

For the Eightieth Anniversary
of Mother Cornelia Connelly's Death,
April 18th, 1879

We print, below, the letter written by Reverend Mother Angelica Croft (so far unpublished) to Mr. John Connelly at New Orleans, in reply to his of April 30, 1879, requesting details of the sickness and death of his "very dear old friend", whom in a letter of the following year he calls "my brother's saintly wife and your most blessed Mother Foundress." It is in this letter that he gives an account of the reception into the Church of himself and of his wife, Angelica, as a result of her prolonged stay with "Neali" (Cornelia) at Grand Coteau. "The strong attachment" which led Cornelia to write to the John Connellys about housekeeping and to give hints on gardening made her share with them her enthusiasm for the Missions.

THE CONVENT H.C. JESUS
ST. LEONARDS-ON-SEA
MAY 14, 1879

MY DEAR MR. CONNELLY

IT will be a great consolation to give you the information you so much wish to have concerning the last illness and saintly death, and I think its most touching circumstances will vividly recall to your memory all that you once most admired and loved in her.

Our dearest Mother never really recovered her health since her very severe illness she had about 15 months ago. She continued very weak the whole summer and winter, without having any particular complaint. We still hoped, however, that the warm weather might restore her health partially and enable her to have a change of air. But God had something brighter in store for our beloved Mother. About five weeks ago she was attacked by a poisonous kind of eczema from which she suffered very much, on account of the virulent internal as well as external irritation produced and which our Mother bore with a patience and resignation to the will of God which my poor words can never express. No danger was, however, apprehended till within one short week before her death, when the disease began to assume a more alarming aspect, owing to the virulent action of the poison upon the nerves of the spine and brain. Before this began, our dearest Mother received all the Sacraments and even made her Jubilee. Afterwards came a time of great suffering, owing to the irritation of the nerves, so that the Doctor said it was a miracle that she did not lose her senses; but God Himself watched over our beloved Mother and instead of this most terrible of all trials, she fell into a kind of half-consciousness in which she was perfectly calm and seemingly united to God. This we could gather by the half intelligible words she uttered every now and then about "God's adorable justice" and "God's will". Her thoughts seemed to wander to our dear Sisters in America and she mentioned the Superior's name - Mother Mary Walburga and though apparently quite unconscious to passing things, she added "far - far away - bless - bless". But the worst was to come. The night before our Mother's death was one of such intense misery that the Doctor said, God alone could know what she suffered, and I am sure we may add, He alone can know how she bore it. At the worst and when suffusion of the brain was coming on she only said, "My God have pity on me" "Jesus

have mercy ". Towards morning she fell into nearly complete unconsciousness and her breathing became difficult; what the doctor most feared was convulsion coming on, which he thought almost inevitable in her state. We continued praying round our dear Mother hoping that she might catch a familiar sound to rouse her, especially when we chanted the *Miserere* one of her favorite devotions — but no sound of earth was ever again to move her and she continued thus tranquilly unconscious to the end, when, contrary to all hope she passed away so very peacefully that not a sound — not even a sigh revealed the change, only as we eagerly gazed upon her sweet and loved features, all at once a change came over them — a heavenly expression of complete repose — an unearthly beauty was seen by us all such as is never seen in life, and by this alone we knew that our most beloved Mother had left us. This lovely expression never departed till her sweet face was closed



PORTRAIT IN OILS OF MOTHER CORNELIA CONNELLY,
TREASURED AT ST. LEONARDS-ON-SEA.

from our earthly sight forever. We have told you all these little details, dear Mr. Connelly, for we are sure that, having known our Mother as well as you once did, you will treasure them up, and you will feel that her saintly death was a true echo of her almost unexampled life of self-sacrifice and self devotion, throughout which a loving conformity to the will of God had been her guiding light and only consolation. Our Mother's loss is in every way quite irreparable to us, but when God removes a great earthly prop, it is to teach us to cling more entirely to Himself, and we are sure the Divine Hand which has removed her, who was our Crown and Treasure upon earth, will guide us to walk on to Him in her blessed footsteps. Our loss is in a measure shared in by all who ever knew our beloved Mother, to which the letters which continue to come in from all parts bear touching witness. All speak alike of her singular excellence and those incomparable and endearing qualities which attracted and won all hearts. All speak too of her life-long persecution — labours — and heavy crosses she so magnificently bore. Few though, ever heard of the furnace of heart-sorrows she had to pass through of which you, dear Mr. Connelly, know far better than we do, but no one but ourselves can say that, overwhelmed as she often was, she bore all her troubles with such a constant outward serenity and maintained to the last such a fresh, bright spirit, that she managed to cast a sunshine round her which no other presence ever did or ever can create. But we must turn our eyes and our thoughts from the wide blank which she leaves forever unfilled and remember again with grateful joy the bright reward that is promised to those best beloved and generous souls who go through life clinging to the Cross of Our Lord, and choosing the same suffering road to heaven in which they can best follow Him.