

Our Lady of Prayer

THE APPARITIONS AT L'ILE-BOUCHARD

8-14 December 1947

by Paul RHOADS

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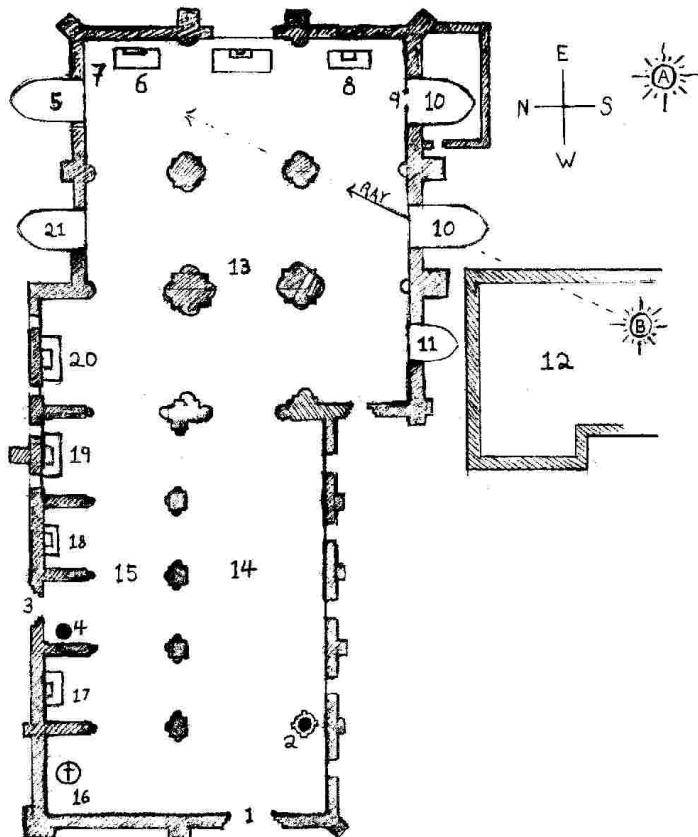
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L'EGLISE SAINT-GILLES, A L'ILE-BOUCHARD

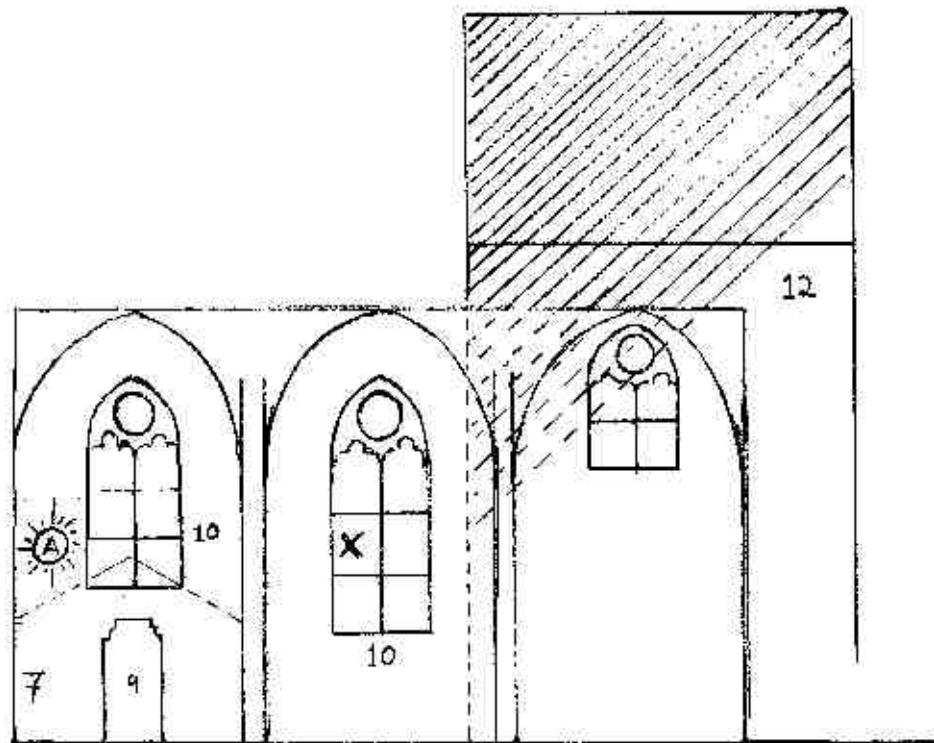
Cliché M. Clément, L'Île-Bouchard

PLAN OF CHURCH

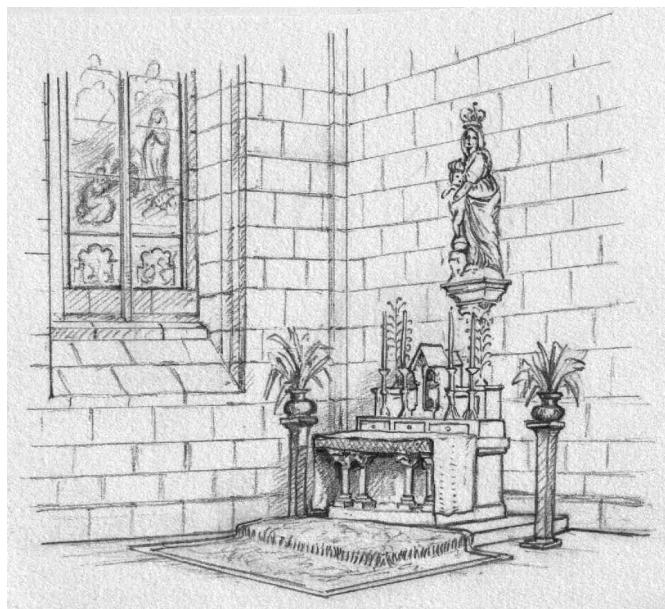


- 1 MAIN DOOR
- 2 FOUNT OF HOLY WATER
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- A ACTUAL POSITION OF SUN AT MOMENT OF RAY
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DIAGRAM OF SOUTH WALL OF CHOIR



SILHOUETTE OF SACRISTY AND PRESBYTERY
SUN'S POSITION AT 1:35 PM, DEC. 14, AS VIEWED FROM EMPLACEMENT OF APPARITION - 7
X - ENTRY POINT OF RAY





De gauche à droite : JEANNETTE AUBRY, JACQUELINE AUBRY, NICOLE ROBIN, LAURA CROIZON

Cliché M. Clément, L'Ile-Bouchard

PREFACE

In the diocese of Tours, a region of central France known as the Touraine, the ancient village of L'Ile-Bouchard shows two steeples, one on either bank of the river Vienne; St. Maurice to the south and St. Gilles to the north. In the latter, on December 8, 1947, the Blessed Virgin, or *Sainte Vierge* as she is called in French, appeared to four little girls. The apparitions continued for seven days amidst growing local excitement. After each apparition the girls were separately questioned and a number of investigations were subsequently conducted, including that of Monseigneur Fiot; Canon of the Cathedral of Tours and Vicar General of the diocese.

Many books exist in French concerning L'Ile-Bouchard. This first English publication relies principally upon the original investigations but the author also benefited from contacts with people close to the events, including Jacqueline Aubry; eldest of the four girls and now a retired school teacher.

What is the position of the Church? While official recognition has not yet been given, the pilgrimage of L'Ile-Bouchard is encouraged. It is the bishop who judges the authenticity of apparitions in his diocese; the Virgin's request that a grotto and statues be installed at the place of her appearance has had the support of the bishops of Tours. With their accord this display has been improved over the years (the present beautiful arrangement of stone statues in a gilded grotto was installed in the Marian year 1988; in 1992 the theologian Father Vernet published a four hundred page study affirming authenticity which received the Episcopal imprimatur. The pilgrimages in honor of Notre Dame de la Prière (Our Lady of Prayer; name given by the archbishop of Tours in 1966) are conducted in obedience to Church authorities. Since the retirement in 1960 of Father Ségelle, curé at the time of the apparitions, a succession of curés has presided at L'Ile-Bouchard. Through this period the bishops have quietly supported the devotion to Our Lady of Prayer. A commission of investigation, prerequisite of official recognition, has been named in 2000. In December 8 of 2001, the Archbishop of Tours, André VINGT-TROIS has publicized the decree : "After carefully studying the facts and seeking the counsel of competent individuals, I hereby officially authorize these pilgrimages, as well as the public worship celebrated in the Parish Church of "SAINT-GILLES", in L'ILE-BOUCHARD, to invoke OUR LADY OF PRAYER, under the pastoral responsibility of the legitimate Pastor of this Parish."

