

DID A RELIGIOUS MANIAC PRETEND TO BE JESUS' MOTHER AT LA SALETTE?

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LA SALETTE.

Some months ago, we presented our readers with the prospectus of a work printed at Grenoble, by several of the diocesan clergy of that place, with the object of laying before the Pope a memorial, exposing, in detail, the imposture of the alleged apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette -

The whole subject is too large, and has been too minutely dealt with by the Abbe Deleon and his colleagues, to be satisfactorily disposed of in a single article, and we, therefore, propose to confine ourselves, for the present, to that part of the work alone which has reference to the lady plaintiff in the court of Grenoble, and which will enable our readers to understand, without going any deeper into the supposed mystery, why Mademoiselle Lamerliere should have brought an action against the Abbe Deleon for 20,000 francs damages for alleged injury done to her character by the publication of the work in question, and, at the same time, to estimate, at somewhat of its real value, the importance of the decision at Grenoble, as bearing on the veracity and faith-worthiness of the reverend author and his colleagues, when we state that the court dismissed her proceedings with costs -

What follows is a verbatim translation (and, perhaps, may be considered by some too literal a one) of the early part of the 4th chapter of the Abbe Deleon's book, pp. 59-69.

The Apparition on the Mountain of La Salette on the 19th September, 1846 — Mademoiselle Lamerliere. Mademoiselle Constance Lamerliere, de Saint-Ferreol, was born of rich parents, and received a careful education. After several years' sojourn in the Convent of St. Pierre, at Grenoble, under the religious direction of M. Rousselot, Canon and Vicar-General of Grenoble, she entered the Convent de la Providence, in 1822. That convent had only just been established, and had at its head a lady of high merit, Madame Chantal.

Mademoiselle Lamerliere filled several offices in this convent, and was at last chosen as the mistress of the novices. Gifted with a lively imagination, she became remarkable for an exaggerated piety, and gave herself up to practices the most mystical. To fulfil the rules of her convent was not sufficient for her ardent zeal. In her class, in her cell, in fact, everywhere, she desired to have little shrines which might recall to her more particularly the presence of God and the Holy Virgin. By the aid of a fluent speech, she easily fascinated her pupils — simple, young, country girls, who were scarcely initiated into the first elements of the most ordinary instruction. This continued tendency to fanaticism excited the solicitude of her superior, Madame Chantal; and, as it was her duty to guard the novices of the institution against rash innovations, or any dangerous exaggerations, Madame Chantal submitted the explanations and commentaries of a private catechism, which Mademoiselle Lamerliere had composed, to the consideration of M. Desmoulins, at present attached to the Seminary of St. Joseph, at Grenoble.

Mademoiselle Lamerliere entered into retreat, which she did in a manner so complete, that she shut herself up in her cell, and never quitted it but to go to the church or the refectory.

Three months thus passed on, when, without giving any one notice of her intention, Mademoiselle Lamerliere quitted the house as a fugitive, and directed her steps to Notre Dame du Laus, in the Diocese of Gap. There she rested for some days, and then commenced her route for Marseilles, on foot. On her way, she visited all the churches, pointed out to the cure of each place defects to be corrected, and repairs to be made, and, to induce them to enter into her views, put down the name of C. Lamerliere, de Saint-Ferreol, for large sums, which she promised should be paid as soon as they informed her that the improvements were made. It is needless to say that not one of these promises were fulfilled. Arrived at Marseilles, she associated herself with a priest who was occupied with several institutions and pious works, among others, societies for the working classes. This excellent clergyman, however, died, and Mademoiselle Lamerliere proceeded to Valence. There she associated herself with an ecclesiastic whose name had had much notoriety, and she only left him when he himself sunk under the reverses of ill fortune. During her sojourn there, however, Mademoiselle Lamerliere had pursued the realization of her favourite dream, and had organized the congregation of " the Holy Family," ami made desperate efforts to obtain the patronage of the Bishop of Valence, Monseigneur Latourette.

At Grenoble, where she came often, she placed herself under M. Rousselot, the first director of her conscience, and M. Canon Bouvier, the second director.

Among all these projects she dissipated her fortune, and her correspondence evinced such a constantly-increasing change in her intellectual faculties, that some members of her family became alarmed, and tried to lead her back by kindness. Mdlle. Lamerliere took no notice, however, of their friendly overtures ; and, as matters appeared only to grow worse, her own sister and brother-in-law commenced proceedings for her protection before the tribunal of Saint Marcellin on the 28th August, 1846, and the 5th September following, the court assigned to Mdlle. Lamerliere guardians appointed by the court (un conseil judiciaire).

