have been possible levels of achievement in thought and understanding of life.

When in 1939 word came that Mother Keyes was to go to India, it was commonly said that the vicariate was giving its best. One religious recalls that when she ^{came} came to one of the houses to give a talk on her new mission and to say good-bye, it was a privilege to witness her radiant joy in sacrifice. Of her work in India, which was from some points of view the culmination of her experiences, we have the following recollections from those who were with her. One says: "The students loved her and she got a great deal out of them. She also impressed outsiders with her culture and courtesy. All admired her great capacities, both intellectual and practical. She succeeded in the lecture room, with the resident students and with the dramatic ~~society~~ society. She was very generous in her service of God and in the apostolate and very devoted to the Society. She experienced difficulties owing to her sensitive nature and to the fact that she interpreted her position in regard to the hostel students in a wider sense than that intended by her superior." Another religious says: "Her love for the students was deep and her zeal was boundless. I always picture her with a book in her hand, always reading or studying. Thus she was enabled to help the poor and our servants. She gave much time to working with the students on plays -- one of them became converted to Christianity as a result of being in Quality Street under Mother Keyes's direction -- and she took every opportunity of making the faith known to whomever she could contact. She had arrived at the mission with eleven trunks filled with practical gifts for the foundation, but she left with just one suitcase." One of her students at Sophia College speaks thus of her: "She seemed to have the knack of answering questions just as one would want to have them answered; for example, to a Hindu she would quote the Bhagvad Gita or the great Hindu philosopher Shankaracharya whom

she admired so much; to the Parsi she would refer to Zoroaster, and to the Muslim she would speak about the Koran. Nothing was too small or too big to escape her interest. There were several students whom she helped to bring to Our Lord by her understanding. One of them, now a Religious in the Society, thinks that she owes her not only her baptism and First Communion and the beginnings of her vocation but also the fact that she is not among the ranks of those who have seen the light but have not had the courage to follow it. Everyone with whom Mother Keyes came in contact was a soul for her to draw to Our Lord's Heart, and she set about it immediately, sometimes in a disconcertingly open manner but always with utterly genuine affection. She would stand for long hours, ~~oblivious~~ to everything else-- including her shoelaces invariably untied -- having what she called a "popyow" with some student and perhaps the non-Christian fiance of the girl, or with the Muslim carpenter employed by the college. She had mastered the scripts of Hindi and Urdu and the rudiments of the grammar of both languages and she could speak well, if slowly." In 1943 Mother Keyes had a severe illness which necessitated an operation. The person who nursed her was greatly impressed by her spirit of detachment and her courage. Shortly after her recovery came the sacrifice of her beloved India. Conversions had begun to come but she was not to see the fruit of the work there. Archbishop Roberts who had invited the Society to India admired Mother Keyes greatly and appreciated her part in what he called the all but miraculous progress of Sophia College. Her leaving there, as one of her students remarked, was Our Lord's way of showing her His cross; she promised that all the rest of her life back in America would be for India. In her information papers the exact day of her arrival and departure is noted, whereas otherwise she notes only the year, as if those two dates, March 20, 1940 and August 31, 1944, marking her stay in Bombay had a special significance for her.

After a few months of rest and convalescence she returned to Manhattanville where Rev. Mother U. Benziger was superior and she took up again her employments of philosophy classes, play closet, and sacristan. But in September ~~the~~ 1946 at the request of Archbishop Cushing the Society was to open a new college in Newton, Massachusetts, and therefore in June of 1946 Mother Keyes received her obedience for the Newton convent whence the college was to be founded. She found there as her superior the same Religious who many years before had been her companion in studies at Fordham University and who knew and understood her so well. In the first years of the new college Mother Keyes was in charge of the discipline of the college as Warden, later she became Dean, she was a Councillor, had charge of the Children of Mary, taught classes in theology and philosophy, and devoted herself tirelessly to the work. Those who knew her and worked with her in the early years speak of her thus: "From the very beginning she saw the necessity of putting the intellectual work of the college on a high level. She took particular trouble to plan a coherent and demanding program of studies in theology and philosophy, a program which has remained with some modifications the principal and characteristic part of the college curriculum. The quality of her learning and the creativity of her approach added much to the cultural life of the young college and won for it the esteem of outstanding educators. One of the lay members of the faculty who later became a member of a contemporary Order wrote on hearing of her death: "I owe Mother Keyes a great deal -- something I did not begin to realize until I entered religious life. Happily, I tried to thank her several years ago and she responded with such enthusiastic charity that I was even glad to be the prodigal. I shall never forget the warmth of that reception." And another one of the lay faculty

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loved someone, she wanted almost unimaginably that the person would love God totally. Never once in the least way did she falter in this. It was all part of her determination to be utterly ruthless with herself. Her intention was never to be ruthless toward others; it was that with her whole mind and heart she could wish nothing better for a friend than that the person should learn to live entirely in God." One of the religious who worked with her at this time recalls the fact that sometimes Mother Keyes inadvertently hurt people, expecting more of them than they were prepared at the moment to give; on one occasion she told this religious that she knew that she hurt people and did not understand it, as she wanted nothing but to be kind to them. There were tears in her eyes as she said this. The religious who tells us this added: "I believe that she had a profound realization of what it meant by the love of Christ, and that her actions with and for others flowed from this realization; her deep and tender charity was, I suppose, contemplation in act." The Newton College students of the early years remember her with the greatest admiration and affection. One of them writes: "She always came to classes thoroughly prepared and succeeded in training the minds of students even when they thought that the material presented to them was far above them. In the Summa she presented the person of Our Lord seen from a profound point of view. One could see all that the Gospel teaches reflected in her life. She was very humble; no task was too menial for her; she sought out the least attractive and gifted students and took endless trouble for anyone in need. She felt that she was a failure and probably that was why the WAY OF DIVINE LOVE meant so much to her." This same student adds that when she came to say goodbye to Mother Keyes when she was leaving Newton, Mother Keyes said to her: "Our Lord is waiting for me in St. Louis", and asked her to be good to the religious who was replacing her. Then she went off smilingly, though the sacrifice of the college for which she had, largely unknowingly, done so much good, was very keenly felt. A priest who worked closely with her at Newton records his impressions of her: "Her incredible energy and vigor of mind and body had to be seen in order to be believed; she literally ran about the campus and she did everything from cutting out and making vestments for the altar to studying commentaries on St. Thomas's Summa and rehearsing the students' dramatic productions. I remember so vividly her courage, her gaiety even at times of intense physical pain and spiritual anguish. She was the holiest person I have ever known, and I am grateful to God for her friendship and example." In July of 1953, Mother Keyes left Newton College for Maryville where she was to spend the remaining years of her life.

See The St. Louis Years