BACKGROUND OF THE APPARITIONS

The four girls were: sisters Jacqueline and Jeannette Aubry, their cousin Nicole Robin and their neighbor Laura Croizon. Jacqueline and Jeannette were 12 and 7 years old, Nicole was 10 and Laura was 8. Jacqueline was talkative and gay while her sister Jeannette was silent and of strong character. Nicole was placid and matter-of-fact. Laura was affectionate and lively. They were considered ordinary little girls by everyone who knew them. They are alive today and lead normal lives.

Their families were modest. The Aubrys had a pastry shop and the Robins were farmers. Both families were Catholic but non-practicing. Madam Croizon had children of several fathers and lived with a man out of wedlock. This household was anti-clerical.

Madame Aubry, occupied in her shop, sent Jacqueline out for daily walks with their elderly neighbor Mademoiselle Grandin. On the way home Mademoiselle Grandin always stopped in the church to say her prayers. By this example Jacqueline had learned to love her *maman du Ciel* (Heavenly mama) and to say the Hail Mary. She began to slip into church her own and would invite her sister Jeannette to come and pray with her. Their cousin Nicole lived out of town on the farm and since it was too far to return at noon, on school days she stayed at her aunts house for lunch. She too went to pray with Jacqueline.

The teachers at the local private school were nuns who approvingly noted Jacqueline's love of the Virgin. On the morning of the first apparition they had urged all the girls to pray for France, a request made from time to time. In December 1947 the children could have had no exact idea of the dire events then unfolding. At the liberation of France in 1945, a Communists takeover had been barely avoided. The Communists were still the most organized political force in the country and again they were on the verge of revolutionary success. Obedient to Moscow, they had committed sabotage, derailed trains, captured arsenals and were economically strangling the country with a general strike. Food shortages were more severe than during the war and blood was being shed. Events were out of control and the elected leaders were powerless to avert what seemed a hopeless situation.

Where did the apparitions occur?

In the church of St. Gilles. On March 6, 1429, on her way to Chinon where Charles VII would give her an army to liberate France, sixteen year old Joan of Arc entered this church and prostrated herself before the altar of the Virgin.

When did the apparitions begin?

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception; December 8, 1947. On that day three other events also occurred. One was the funeral of general Leclerc. Liberator of Paris in 1945 and devotee of the Virgin, Leclerc had been called back to France in the emergency but was killed in an airplane crash in Africa before his return. The state funeral drew together French patriots and kindled patriotic sentiment at this crucial moment.

In another part of France Father George Finet paid a visit to the famous holy woman; Marthe Robin. "Marthe" he said, "France is finished; we're going to have a civil war."

"No, Father" she replied, "the Virgin Mary is going to save France by the prayers of little children."

In the small hours of the morning the sisters at L'Ile-Bouchard had completed a secret novena. The final prayer was a consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Its last lines were:

**Oh Mary!
ignite in our souls your inner fire
that with you we may sing
an eternal Magnificat.**

FIRST DAY

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8: FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The Shining Kiss

After lunch Jacqueline Jeanette and Nicole left the Aubry house for school. It was one o'clock on a cold and overcast winter day. They planned to play in the school yard until class at one thirty. Passing the church Jacqueline thought of their teacher's request and suggested they stop to say a prayer. Nicole and Jeannette agreed.

As they entered the door they had the odd sensation of being gently guided as if by a kindly hand on the shoulder.

They crossed themselves with holy water, traversed the nave making a reverence to the main altar and, halfway up the aisle, stopped to say a Hail Mary at the statue of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Proceeding to the altar of the Virgin they crossed themselves and began to say ten Hail Mary. Such was their habitual routine.

After the fourth Hail Mary Jacqueline suddenly saw a light in the corner of the church to the left of the altar. Its source was a wonderfully beautiful Lady dressed in white. She stood in a grotto several feet above the floor. Her hands were joined in prayer and a Rosary was draped over her right arm. An angel holding a lily was kneeling to her left, contemplating her with adoration. Jacqueline nudged Nicole and whispered: "Look!"

Jeannette, who alone had her Rosary, had dropped its case. She and Nicole had bent down to retrieve it. Both girls looked up and simultaneously brought their hands to their mouths in astonishment.

"*O la belle Dame!*" (Oh, the beautiful Lady!) exclaimed Nicole.

"*O le beau ange! O le beau ange!*" (Oh, the beautiful Angel!) exclaimed Jeannette, falling back into her chair and putting her hands together in a gesture of admiration. The Lady smiled kindly down at them all though mostly at little Jeannette. As for Jeannette; she couldn't take her eyes off the angel. The girls did not know who these personages were and did not dare approach.

Jacqueline whispered; "Listen; we've got to go tell people there's a beautiful Lady in the church!" so they rushed out of the church glancing over their shoulders as they went. "She's still there," said Jeannette, looking back as they slipped out the door.

In the street they spotted their friend Monique Clément and ran up to her: "You know what? there's a beautiful Lady in the church! Come and see!" but Monique had a rendezvous with the seamstress and was in a hurry. At that moment Laura Croizon and her 13 year old sister Sergine, who's house was opposite the church, came out their door on the way to school and agreed to follow their exited friends back into the church.

The Lady had not disappeared; little Laura, marching up the aisle head down, raised her eyes when she came abreast of the statue of Saint Thérèse: "I see the beautiful Lady and an angel!" she cried.

They had stopped about thirty feet away. Jacqueline whispered to Sergine: "Do you see the beautiful Lady?"

"A Lady? An angel? Where do you see them? I don't see anything!"

"But there she is!" urged Nicole, "in the corner; right in front of you!"

But Sergine saw nothing. So the others described everything to her while the Lady smiled at them.

Like many old churches in France, St. Gilles is an accretion of additions and modifications. Built of local limestone, now eroded and stained, it is composed of a twelfth century nave which opens upon a fifteenth century choir. The main altar stands below a large nineteenth century stained-glass of an episode from the life of St. Gilles. The oldest part of the church is the original eleventh century nave, now an aisle. In this aisle is the door made famous by the passage of Joan of Arc.

In the prolongation of the aisle - to the left of the main altar - is the altar of the Virgin above which, in 1947, was a statue of Our Lady of Victories, now in another part of the church. In the north wall, to the left of the altar of the Virgin, is a stained-glass window representing Our Lady of Lourdes, with two medallions below: to the left, a scene from the childhood of Jesus; to the right, the Annunciation (see Note 1) December 8th being the feast of the Immaculate Conception the altar of the Virgin was decorated with flowers, including lilies. The apparitions occurred in the north east corner of the church,

between the altar and the window, and as if attached to them on either side.

What Nicole and the others described to Sergine was this: a Lady clothed in a brilliantly white dress with gold trim at neck and wrists, her bare feet peeking out below. She wore a blue sash knotted on the left and carried a Rosary of white beads and gold fittings. A veil of a white different from that of her dress covered her head, ears and shoulders and came down to her feet. It was decorated along its border with a traditional motif of the Touraine: 'S's one above the other in alternating mirror image. A few curls escaped at her forehead and, to the admiration of the girls, tresses of blond hair flowed out over her shoulders and down to her knees. She stood with her hands together in the traditional attitude of prayer and radiated "strong but not blinding" golden light.

Most impressive to the girls was her beauty, especially her ravishing smile and blue eyes full of sweetness and purity. She was so splendid a personage that, though apparently but sixteen or seventeen years old, her enchanted admirers naturally thought of her as a *Dame* or Lady.

She and the angel were in a rocky grotto but the Lady stood higher upon a rectangular stone block, integral with the rocks. Its front surface was decorated by a garland, hanging by two in-curving leaves. This garland consisted of five pink roses, the largest in the center. On the rocks below, in two lines parallel to the garland, golden letters spelled out:

O MARIE CONÇUE SANS PÉCHÉ
PRIEZ POUR NOUS QUI AVONS RECOURS À VOUS

(OH MARY, CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN)
(PRAY FOR US WHO HAVE RE COURSE TO YOU)

This is an Invocation from the apparition of the rue du Bac, which occurred in Paris in the nineteenth century. It is much used by the French. The golden letters were three inches high.

The Angel was on the left, kneeling on his right knee. He wore a robe of rosy-white also trimmed with gold. He had blue eyes and long curling blond hair. His left hand was upon his heart and in his right he held out a lily stalk of three buds and three blooms. His wings were white, rimmed with gold. The feathers were small and shining. The feathers and the lady's blue sash trembled in an imperceptible breeze blowing from the right. The angel radiated a white light even brighter than the golden light of the Lady.