Deeply wounded by this measure, and, above all, irritated because it had been taken at the instance of her brother-in-law (a military officer, whose name already is distinguished, and will probably figure still more hereafter in the records of our history), remembering also, with complacency, the benevolent reception she had experienced from several members of the clergy at Grenoble, Valence, and Marseilles, Mdlle. Lamerliere at once formed her resolve. Having been placed under a kind of tutelage by the magistrates of her country and at the instance of her own family, it was by means of the clergy of her country and by a bold stroke that she was to regain her liberty.

The clergy take the lead in matters of civilization ; it is their duty, and their disposition ; if the clergy, therefore, should bow before her proceedings, and proclaim her above the laws which govern feeble humanity — if this proclamation should be accepted by the Catholic world — if the magistrates themselves should respect it and keep silence — the decision of the 5th September would be, in fact, reversed, and the superhuman nature of Mdlle. Lamerliere, and the success of her divine mission, would be for her an ample compensation ! Thus thought Mdlle. Lamerliere, and thus she set herself to act.

Very skilful in the art of embroidery, she prepared an aerial costume ; it was a white robe, trimmed with a garland of silver flowers, ornamented with arabesques, rising in graceful designs to the waist ; on the front of the body was embroidered a brilliant cross, which appeared supported by a chain embroidered in the same manner ; on either side, two similar embroideries represented the pincers and hammer, the instruments of the passion of the Saviour. A yellow apron, surrounded with a silver fringe, a scarf, bordered with roses, shoes of white satin, ornamented with a little garland of flowers, and, lastly, yellow stockings were prepared by her ; and, as if one single costume was not sufficient for her purpose, she further prepared a dark blue dress, and another rose-coloured one, and, carefully packing them up in a pasteboard box, set off for Grenoble.

At St. Marcellin she took the diligence ; and, as the Conveyance was already full, she was obliged to mount the imperial, and share the seat of the conducteur, whose name was Fortin.

She had with her her precious box. Her whole soul was set on the execution of her project. She commenced speaking mysteriously at first, but afterwards without disguise, to her "compagnon de voyage." " Her brother-in-law had rendered his name illustrious by his feats of arms ; she aspired to acts of renown of another kind. She was going to the mountains of the Alps ; there she was sure of success!" The conducteur, Fortin, laughed, and, like an agreeable traveller, began to banter Mdlle. Lamerliere ; but, far from disconcerting her, she displayed the resources of her imagination, and her brilliant and fluent elocution charmed her companion, who was satisfied with becoming a listener. When they reached Grenoble, he restored her box to his fair passenger, and wished her good fortune, and complete success.

The same day Mdlle. Lamerliere presented herself at the house of M. X , a merchant, at Grenoble, and asked for a particular kind of trimming (u galorrs en points d'Es-pagne"). She specified the size which was necessary to enable her to complete her work ; and, as the merchant could not satisfy her with the lace which he showed her, of which the breadth was not exactly what she required, Mdlle. Lamerliere opened her box, took out her several dresses, and displayed, before the eyes of the merchant and his family, the white robe embroidered and ornamented with arabesques and garlands, and especially the cross, pincers, and hammer, which decorated the upper part ; the yellow apron, yellow stockings, scarf trimmed with roses — in short, the whole contents of her box. In vain the merchant searched his stock for trimming which would match those so artistically used by Mdlle. Lamerliere. He was obliged to ask for a delay of 48 hours to enable him to get it from Lyons, but the traveller was too much hurried to agree to his proposal — for she wished to continue her journey the next day. The merchant then gave her the address of Messieurs X or Y as the only persons in Grenoble who could supply her.*

Mdlle. Lamerliere, in the presence of all the members of the family of the merchant, shut up her goods again in the box, and retired, leaving them in a state of astonishment ; for none of them could comprehend the design or aim of a costume so eccentric.

The next day she returned ; she had found, at one of the places to which they had directed her the evening before, the kind of material which she was seeking for.

She thanked the family of M. X for the assistance they had given her, and left them, tore-appear no more.

All this took place in the early part of September, 1846, and before the event of La Salette, which occurred; on the 19th of the same month.

Mdlle. Lamerliere betook herself towards the Alps.

In the very heart of the mountains, at a few miles distant (huit kilometres) from Corps, there is a village called La Salette-Fallavaux, of difficult access, and which is surmounted by wild and abrupt mountains, which serve as pastures for cattle. Every day the children of the village climb these mountains, and drive there the beasts of their parents or masters, and, in the evening, lead them back to the hamlet.

Melanie Mathieu, a native of Corps, and who had been for nine months in the service of Baptist Pra, met on this mountain, on the 18th September, 1846, Maximin Giraud, also a native of Corps, whose services his father had given for eight days only to Peter Selme. She descended the mountain with him, promised to meet him again the next day ; and, on the 19th September, the two children again betook themselves to the mountain.*

Maximin was always accompanied by his master, who, not to lose sight of him, went to till a field, from which the little shepherd could watch the cows, and sent him, at noon, to water them at a rivulet which flowed near the place, desiring the child to rejoin him immediately. On this 19th September, at noon, Peter Selme despatches his young herd to the fountain. Maximin commenced by calling Melanie ; then joined, and went away with her, and, contrary to his usual custom, did not come back to his master, he did not, in fact, rejoin him until the evening, at his house ; and when the latter scolded him for the liberty he had taken, Maximin replied by telling a story of a beautiful lady who had appeared to him, and also to Melanie, and had amused them for a long time, and had made them both talk familiarly with her (" les a fait deviser l'un et l'autre").

I extract these details and the chief part of those which follow from a report of MM. Rousselot et Orcel, printed under the title " Verite sur l'Evenement de La Salette," p. 51, &c.

The question is, who was this beautiful lady ? and under what circumstances did she appear to the two shepherds ?

Having lunched Ute-a-tUe at a little fountain called " fontaine des homines," Melanie and Maximin betook themselves to the other side of the rivulet (le Sezia), and, contrary to their habit, went to sleep at some distance from one another. Melanie awaking first, woke Maximin. The two shepherds crossed the brook, set about searching for their cows, thou came down again to get their bags, which had remained near the place where they had gone to sleep, when all of a sudden their dazzled eyes perceived a lady bright with light seated on the stones of the fountain, in an attitude which indicated profound grief.

Frightened at first, the children, however, soon regained courage. The lady rose, advanced towards them, invited them to approach her, then crossed her arms, and announced to them that she was there to tell them great news, which she then proceeded to relate. Her language, at first, was French ; she perceived afterwards, however, that she was not understood, and, without recommencing, she continued her discourse in patois, then finished in French, and, taking some fifteen paces (quinzaiue de pas^) to ascend to the highest part of the hillock, she then disappeared (Verite sur rEvenement de La Salette, par MM. Orcel et Kousselot, pp. 52, 3, 4).

The beautiful lady had risen, and the children had been able to see her costume.

It was a white robe, with pearls all over it, a handkerchief with roses round it, a yellow apron, yellow stockings, white shoes with roses round them, a small chain to which a cross was suspended, on the right, the pincers, on the left, a hammer (Verite sur l'Evenement de La Salette, page 59).

Now this costume is precisely that which Mdlle. Lamerliere displayed some days before, at Grenoble, in the warehouse of M. X . This costume was distinguished particularly by the fantastic yellow apron and yellow stockings, a colour which has never in any place been employed to ornament the statues, altars, or chapels of the Holy Virgin. It was distinguished still more by the pincers and hammer, which it never occurred to any painter or sculptor to annex to a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and it is certainly something very singular that such a coincidence should exist between the costume previously imagined by Mdlle. Lamerliere, without any foundation in the pious usages regarding the Holy Virgin, and the costume worn by the beautiful lady of La Salette ; and still more singular is the coincidence between La Salette, the mountain on which " the beautiful lady" appeared to the two shepherds, and the mountain of the Alps towards which Mdlle. Lamerliere directed her course some days before, carrying with her the costume of the Lady of the Apparition, and with the design of doing "something which was destined to make a great noise in the world."

But these two striking coincidences are not the only strange things in the story.

"The beautiful lady" commenced speaking in French, and then, when she had recounted one half of her "great news," she perceived that the children did not understand French, and, without going over again what she had already said, she proceeded in patois, and, subsequently, began again to speak French, to tell the children what must have been the most unintelligible to them of all — "You will make this to be known to all my people" ("Vous le ferez passer a tout mon peuple") — (Verite sur l'Evenement, par MM. Orcel et Kousselot, pp. 53, &c, 04, &c).*

The Holy Scriptures inform us that Jesus Christ, after his ascension, sent down his holy spirit on the apostles, and enabled them to speak in divers tongues, to the end that every one of the nations collected at Jerusalem — Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia's, Egyptians, Lybians, jews, Cretes, and Arabians — might all hear, in their own tongues, the wonderful works of God ; and, accordingly, 3,000 souls were converted to the faith in one day. God was with the apostles, He rendered his presence sensible by a miracle, the miracle produced its proper effects, and senseless would have been the man who would attempt to deny it.