The grotto began a few feet above the ground and blocked all view of the wall behind. The rocks were brown but, lit by the shining personages, glittered entrancingly with colors the girls had never seen.

For the time it took to describe all this the Lady remained, then disappeared in a cloud of silvery dust.

"She's gone! Maybe she'll never come back" said Laura.

"Let's go; maybe it's the devil!" Sergine suggested nervously.

They left the church to go to school, but first the Aubry girls ran to their house, two steps from the church, to tell their mother what had happened: "Mama, we saw a beautiful Lady!" they cried. But their mother thought it was a game of make believe and wouldn't listen. Mademoiselle Grandin, who lived opposite, was at her door, so they ran over and told her the news. Understanding who the Lady was, she believed them without hesitation. She exclaimed joyfully but them they had better get to school. They returned to their mother again with their story but this time Madame Aubry got angry and sent them sternly off to school.

In the school yard the news spread quickly. Sergine whispered it to the older girls and everyone was excited. Jacqueline had been wondering who the beautiful Lady might be. At last she realized it must be the Virgin Mary. Sister Marie de l'Enfant-Jésus, teacher of the lower class, was monitoring the yard. Jacqueline eagerly went up to her and, using the affectionate and formal language of the time, cried: "Dear Sister, dear Sister! I saw a beautiful Lady in the church; I saw the Blessed Virgin!"

Gentle Sister Marie instantly believed her and exclaimed in wonder: "You saw the Blessed Virgin?" But fearful of the reaction of others she added: "Don't say such things!"

"But I wasn't alone!" insisted Jacqueline. "There was Laura, there was Jeannette, there was Nicole!"

"And what did she say to you?"

"Nothing. We just looked at her."

Father Clovis Ségelle, the parish priest or *curé* chanced to be at the school and just at this moment came out into the yard with the head teacher; Sister Saint-Léon de la Croix. The two of them were mobbed by the excited girls. Father Ségelle, like most French priests of his time, was devout but not

mystically minded. Sister Saint-Léon also was a down to earth individual, jovial and authoritarian. Once they made sense of the chorus of eager voices they dismissed the news as nonsense. Jacqueline repeated what she had said to Sister Marie. Sister Saint-Léon, assuming it was a childish prank, said: "*Tu es folle!*" (you're crazy).

The curé, hearing about the angel, exclaimed: "An angel! An angel? What is this angel!" After hearing Jacqueline's explanation he said: "You saw double through your thick glasses!"

Indeed, Jacqueline had eye trouble. From birth she had suffered from severe, chronic and purulent conjunctivitis. She was obliged to continually wipe her eyes in class or pus would drip on her books. Each morning her eyes were glued shut by a dried crust which her mother had to wash away with warm water. Her eyelashes could never grow since they were pulled out with the crusts. Additionally she was nearsighted, astigmatic and cross-eyed. She had to sit in the first row to see the blackboard. Everyone pitied her condition which was considered a "disgusting sight."

Undeterred, Jacqueline repeated that Laura Jeannette and Nicole had also seen the Lady. Finally the curé and Sister Saint-Léon decided to take the girls aside one at a time and question them. Each spoke with assurance and gave identical information. To test Jeannette Sister Saint-Léon insisted that such such a Lady would wear "red hat, red gloves and a red sash, in the latest fashion." But Jeannette, ordinarily all but mute, stamped her little foot and cried: "It's not true! Blue! Blue! Blue!" When Laura described the angel's wings she said they resembled the ones "the missionaries dressed us in (the year before) except for being bordered in gold."

After the interrogations the curé said to them in annoyance: "All right, enough of this. Go play. Do your school work." As he left he said to the other girls: "Be good. Love the Blessed Virgin. Tomorrow we'll forget all about this." And Sister Saint-Léon added:

"Those little girls won't be long giving away their game!"

At this moment came the signal to line up and go to class. Jacqueline, who wished she could return to the church to see the Lady again, approached Sister Saint-Léon and pleaded: "Oh dear Sister, if only you knew how beautiful the Lady was!" At which the nun snapped

"If she's so beautiful, if I were you I would have stayed in the church!" Then she turned brusquely away to dismiss such foolishness once and for all.

But Jacqueline thought: "She wants me to stay in the church; I'll go back!"

"Come on!" she said to Nicole, "the dear Sister is giving us permission to stay in the church!" She repeated this to Laura and Jeannette who were in line with the lower class, and led them away. Sister Marie nervously tried to stop them but Jacqueline explained they had Sister Saint-Léon's permission.

They left the yard but the curé was in the street talking with the pharmacist; impossible to get past him unseen. So Jacqueline took them though a back alley to where they could cross the street and slip into the church behind his back.

"She's waiting for us!" cried Laura. The Lady smiled affectionately and with a slow motion of her right index finger signaled them to approach. The girls came forward and knelt just below her. The Lady's expression now changed to one of deep sadness and, very slowly in a soft voice, she said:

TELL THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO PRAY FOR FRANCE FOR HER NEED IS GREAT

Then She smiled again (see Note 2).

Jacqueline was still preoccupied by the question of the Lady's identity but she didn't dare ask. At home her mother was more indulgent with Jeannette, and Jacqueline had gotten in the habit of asking her mother things though her little sister. So now she whispered to Jeannette and Laura: "Ask if she isn't our Maman du Ciel (Heavenly Mama). The two little girls did so and in the same soft voice the Lady answered:

BUT OF COURSE
I AM YOUR MAMAN DU CIEL

Saying the last two words she looked upward. Jacqueline, seeing she had nothing to fear, remembered the curé's question and asked: "Who is the angel with you?" The Virgin looked toward the angel who turned towards the girls. Later they would debate whether his voice and face were more masculine or

feminine and Jeannette would speak enthusiastically of this moment; the only time she saw his "two eyes" or heard his voice:

I AM THE ANGEL GABRIEL

The Virgin then bent towards them, holding out her right hand:

GIVE ME YOUR HANDS TO KISS

Jacqueline, who had no idea of proper manners in such a case, stood up and held out her hand palm up. The Virgin took it, turned it over and, bending foreword, brought Jacqueline's fingers to her lips and silently kissed them. Then, on tip toes, Nicole held up her hand. The Virgin had to bend even lower to kiss it. Laura and Jeannette, so much smaller, could not possibly have reached high enough. Spontaneously Jacqueline took them under the arms and, one after the other, lifted them as effortlessly as if they were dolls, holding them out at arms length. The girls felt the human solidity of the Virgin's hand and the softness and warmth of her lips.

She spoke again:

COME BACK THIS EVENING AT 5 O'CLOCK AND TOMORROW AT ONE O'CLOCK

Then She disappeared in an effulgence of silvery dust.

In wondering delight the girls left the church. Outside they noticed that their fingers bore a trace of the kiss: a white, shining oval.

"Quick!" said Jacqueline, "the dear Sister will have to believe us this time!" Taking their right hands in their left as if carrying a precious object they ran off down the street.

Madame Bossis, a shop keeper, was sweeping the sidewalk in front of her door. "Children!" she scolded, "do you realize what time it is? You're late for school!" But the four girls clustered round her and showed the shining ovals. "The Blessed Virgin kissed our hands!" they cried, and then rushed off, leaving the amazed woman holding her broom in a pose of astonishment.

Before they reached school the traces faded away.

In the upper class Sister Saint-Léon rebuked Jacqueline and Nicole but then asked: "Well then, what did you see; the walls? the flowers?" Jacqueline and Nicole described what had happened. Their classmates were particularly struck when they heard that the Virgin wanted the children to pray for France. "Well," said the nun, "get to work. You're fifteen minutes behind." and she assigned them extra lessons as punishment.

But Sister Saint-Léon began to have doubts. She went and asked Sister Marie to question the two youngest girls and record their answers. After class she had Jacqueline and Nicole separately write out what had happened. The accounts were unambiguously concordant.

After school Nicole had a mile and a half to walk and, the winter dark coming early, she was obliged to go home before five o'clock. On her way she stopped to tell her aunt what had happened but Madame Aubry didn't believe her, or Jeannette either. Madame Croizon didn't believe Laura and Sergine, and neither mother would let her girls go back to church for the five o'clock rendezvous. Laura got permission to visit Jeannette however and the two girls talked about the Lady and the angel. Jacqueline, as usual, stayed for after school study and then, it being the feast of the Immaculate Conception, went with the others directly to church for the Rosary and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

During the Rosary Jacqueline's class mates peeked at her and whispered questions: "Is she there?" "Where is she?"

The Virgin had appeared. She smiled at Jacqueline and signalled her to approach. But with the curé at the altar and her school mistresses behind her Jacqueline didn't dare. She turned and searched out Sister Saint-Léon, caught her attention and, with an imploring look, sought her permission. She assumed her mistress could see the Virgin beckoning and would allow her to obey but instead got an angry and perplexed glare.