But at La Salette, the Lady of the Apparition (who came also, according to MM. Orcel et Rousselot, to perform an apostolic office, for the conversion of the world) employs the common language of the country, which the shepherds did not comprehend ; and instead of reproducing in a simple form, in reference to the two children, the miracle which the apostles had wrought in a multiform manner with relation to twenty different nations, she accommodates herself to the ignorance of the two shepherds, and speaks "patois" to them, but only after her young auditors had let her know that they could not comprehend her. Could the most ordinary mortal have acted in a different manner ?

But this is not all. The lady announces to the shepherds that she is come to La Salette to tell them great news (Verite, pp. 55 et 65). She adds that their duty is to make it known to all the people (Verite, pp. 57 and 68). Both these important paragraphs were announced in French, a language that neither of the children understood. Those shepherds are the channel chosen of God to communicate to all Christian people the great news which so miraculously reached them. Was it not necessary that they should understand what was told them, in order that the Divine communication should be preserved in all its purity, and that the first intriguer who met with them might not be able to change it to his own purposes? Both the honour of God and human reason seem to demand that this should have been so.

But how did things really happen ?

The lady related, in French, the half of her news, and then only when the children informed her that they did not understand it, she continued in "patois," but without repeating what she had already said, and which was, moreover, the essential part, the very seal of the mission which she came to fulfil ; for it is the expression of the Lord's complaints of the iniquities of His people.

On this capital point did the Lady of the Apparition, after the example of the apostles, open the understandings of the two shepherds ? Let us see. MM. Orcei and Rousselot have taken on themselves to inform us.

In their joint work (Verite, p. 87), they represent, as inspired, the answer which they put into the mouth of Melanie, when pressed with questions on the difficulty she must have experienced in remembering the recital of the lady — "Oh! no," said she, "she (the lady) told it to me but once, and I remember it well ; whenever I did not understand her well, in saying what she said to me, those who understand French comprehend it, wlten even I did not comprehend it ; that is sufficient.,"

If that was sufficient, why did the lady change her language with the object of making herself understood ? If that was not sufficient, why did she not repeat the part of her news which was not understood by the shepherds?

In either case the white lady has to choose between the absurd and the ridiculous — a dilemma not unnatural for Mdlle. Lamerliere, but superlatively indecent to imagine, much less to say, in reference to the Holy Virgin. The answer of Melanie, so far from being inspired, was either silly or impious.

One other strange thing, and I proceed.

The white lady, after having fulfilled her mission, ascends to the highest part of the hillock, her feet only touch the top of the grass; then she disappears, by rising into the air (Verite, pp. 58 and 68).

Now, in the first place, in those high parts of the mountains where the ground is scarcely covered with a light coating of earth, and the grass is so short that it does not even afford the teeth of the sheep or goats anything to lay hold of, how could the feet of the lady touch anything else than the top of the grass, since the top is, in fact, the whole of it ?

Moreover, why was this ascension of the white lady from the very top of the hill? The Holy Virgin could just as easily have

raised herself to heaven from the bottom of the hollow where she was ; then every natural explanation of the phenomenon would have been anticipated and prevented. In surmounting the hollow, she reached a crest which presented at the other side a rapid descent, and allowed a human being to disappear and vanish adroitly before the dazzled eyes of two little ignorant peasants — a precaution very suitable to Mdlle. Lamerliere, but which it is ridiculous to attribute to a messenger from heaven.

Thus, the agreement between the Lady of La Salette and Mdlle. Lamerliere in the choice of a fantastic dress, and in the choice of a mountain of the Alps destined to become the theatre of a great event, affords, in the first place, a strong presumption that Mdlle. Lamerliere is the Lady of La Salette ; for without a divine revelation, Mdlle. Lamerliere could not have foreseen either the eccentric costume which the Holy Virgin was to choose, or the apparition of the 19th September on La Salette, a mountain of the Alps. This presumption is strengthened still more by the nature and variation of the language of the white lady to the shepherds, and by the human precautions which she took to disappear adroitly from their view.