At this moment the bell sounded announcing the Blessed Sacrament carried forward by Father Segelle. When Jacqueline looked back the Virgin was gone. After the Benediction, the Blessed Sacrament was returned to the tabernacle. Then, as the curé said a prayer often used at L'Ile-Bouchard : Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for France, the Virgin reappeared.

Again she smiled and signalled Jacqueline to approach. Again Jacqueline looked back in supplication at Sister Saint-Léon who again glared at her. Jacqueline's friends saw she was seeing something they did not and whispered urgent questions but Jacqueline was too intimidated to say anything.

At the end of the ceremony the other children wanted to stay with Jacqueline and pray to the Virgin but Sister Saint-Léon hustled them out. Then she returned to Jacqueline, took her by the shoulder and shook her: "When someone pretends to see the Blessed Virgin they don't turn their heads in church!"

"Dear Sister," said Jacqueline meekly, "the Lady is there. She is looking at us. What should we do?"

"But!... where is she?"

"You can see her perfectly well yourself dear Sister; there she is;" and Jacqueline pointed, for all her mistress could tell, at the vase of lilies in the corner. When at last Jacqueline understood that Sister Saint-Léon indeed saw nothing, she described the apparition. Poor Sister Saint-Léon, already perplexed, was completely flummoxed. Hesitating and unsure she led Jacqueline forward. They knelt down and she tried to say a Hail Mary but her state of mind was such that she couldn't get it right. At this spectacle the Virgin smiled so gaily, though without mockery or malice, that Jacqueline saw her teeth. Then she disappeared in a luminous cloud of silvery dust.

"Dear Sister, the Blessed Virgin is gone." Hearing this, Sister Saint-Léon was so relieved she made a gesture as if to say: whew! Some of the children had snuck back into the church and witnessed this scene.

Sister Saint-Léon escorted Jacqueline home to keep her from the others then rushed to the sacristy to find the priest. He greeted her with the words: "Nothing new? then that's the end of that! Tomorrow this nonsense will be all forgotten."

"Not a bit!" replied Sister Saint-Léon. "It's still going on!" and she described the events of the afternoon and evening. Moved to anger the curé raised his arms and cried: "We'll never get out of this! But wait: you'll see! Tomorrow at quarter to one I'll lock the church and nobody will get in! And you! You forbid the children to come sneaking around!"

Sister Saint-Léon agreed but her scepticism was shaken and she disapproved the plan. The curé himself, thinking it over later, was troubled by one aspect of the affair: Jacqueline's report that the Virgin disappeared during the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; if She had not, Jacqueline would have been distracted from the essential. It was a graceful act in nice concordance with the doctrine of the Real Presence; a subtlety surely beyond Jacqueline's powers of invention? (This aspect of L'Ile-Bouchard came out in various ways. A year later for instance, an artist named Gabrielle Bonnet, drawing the church in L'Ile-Bouchard , was approached by Laura and they got talking. Gabrielle asked Laura which was more important to her: Communion or seeing the Virgin? Without hesitation Laura replied: "Communion".)

That evening Jacqueline recounted everything to her mother. Madame Aubry did not know what to think but she knew her daughter was no fibber. She warned her not to speak of it to her father however.

Nicole also tried to tell her mother but she said: "It isn't true! You're crazy!"

SECOND DAY
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Jacqueline lifts Laura and Jeannette

Making sure Jacqueline and Nicole were absent, Sister Saint-Léon forbid all the girls to go to the church. Some of them dared protest against her forbidding Jacqueline and the others, but Sister Saint-Léon secretly agreed. At a quarter to one Father Ségelle went to lock the church door but half way across the nave he stopped and went back. Later he could not explain why he changed his mind.

Similarly Madame Aubry wanted to stop her younger daughter from returning to the church but poor Jeannette stood at the door sobbing: "I want to see the Blessed Virgin and the beautiful angel!" Madame Aubry finally relented. Opening the door she said:

"Ha! You want to go see the beautiful Lady do you? Well, she's really the Devil and she's going to carry you away and you'll never see me again!" Jeannette dashed off in delight. Madame Aubry instantly regretted her words.

So at one o'clock the four girls were in the church. Sergine and two others came as far as the door but dared go no further; they asked Jacqueline to see if the Virgin wouldn't give them permission to come in.

The four girls knelt by the altar and began to recite Hail Mary. Suddenly a golden sphere, three feet across and shining brightly, surged out of the wall. It opened and deployed itself as a curtain of silvery light in the corner between the stained glass window and the tabernacle of the altar. The grotto was in relief on this rectangular screen. There were other differences; the Virgin's hair no longer cascaded down her chest but was pulled back and hidden under the veil; the angel was on the right, and the inscription on the rocks was different. It read:

JE SUIS L'IMMACULEE CONCEPTION

(I AM THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION)

A riddle for the girls was a word written in gold letters across the Virgin's chest; the middle was hidden by her hands:

MA.....CAT

She smiled at them; they gazed back in excited admiration. Finally Jacqueline asked: "Madame, can I bring in my friends?

YES
BUT THEY WILL NOT SEE ME

They ran back to the door. Just then Madame Trinson, who had a shoe store in the village, was about to come through. Sergine and the others had tried to stop her, repeating Sister Saint-Léon's interdiction. But Madame Trinson had replied: "That has nothing to do with me!"

Jacqueline reported what the Virgin had said, and they all went back to the altar. The apparition was gone, but after they knelt and began to pray it returned, beginning with the golden sphere, as it would from then on.

"There she is!" cried the girls.

The Virgin beckoned them forward and the four girls approached and knelt just below her. Her expression became serious. In the palm of her right hand she held out the golden crucifix of her Rosary and, with an air of sadness, requested:

KISS THE CROSS OF MY ROSARY

Jacqueline stood up and kissed the golden Christ. Nicole did the same on tiptoes. Then Jacqueline

lifted Laura and Jeannette, taking them up and holding them out lightly at arms length just as she had the day before. Madame Trinson was astonished, and overwhelmed by a sense of the Virgin's presence; Jacqueline lifted the little ones with impossible ease, and the kisses so distinctly touched the same point in the empty air that it affected her like the mime's trick of discovering an invisible wall.

Jacqueline was not only a frail girl but, like everyone else, suffered from lack of food. That evening Madame Trinson invited her and the little girls to her house; in front of her husband she made her try to lift them as she had done in the church. This was only the first time the experiment was made, always with the same result: Jacqueline couldn't even get them off the ground.

On the cross the girls read the letters; "I.N.R.I.". With their lips they felt the cold metal. The figure of Christ was in high relief and seemed both lifelessness and in suffering. The Virgin looked down at the crucifix with love and sadness; as the girls kissed it they felt her maternal grief.

Then again they knelt before her and the Virgin, with great slowness, made a sign of the cross. The girls imitated her. It took two minutes to complete. Madam Trinson was amazed to see the four girls, not looking at each other but apparently at a point on the wall, simultaneously making the same strangely slow motions. The angel did not cross himself. When this was complete the Virgin said to them sadly:

I AM GOING TO TELL YOU A SECRET
WHICH YOU CAN TELL IN THREE DAYS

and then, laying stress on each word:

PRAY FOR FRANCE
WHICH IN THESE DAYS
IS IN GREAT DANGER

After a pause she added:

GO TELL THE CURÉ TO COME AT 2 O'CLOCK
HE SHOULD BRING THE CHILDREN AND A CROWD TO PRAY

Jacqueline, alarmed at this request, turned to Madame Trinson; "The Blessed Virgin wants a crowd! Where will we get it?"

"Don't you worry about it" she replied, patting her reassuringly, "these little girls and I are the beginning." The Virgin smiled at Madame Trinson as she said this.

Then the Virgin said:

TELL THE CURÉ TO BUILD A GROTTO
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
HERE WHERE I AM

(She emphasized these last four words)

AND TO PUT MY STATUE AND THAT OF THE ANGEL IN IT
WHEN IT IS DONE I WILL BLESS IT
COME BACK AT 2 O'CLOCK AND AT 5 O'CLOCK

The silver curtain closed around the Virgin and the angel, formed the golden sphere, and disappeared into the wall. "Oh! the beautiful ball!" cried the girls.

They immediately rushed out through the sacristy to the presbytery to deliver the Virgin's message to the curé, crying joyfully to each other: "He's going to see her!"

It was warmer that day and Father Ségelle heard them through the open window of his upstairs office. At the kitchen door the girls told Mademoiselle Camille; the housekeeper, that they had seen the Virgin, and gave her message. Mademoiselle Camille went upstairs; the girls heard the priest's angry voice through the window: "Two o'clock?! That's school time! Off to class with them; they should obey their mistresses!"

They returned to the church in distress. "It's not your fault" Madame Trinson comforted them, "you must obey. The Blessed Virgin will not punish you. Come back at five o'clock." Together they said a last prayer and the seven girls went back to school.

Jacqueline arrived in tears. Sister Marie asked what was wrong and Jacqueline told her story. Her classmates clustered round to defend her. At the end Jacqueline insisted: "The Blessed Virgin is above the curé; we should obey her!"

Sister Marie looked at them sadly: "Yes, the Blessed Virgin is above the curé, but today Jacqueline, we must obey Monsieur the curé."

Her friends persisted, urging Jacqueline to go the church at two o'clock but Jacqueline sobbed: "Monsieur the curé doesn't want it; I won't go!"

When Sister Saint-Léon heard about the hidden word, she could have completed it for them; instead she said: "'Ma-cat'; that doesn't mean anything!" During class she caught her Rosary on the corner of her desk and the beads spilled over the floor. The girls laughed and later one said it served her right.

At two o'clock Jacqueline and Nicole's classmate's said to Sister Saint-Léon: "The Blessed Virgin is waiting for us to come and pray."

"No," said their teacher, "we are going to obey the curé." But many of the girls prayed silently.

In town Madame Trinson closed her store and went from door to door to gather the crowd. News of the apparitions spread. At the market Madame Robin learned that her daughter's visions had become the talk of the town.

Nicole returned home to escape the early nightfall. Jacqueline stayed in school for study period. At five o'clock she asked permission to go to the church. "Do as you like!" answered Sister Saint-Léon, "it's none of my business."

Jacqueline Laura and Jeannette, along with some twenty other children and thirty adults, were in the church. They said ten Hail Mary; the golden ball appeared and deployed itself in a silvery curtain. In the grotto the Virgin and angel radiated gold and white light; the invisible breeze ruffled the sash and feathers. At this moment Jeannette, recalling what her mother had said after lunch, got scared and cried out: "The Lady is going to take me away! I'll never see Mama again! I want to go home!" Madame Aubry had sent their older brother after them; Jacqueline signaled him to take Jeannette home. Being led away Jeannette hid her face in her arm but three times turned back and put her hands together in prayer. The Virgin, smiling gently, looked after her as she went, then beckoned to Jacqueline and Laura, she spoke:

SING
JE VOUS SALUE MARIE
THE CANTICLE I LOVE SO WELL

As the girls sang this song (I Hail You Mary), well known in L'Ile-Bouchard and now associated with the apparitions, the Virgin smiled down at them and the others. After the song, as was usual, the girls added the thrice repeated Invocation: "Oh Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." Then the Virgin said:

TELL THE CROWD TO APPROACH AND RECITE TEN HAIL MARY

Jacqueline got up and turned to the crowd: "You must approach. We're going to recite ten Hail Mary." The people gathered. As they prayed the Virgin counted her Rosary beads in her fingers. She and the angel also prayed, silently moving their lips, but only during the first part (Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with Thee; blessed art Thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus.). not during the second (Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death, amen). When the decade was over the Virgin herself began the Invocations (when praying the Rosary in a group the French divide the invocation in two):

O MARY CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN

and Jacqueline and Laura replied: "Pray for us who have recourse to you." The people were surprised to hear the two girls in perfect chorus say only the second part as if praying normally with someone.

Then Jacqueline asked: "Madame, should we come back? Will you come again tomorrow?" The Virgin replied:

YES
COME EVERY DAY AT 1 O'CLOCK
I WILL TELL YOU WHEN IT WILL ALL BE OVER

Then, with majestic deliberation, She blessed the crowd. The blessing lasted two minutes. She began with her hands in the attitude of prayer and at the end brought her right hand back against her left and lowered both together a few inches. Jacqueline and Laura had never seen the curé perform such a gesture. They crossed themselves in time with the blessing, to the astonishment of the crowd. Then the curtain of light folded itself into the golden ball and disappeared into the wall.

At five-thirty the curé was informed of this latest apparition. He hurriedly informed the archbishop.

On that day, for reasons never adequately explained, the Communists called off their general strike. This partial step toward civil peace corresponded to the appearance of MA.....CAT. The word would not be fully revealed before the menace was definitely over several days later.

THREE THEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

1 - The apparition, which takes the form of the scene of the Annunciation, was presented in relief on the silvery curtain which spread from the statue of Our Lady of Victories and the tabernacle of the altar of the Virgin on the right, to the stained-glass representation of Lourdes and the Annunciation on the left. In the apparition at Lourdes, which occurred shortly after the promulgation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin said: "I am the Immaculate Conception." This occurred on March 25; feast of the Annunciation.

2 - Why did Gabriel did not cross himself? Angels are not in need of salvation. For the same reason he did not say the second part of the Hail Mary. The first part is Gabriel's salutation to Mary; the second is our request of her to pray for us.

3 - One of the criteria by which the Church tests the genuineness of an apparition is that nothing which occurs should contradict Church doctrine. This tests is logical; if, as the Church claims, She has been established by the Son of God himself and is guided by the Holy Spirit, then no supernatural message would contradict Her teachings.

Note 1: The stained-glass window shows Our Lady of Lourdes standing upon a leafy branch near the grotto, with Bernadette kneeling. The medallion of the Annunciation shows the Virgin in a chamber with Gabriel on a cloud. Such images are typical of French churches. Many assumed they were the basis of invention or hallucination though the girls professed never to have taken note of them. In fact differences of iconographic detail exclude this thesis as much as thematic affinities reinforce the supernatural aura of the apparitions; nota bene: observation 1, above.

Note 2: France has three patron saint the principal being the Virgin Mary; the other two are Joan of Arc and Thérèse of Lisieux.

France is called by the popes "Eldest Daughter of the Church".

THIRD DAY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

The Promise to Heal Jacqueline

Mr. Aubry was still in ignorance of the adventures of his daughters when, Wednesday morning, he was hailed by two friends. "Hey Aubry; come have a drink with us. We have something to ask you!" In a café they put their question: "Why didn't you let us in on your joke with the curé?" Monsieur Aubry had no idea what they were talking about so they told him the story that was circulating in the town. Stupefied he rushed home with the idea his daughters were making a fool of him.

"Madeleine!" he yelled, "what's been going on? What's this people are saying about our daughters? Why are you hiding it from me?" The table was set for lunch and he pounded it in anger; glasses danced off and shattered on the floor. As for Jacqueline; he gave her what she later called: "*une paire de claques magistral*s" (a magisterial pair of slaps).

"We're the laughing stock of the village!" he stormed. "From now on: no more sisters! no more priests! We're going to close the shop for a week and lock those girls up!" In tears his wife finally convinced him to go upstairs and rest; normally he was in bed at that hour since he worked at night.

After they had sadly eaten lunch her mother said: "Jacqueline, why don't you go to your father and tell him what you've been seeing." So Jacqueline went upstairs, put her arms around her father's neck and described everything, especially what most impressed the girls; the Virgin's beauty.

Poor Mr. Aubry already regretted his anger. Repentant and troubled he repeated: "What have I done? What have I done?" He went downstairs and said to his wife: "You know? she is seeing something! You had better go to the church and see what's going on." So Madame Aubry followed the girls who had already left.

A hundred and fifty people were there, including Madame Croizon, and all wanted to be near the girls so, though all four were in the first row, they were separated from each other. Suddenly and together they stood up saying: "La voila!"; "There she is!"

The Virgin, smiled kindly:

SING JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

The girls sang the canticle and after, propelled by the desire to pray they always felt in her presence, they said ten Hail Mary. When the decade was over, and for the only time during the apparitions, they added a Glory to the Father as practiced people often do after each decade of the Rosary (Glory to the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be. Amen). The Virgin bowed in reverence, following church practise.

Then the Virgin bade them approach with a motion of her finger. Speaking softly, slowly and sweetly she requested:

KISS MY HAND

She proffered the back of the fingers of her right hand and Jacqueline, then Nicole, reached up, took the fingers delicately in their own and kissed them. Then Jacqueline lifted the two little ones. The crowd had the same reaction as Madame Trinson: amazement at Jacqueline's feat and the sense of an invisible presence provoked by the exact placement of the kisses in the apparently empty air. The girls again felt the human warmth of the Virgin's hand.

Sister Saint-Léon had challenged Nicole: "Make a grotto!? Out of what? You had better ask her how to do it!" So Nicole now asked:

"What should we make the grotto out of you asked for yesterday?" The Virgin answered kindly:

OUT OF PAPER TO START

Meanwhile Jacqueline heard her name being called and saw the Virgin look out into the crowd.

Following her gaze Jacqueline found her mother and went to her. Madame Aubry, in tears, urged her daughter: "Ask the Blessed Virgin to perform a miracle so that everyone will believe!"

Jacqueline went back and knelt as before: "Madame, would you perform a miracle so that everyone will believe?" Slowly and kindly the Virgin answered:

I HAVE NOT COME HERE TO PERFORM MIRACLES
BUT TO TELL YOU TO PRAY FOR FRANCE
BUT TOMORROW YOU WILL SEE CLEARLY
AND YOU WON'T WEAR GLASSES ANYMORE

Then, no longer smiling but still sweetly, she went on:

I AM GOING TO TELL YOU A SECRET WHICH YOU ARE TO
TELL NO ONE
WILL YOU PROMISE ME TO KEEP IT

The girls answered simultaneously: "We promise you." Holding their hands in the attitude of prayer they listened. After the secret the Virgin added:

COME SEE ME TOMORROW AT THE SAME TIME

"We promise!" replied the girls, and the Virgin disappeared in the marvelous golden ball.

"What did she say when you asked for a miracle?" everyone wanted to know.

"She said Jacqueline would see clearly and not need glasses."

"Are you sure she meant you?" they asked Jacqueline.

"Yes, yes! but she said: 'tomorrow.'"

The priest and the sisters were hidden behind the sacristy door peeking and listening through the key hole and a crack.

Back in school Sister Saint-Léon was especially severe with Jacqueline and Nicole who were glad to receive the encouraging smiles of their friends. At five o'clock she told Jacqueline that the curé wanted to see her. Poor Jacqueline was sure he would be nice to her at last but again he was harsh. He demanded to know what the "belle Dame", as he mockingly called her, had said that day. Jacqueline gave her report but when she repeated what the Virgin said about a miracle he got red in the face and sputtered: "What's this? Do you realize what your eyes are like?!"

"Yes, Monsieur le curé."

"And you think that, just like that, in one night, they're going to be cured?"

"Yes, Monsieur le curé!"

"No! it's not you who are going to 'see clearly', it's we who are going to see clearly right though your crazy nonsense!"

"No, Monsieur le curé," Jacqueline persisted, "the Blessed Virgin also said: You won't wear glasses anymore." (Vous ne porterez plus de lunettes.)

For those unfamiliar with French it must be explained that the misuse, real or perceived, of vous (the respectful 'you') and tu (the intimate 'you'; always used with children) can cause embarrassment and even distress. "Oh la la!" cried the curé. "This belle Dame says 'vous' to you!" and he shooed her out the door.

Jacqueline went home in tears where she found her father and mother also crying. That night Madame Aubry watched over her children who both slept soundly. But she, the other parents, the curé and the sisters got hardly any sleep at all.

As for the secret, the girls later confirmed it was the same for all of them; but nothing could induce them to divulge it. When her father cajoled Jeanette: - "tell papa; you should obey your papa!" - Jeanette answered:

"Even if I wanted to I couldn't." And grasping her throat added: "It would stop: there!"

No bribe could succeed and when an irresponsible priest tried to intimidate Laura by suggesting they would come with guns to shoot her if she wouldn't tell, she lowered her head and replied: "Well; you'll just have to kill me".

Asked if they would tell the archbishop or the pope they answered "No". When the pope's place in the

Church was explained to them they finally answered that if he asked them for the secret the Virgin would tell them what to do.

FOURTH DAY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Happiness in Families, Jacqueline is cured

When Jacqueline woke up that morning her head felt light and wonderful. Her eyes opened with no trouble and she could see perfectly.

"Papa, Maman, I can see!" she cried in delight. Her mother was already on the stairs with warm water. Both parents rushed to their daughter's room and looked in astonishment; Jacqueline's eyes were open, clean and sparkling. There was no sign of crust or pus and she was no longer cross-eyed. Her father held out a newspaper four feet away which she read without glasses. To this day she has never needed them again. Her parents, shedding tears of joy, had no more doubts, and Mr. Aubry who never set foot in church, rushed out to fetch the curé.

When the curé saw Jacqueline he raised his hands to heaven and exclaimed: "So it's true that she has descended among us!" He telephoned the archbishop about the miracle and was instructed to be present at the next apparition with the sisters.

At ten o'clock Nicole was stopped in the street by a woman who said: "Your mother should take you to a doctor!"

The cool-headed Nicole replied: "I eat well, I sleep well: I'm not sick."

"So why do you pray in front of a wall?"

"I'm not crazy: if I didn't see anything I wouldn't pray in front of a wall."

Since there was no school that day people flocked to the Aubry house to inspect Jacqueline's eyes. In spite of all the commotion the girls did not boast, go off secretly among themselves, or otherwise change from their normal behavior. The strong opposition of the curé and the sisters weakened the accusation that it was a fake he had orchestrated, and that Sister Saint-Léon hid behind the altar and projected films against the wall.

That day at one o'clock the church was almost full. All the front row seats were taken. The girls had to go directly up near the altar and kneel on the floor. The curé and the sisters were kneeling near by. The girls began to say Hail Mary.

When the Virgin appeared she seemed even more beautiful and joyous than before. Her first words were:

SING JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

The girls sang. Then the Virgin asked:

DO YOU PRAY FOR SINNERS

"Yes, Madame," the girls could answer since the curé led them in such prayers.

Then the Virgin began to pray; they followed her through ten Hail Mary.

Father Séguille, troubled by why the Virgin should chose to come to L'Ile-Bouchard , had written out a question for Jacqueline. When the decade was over he gave her a signal. Jacqueline stood up and read: Madame, why do you do us the honor of appearing in this church?

The Virgin answered:

BECAUSE THERE ARE PIOUS PEOPLE
AND BECAUSE JEANNE DELANOUE CAME HERE

Only a month before, on November 9, 1947, Jeanne Delanoue had been beatified. In the sixteenth century she had established the school at L'Ile-Bouchard. The teachers were still Sisters of Saint Anne of Providence; the order she founded at Notre-Dame des Ardilliers at the nearby town of Saumur.

The curé had added a second question which Jacqueline was to read only if the first got no response. But Jacqueline, struggling to do exactly as she had been told, read it out anyway: Is it in memory of

Jeanne Delanoue who so loved to pray to you at Notre-Dame des Ardilliers... nodding her head, the Virgin gently interrupted:

YES
I KNOW THAT VERY WELL

But Jacqueline dutifully persisted: ...and who came here herself to establish her daughters?

The Virgin smiled broadly. With a twinkle in her eye she asked the girls:
HOW MANY SISTERS ARE THERE HERE

The crowd heard them speak, in chorus, the apparent non-sequitur: "Three of them."

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THEIR FOUNDER

To the stupefaction of their auditors the girls again spoke in chorus (except Jeannette, who didn't know the answer): "Jeanne Delanoue." Parishioners concerned about illnesses had given Jacqueline a message which she now read: Madame, would you cure the people who suffer from rheumatisms and nervous disorders and who suffer physically and morally? The Virgin looked down at Jacqueline for a moment and then said:

THERE WILL BE HAPPINESS IN FAMILIES
NOW WOULD YOU SING JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

"Oh yes we would!" answered the girls. When the canticle was over the Virgin asked:

IS MONSIEUR LE CURE GOING TO BUILD THE GROTTO

"Yes Madame, we promise."

CAME BACK TOMORROW AT ONE O'CLOCK

"Yes Madame, we'll come back tomorrow."

OH MARY CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN

the Virgin began, and the girls finished the three Invocations. Then the Virgin blessed the crowd and the girls crossed themselves at the same pace.

The apparition had lasted thirteen minutes. The girls were then separately questioned in the sacristy.

Later two policemen came to the Aubry house and one tried to intimidate Jacqueline by ordering her not to return to the church. Poor Jacqueline replied simply: "Monsieur, if you saw what I saw, you would go back."

Madame Aubry defended her daughter: "She has started and she will go on to the end."

The Crown of Colored Light

That morning Jacqueline had copied the lessons on the blackboard from the back of the classroom without glasses. Even so Sister Saint-Léon took her aside.

"Is your nonsense ever going to end?"

"What nonsense, dear Sister?"

"Pooh! to make everyone think you see the Blessed Virgin, you and the others, and to make the crowd come every day at one o'clock! I've had about enough! If you keep it up you're going to discredit the whole school!"

Jacqueline started to cry: "Oh no, dear Sister, it's not nonsense! But you won't believe me!"

At one o'clock three hundred people filled the church. Sister Saint-Léon and Dr. Tabaste were hidden behind the main altar to observe the girls unseen. Several priests from the surrounding parishes were present.

When the Virgin appeared the girls were delighted by a new phenomenon; a crown of shining rays, each a foot long. Two narrow ones in the center were intense blue, five wider ones to each side were symmetrically colored (listed in order from in to out); red, yellow, green, pink and brownish-red. The outer rays curved inwards giving the crown a shell shape. The Virgin also held her hands lower so the girls could read the word written in golden letters across her chests:

MAGNIFICAT

The crisis in France was over. A week later an officer of the Ministry of the Interior; Monsieur Piquot, who had heard of the apparitions, came to L'Ile-Bouchard . After learning all the facts he said to the curé: "France was saved by those four kids, and all the people here who prayed at the feet of Mary."

The girls were thrilled at the sight of the crown.

"Nicole! do you see the rainbow? How pretty it is!" whispered Jacqueline.

"Yes; it's brilliant!" answered Nicole.

Radiantly happy the Virgin requested:

SING JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

The girls sang and then, with the Virgin and the angel, said ten Hail Mary. The Virgin began the Invocations. The girls, joined by some of the people, responded.

Then the Virgin asked:

SING AGAIN JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

She never before had requested the canticle a second time and Jacqueline, in the midst of her emotion, thought she had not understood. "What?" she asked. And the Virgin, with especial kindness, repeated the request:

WOULD YOU SING AGAIN JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

"Oh, yes we will!" replied the girls. Afterwards they added three Invocations. Then the Virgin, her left hand on her heart, offered her right, and tenderly requested:

KISS MY HAND

As before, Jacqueline, then Nicole, took the Virgin's hand and kissed it. Then Jacqueline lifted the little ones. The crowd, watching intently, saw frail Jacqueline perform the strange feat and were struck by the

sense of the Virgin's presence.

Then the Virgin asked them:

DO YOU PRAY FOR SINNERS

"Yes, Madame."

GOOD
ABOVE ALL PRAY A LOT FOR THE SINNERS

Then She led them in ten more Hail Mary.

Then Jacqueline, referring to a sick young woman who had come to L'Ile-Bouchard in hope of a miracle, requested: "Madame, would you heal this girl?"

IF I DON'T HEAL HER HERE I WILL HEAL HER ELSEWHERE

Not long afterwards, this young woman of whom the doctors despaired, regained her health.

The priests had impressed upon Jacqueline what a good thing it would be if the Virgin performed another miracle. So Jacqueline now implored: "Oh Madame, would you perform a miracle?" The Virgin responded kindly:

I HAVE NOT COME HERE TO PERFORM MIRACLES
BUT THAT YOU SHOULD PRAY FOR FRANCE

She led them through a third decade after which She gave her majestic benediction; the girls crossed themselves at the same pace. Then She was enclosed in the golden globe which disappeared into the wall.

Although most of the crowd was overwhelmed by what they had seen, Dr. Tabaste was not. He noted the whispered conversation between Jacqueline and Nicole, that Jacqueline asked all the questions, that Jeannette looked at a different spot than the others. He summed up his judgment with the phrase: "I have the impression it's the eldest who leads the dance."

The girls were hustled off to be interrogated. They were most excited about the "rainbow". Before they had a chance to speak to each other or anyone else, each gave an identical description of the crown of rays.

SIXTH DAY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

Lesson of Prayer

Five hundred people crowded the church. Some chanted Hail Mary. Father Ségelle led the girls to places from where they could not see each other yet all be observed at once; they responded simultaneously at the beginning of the apparition. When they went forward to kneel Jacqueline, hurt by what Dr. Tabaste had said, placed herself apart from the others.

The Virgin no longer had her aureole. She began by asking for the Je Vous Salut Marie. The girls sang in their soft voices. When the canticle was over the Virgin made a request:

BEGIN THE HAIL MARY

"Yes Madame!" They said a decade, adding the three Invocations.

Then Jacqueline held out a bouquet of pink carnations: "Madame, here are flowers for you!" The Virgin smiled and bending forward slowly made a small sign of the cross over them.

"Oh, thank you!" said Jacqueline.

The Virgin then requested a second decade. Afterwards the girls began the Invocations and this time some in the crowd responded. For a second time the Virgin requested the canticle; Je Vous Salut Marie and then a third decade. This time She began the Invocations and the girls responded.

The priests had again insisted that Jacqueline obtain a miracle. So now Jacqueline implored: "Oh Madame; won't you perform a miracle?" The Virgin answered gently:

LATER

Now the crowd watched as Jacqueline bowed her head, lifted it, crossed herself and again bowed her head; the Virgin was saying things personally to her. Simultaneously they saw Nicole speak and look toward the altar. Because of another conversation with Sister Saint-Léon Nicole had asked if they should leave the altar in place when they made the grotto?

YES
LEAVE IT IN PLACE

Only Nicole heard this.

Then the Virgin requested a fourth decade. With each prayer she seemed to the girls to become more beautiful. They later explained that her beauty was a reflection of her joy. Many people present who had fallen away from prayer came back to it that day. During the prayers the Virgin often looked heavenward.

After the Hail Mary She again began the Invocations, and those near the girls heard them respond in chorus three times: "Pray for us who have recourse to you." Then, filled with the joy of prayer and the desire to please their Maman du ciel, the girls sang the canticle and added three Invocations.

Then the Virgin spoke:

I WILL COME TOMORROW FOR THE LAST TIME

The girls stood and crossed themselves, following the slow, majestic grace of the Virgin's benediction of the crowd. As usual it took two minutes.

The priests whisked the girls off to separate interrogations. Some tried tricks and lies to confuse and confound them. The poor children were shocked and troubled by these tactics. The records of these interrogations are testimony to their calm assurance and the rapid, unhesitating, accurate and invariable character of their responses.

The Miraculous Sunbeam

The day was overcast and dark. The streets of L'Ile-Bouchard were clogged with cars, busses and bicycles. Two thousand people were jammed into the church. Every nook and perch was occupied. Ladders had been set up to which dozens of people clung. One group had scrambled up onto the altar of St. Lawrence. The mayors of the surrounding towns were present. Those who couldn't get in pressed around the door. Amidst the commotion someone began to pray the Rosary and the multitude grew silent. Many prayed who had not done so in years.

At ten minutes to one the girls arrived carrying flowers. Sister St. Léon forged them a path through the masses, sometimes clambering over the pews. After the girls came Father Ségelle, seven other priests, Dr. Tabaste, the Mother Superior and Sister Marie

"La voila!" murmured Laura as the golden globe appeared, opened into the silver curtain and displayed the Lady and the angel shining with golden and white light in the glittering grotto. The impalpable breeze gently blew the Virgin's sash and ruffled the angel's white and gold feathers. As always the spectacle entranced the girls, above all the beauty of the Virgin, though Jeannette was most attracted by the angel. This apparition was to last thirty five minutes and all that time little Jeanette, kneeling on the floor, would have her head bent far back as she tirelessly contemplated his celestial beauty. People later said it hurt their necks just to watch her. The Virgin looked down at the girls with radiant sweetness and kindness. The grace which she emanated, the elegance of her stance, her superlative charm, inspired their admiration; all through the apparitions they constantly emphasized her ravishing beauty. This day she seemed more beautiful than ever.

SING JE VOUS SALUE MARIE

In silence the crowd listened as the girls sang in their soft voices.

Certain people later asked them: "Did you make your song a prayer?" To which the girls answered simply:

"The Blessed Virgin asked us to sing; we just did it to please her." The girls were thrilled in the Virgin's presence, like any child received by a loved and respected person.

The Virgin requested a decade of Hail Mary. As the girls prayed a priest tried to confuse them by pushing over a chair. The girls began the Invocations and some in the crowd joined for the responses.

Then Jacqueline and Nicole together read a request prepared by the curé: *Madame; we ask you to bless Monseigneur the Archbishop, his twenty five years of episcopate, Monseigneur the bishop of Blois, the two parishes of L'Ile-Bouchard, the Catholic schools, the Lenten mission, the priests of our sector (les prêtres du doyenné) and to give priests to the Touraine.*

The Virgin listened to all this, smiled, and after a short silence nodded in acquiescence. "Oh thank you!" cried the girls. Then they stood up and held out their flowers. Madame Trinson had given Laura a tiny bouquet of violets; Jeannette had miniature roses; Nicole had pink carnations; Jacqueline had arum lilies. That morning the priests had insisted to Jacqueline, as she later remembered in her own words: "Jacqueline; do it however you can but those flowers are for her. It's all the people here who are offering these flowers to her!"

"Madame!" cried the girls, "these flowers are for you!"

The Virgin smiled tenderly but said nothing. So they held the flowers higher, the little girls on tip toe, and brandished the bouquets as near as possible to her hands. "Take them, take them!" urged Jacqueline, but when the Virgin did not Jacqueline finally implored: "kiss them!!"

I WILL KISS THEM BUT I WON'T TAKE THEM YOU WILL TAKE THEM WITH YOU

So Jacqueline held up the bouquets one after the other, standing on tip toe to reach high enough with

the smaller ones. The Virgin kissed each one. The bouquets varied in size but Jacqueline held them up to exactly the same spot and the crowd was struck by the sense of the invisible presence.

The Virgin then had them sing Je Vous Salut Marie a second time. Then Jacqueline read more messages people had given her. The Virgin listened with benevolence. One of the messages was a question from Sister Marie: Madame, what should we do to console our Lord for the suffering sinners cause him? The Virgin answered:

PRAY AND MAKE SACRIFICES

When all the messages were read the Virgin requested:

CONTINUE THE ROSARY

As usual she and the angel prayed with the girls and those in the crowd who joined. Then She began the Invocations and the children, joined by many in the crowd, responded: Pray for us who have recourse to you.

Then the Virgin made a request:

ASK THE CROWD TO SING THE MAGNIFICAT

In her soft voice Jacqueline addressed Father Soulard who was next to her taking notes: "The Blessed Virgin asks that the crowd sing the Magnificat." Father Soulard conveyed the message to the curé who asked Jacqueline:

"Is it for everybody?" Jacqueline nodded. Father Séguin began to intone the Magnificat in his robust voice. The people present in the church that day recall this moment with a certain awe. The whole crowd joined him.

During the Magnificat the Virgin was more beautiful and joyful than ever. She raised her eyes heavenward and the girls sensed a prayer soaring up from her soul; they smiled with joy and pressed their hands to their pounding hearts.

After the song the Virgin again smiled at the girls who contemplated her blissfully.

She asked for a third decade, and at the end began the Invocations. Then a third time she requested Je Vous Salut Marie. After the canticle the girls spontaneously sang Oh Marie Conceived Without Sin, Pray for France, a song often sung at L'Ile-Bouchard .

Then followed a time of silence during which the girls prayed fervently; their own intentions and the many which had been confided to them.

Then the Virgin requested a fourth decade, and at the end again began the Invocations herself. The girls now responded in stronger voices and were joined by the crowd.

Then the Virgin asked:

DO YOU PRAY FOR SINNERS

"Yes Madame; we pray for them!" the girls answered eagerly.

Again, for a time, the girls joyfully contemplated their Maman du Ciel. Then she requested a final decade:

SAY TEN HAIL MARY WITH YOUR ARMS IN A CROSS

"Yes Madame!" answered the girls, holding out their arms. Jacqueline said to Father Soulard: "The Virgin asks for ten Hail Mary with our arms in a cross."

Father Soulard repeated this to the curé who then asked Jacqueline: "The arms in a cross?"

Jacqueline nodded. So the curé, turning to the crowd, held out his arms. The people imitated his gesture without self-consciousness; all now prayed with ardor, many with tears in their eyes.

This was the fifth decade; the Virgin had led them through a whole Rosary.

When it was over, the girls began the Invocations and the crowd responded. The Virgin then led three

more Invocations herself. Then She asked:

ARE YOU GOING TO BUILD THE GROTTO

"Yes yes!" cried the girls all together, "we'll build it!" Then the Virgin requested a final Je Vous Salue Marie, and all joined the girls in song. The Virgin then led three final Invocations.

Sensing that the end had come, Jacqueline implored: "Madame, please; give a proof of your presence!" Smiling kindly the Virgin said:

BEFORE I GO I WILL SEND A BRIGHT RAY OF SUNLIGHT

Then She began to bless the crowd, and the girls crossed themselves at the same pace.

During the blessing a marvelous and strange phenomenon occurred; the two thousand people in the church affirm that a ray of sunlight penetrated the church through a certain pane in the a window of the choir. It grew progressively stronger, swept across the church, curved around the south eastern pillar and, fanning out, illuminated the north east corner of the church exactly where the girls were looking. It grew stronger and stronger. People whom it touched, those in the corner directly facing the girls for instance, has to protect their faces with their hands as one might against the summer sun.

The girls had their backs to the ray. Those near them saw their faces gently lit by many-colored lights such as might be reflected from some marvelous object. The flowers also seemed sprinkled with diamonds or pearls or sparkling dew drops. The ray gave the Virgin and angel a new splendor. When they disappeared for the last time, it inflamed the golden sphere with unprecedented dazzle.

At this moment in and around L'Ile-Bouchard people noted a break in the winter overcast, and were pleasantly surprised by the sudden warmth. A group of hunters took off their jackets and one of them, who was not normally religious, was so affected by the ray they saw streaming down into L'Ile-Bouchard that he kneeled in prayer. In town a person was delighted to be warmed by sunlight in a room where the sun never shone in winter.

It may be thought there is nothing miraculous about a ray of sunlight. But this ray remains inexplicable for three reasons. The first is that normal sun beams would not penetrate like a spot light through one pane in a large window, curve around a pillar and then spread out like a fan; they would stream through the whole window in parallel lines. Given its entry point, the ray should have been blocked by the south east pillar of the choir. The second reason (the author has verified this personally) is that while the vertical angle of the ray corresponds approximately to the position of the sun at 1:35 p.m. on December 14 at L'Ile-Bouchard

(47 degrees north latitude), its horizontal angle does not. A ray of sunlight penetrating the window in question at this moment would traverse the church and strike the window of the death of St. Joseph. Thirdly, a sun ray coming through the window in question at the angle in question would normally be impossible because the walls of the presbytery would intervene.

The girls announced that all was over. The curé informed the crowd and asked them to remain and receive the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The girls and many others had tears in their eyes. Jacqueline said to Father Soulard: "She said She would send a ray of sunlight before She went."

After the Benediction the girls were interrogated. That afternoon they were whisked away from the crowd and taken on a walk in the country with the other children by Sister Marie. Never would they boast of having seen and touched the Virgin but continued to be their usual selves. They spoke of their experience with simplicity. Asked to describe the Virgin compared to the angel, Jeannette replied with surprise: "She's like everybody!" meaning she was a flesh and blood woman.

Over the months and years they would be sought out by hundreds of people, constantly questioned, interrogated, fussed over. Eventually they refused all contact with the curious. Even so they would endure more trials.

Father Ségelle instituted a daily Rosary which lasted until his retirement. It was attended faithfully by the girls and many others.

DECREE

Since 1947, many Catholics come in pilgrimage to the “SAINT-GILLES” Parish Church, in the township of L'ILE-BOUCHARD, in order to venerate the Virgin Mary there. These pilgrimages have borne many fruits of grace. Without yielding to the attraction of sensationalism, they develop a spirit of prayer, while contributing to the growth of the faith in the participants.

After carefully studying the facts and seeking the counsel of competent individuals, I hereby officially authorize these pilgrimages, as well as the public worship celebrated in the Parish Church of “SAINT-GILLES”, in L'ILE-BOUCHARD, to invoke OUR LADY OF PRAYER, under the pastoral responsibility of the legitimate Pastor of this Parish.

Tours, December 8, 2001,
Feast of the Immaculate Conception

André VINGT-TROIS
Archbishop of Tours



NOTRE-DAME DE LA PRIÈRE

HOLY MARY, OUR LADY OF PRAYER

In complete faith, you received the message of the Archangel Gabriel
and became the mother of Jesus, the only Son of God:
Teach us to pray, in order to grow in faith.

At the Visitation, you exulted with joy in the Magnificat:
Teach us to give thanks to God.

At Cana, you asked Christ to provide wine for the wedding-feast:
Teach us to intercede in favor of our brothers and sisters.

Standing at the foot of the Cross, you suffered with Jesus for the love of sinners:
Teach us to welcome the mercy of the Father.

At Pentecost, you prayed with the Apostles when they received the plenitude of the Holy Spirit:
Teach us to ask the Spirit to help us bear witness to the Gospel.

You are the Mother of the Church and the Protectress of families. May you watch over each of our families:
Teach us to love each other faithfully.

You are the Mother of humanity and the Patroness of France. Open our country to the universal love of God:
Teach us to serve with generosity.

Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you !
Our Lady of Prayer, teach us to pray.

December 8, 1999
André VINGT-TROIS
Archbishop of Tours