

THE CHILDREN OF FATIMA

BOOKS BY MARY FABYAN WINDEATT

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THE CHILDREN OF FATIMA

AND OUR LADY'S MESSAGE
TO THE WORLD

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To
the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Queen of the Most Holy Rosary,
Queen of Peace,
to whom
the children of Fatima
would have dedicated
this book.

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THE CHILDREN OF FATIMA



IT WAS a cool spring morning in the year 1916 in which the three children, natives of the Portuguese village of Fatima, saw nothing unusual. As was their custom, they had arisen before dawn, eaten breakfast, then driven their parents' sheep to pasture. There had been the usual chatter along the road, the usual plans for games once the sheep were dispersed. And now it was raining, the chill drizzle that was to be expected in early spring.

"We mustn't get too wet," said six-year-old Jacinta. "Lucia, maybe we should go to the cave today."

"Of course we should!" cried her eight-year-old brother Francisco. "It would be easy to watch the sheep from there."

Their cousin, aged nine, surveyed the dreary landscape with a critical eye. This pasture where they had brought the sheep belonged to her parents. It

was only a small field with a few straggling rows of olive trees at one end, but there was also a little rise of ground nearby, surmounted by a windmill. In the side of this hill was the cave—assuredly the best shelter the place offered.

“All right,” she said finally. “You carry the lunch boxes, Francisco, and see that they don’t get wet. I guess the sheep will be all right by themselves for a while.”

A bit breathless, the three finally reached the cave. It was dark inside, and rather cramped, but the young shepherds gave no thought to this. They were used to the place, for they frequently played here even on sunny days. Besides, the cave was dry and commanded a good view of the pasture. It would be easy to notice if the sheep began to stray.

For a while the children amused themselves with talk. Was it going to rain all day? Or would the sun come out so that they could play the Echo Game outside on the hill?

“I do hope the sun comes out,” said Jacinta, shivering a little. “It’s going to be dull if we have to stay in this place all day.”

Francisco agreed, although he was not too interested in the Echo Game. Of course it was fun to stand on the hilltop and shout different words into the still country air, then hear them come back from the distance. But it was even better to hunt through the pasture for stones, drag them into place and then build a house.

“If it clears up, I’ll build a really *big* house,” he told the two girls. “It’ll be the finest house you ever saw!”

Lucia laughed. Francisco was a year younger than she. Since he was a boy, he was a little inclined to think himself skilled at house-building. Yet he knew, and Jacinta knew, that it was really Lucia who was the leader. And why not? Wasn't she the oldest? And the only one of the three children who had made her First Communion?

"We can decide what we'll do later," she said. "Right now let's see what we have for lunch."

An hour later the children had finished the bread, fruit and cheese which their mothers had packed for them. Then, seeing that the rain was almost over, Francisco suggested that they go outside to play. But Lucia would not listen. It was noon, wasn't it? And they had finished their lunch? Very well. Now they must say the Rosary, as was the custom of country-folk for miles around.

Francisco sighed. He had never been very fond of the Rosary—or of going to church. Deep in his heart was the feeling that such things were meant for women and girls. Yet there was no use arguing with Lucia, and so he fumbled in a pocket and brought out a small wooden rosary.

"Hurry up, then," he said, "and as soon as we finish, I'm going to build the stone house. Just wait until you see how big and beautiful it is!"

For a few minutes all was peaceful in the cave as the three children told their beads. But a passerby would have been very much surprised at the manner in which the little shepherds honored the Mother of God. To save time, they said only the first two words of the *Our Father* on the large beads and

the first two words of the *Hail Mary* on the small ones, for long ago they had discovered that in this way an entire Rosary could be recited in the twinkling of an eye!

Presently their prayers were finished, and Francisco looked hopefully at Lucia. "Now we can go and play?"

"No. It's still raining."

"But just a little!"

Jacinta gave a quick glance outside the cave. "It's only a fine mist, Lucia."

"That doesn't matter."

"But the house! I want to start looking for stones!"

"You stay with me, Francisco. You, too, Jacinta. We can have a game in here."

Reluctantly the two children sat down again on the dirt floor of the cave. Lucia was the oldest, and long ago they had been told that they must obey her whenever they spent the day away from home. But as they sat, amusing one another with stories, a sudden gust of wind caused them to look up. Before they could worry as to whether or not a fresh storm was brewing, an amazing sight greeted them. Above the straggling olive trees at the far end of the field was a beautiful white light. It shone like the purest snow, the clearest crystal! But it was not still. It was moving—across the tops of the trees, across the open expanse of pasture, toward the cave!

The three children stared in awed silence as the strange glow approached, and they saw that in its very center stood a young man. He wore flowing white garments such as the three had noticed in pic-

tures of angels and saints in the parish church. But this was no picture. It was real!

"Fear not," said the stranger. "I am the Angel of Peace." Then, kneeling, he touched his forehead to the ground. "Pray with me," he said.

Scarcely knowing what they did, the little shepherds fell upon their knees and imitated the actions of the strange young man. When he spoke, they repeated his words:

My God, I believe in Thee! I adore Thee!
I hope in Thee, and I love Thee! I ask pardon of Thee for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love Thee.

Three times the Angel said this prayer, then arose. "Pray thus," he said to them. "The Hearts of Jesus and Mary will hear your petitions."

The next moment he was gone, leaving the children more awestruck than they had ever been in their lives. Indeed, when they returned to their homes that night, they could not bring themselves to speak of the day's great event to anyone. Somehow the Angel's visit was too holy and beautiful for words.

It was not until mid-summer that the Angel came again. "What are you doing?" he asked. "Pray! Pray a great deal," he told the children this time. "The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have merciful designs on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices continually to the Most High."

Lucia hesitated, wondering whether or not it was

proper to speak to an angel. Then a wave of courage swept through her. "How are we to make sacrifices?" she asked.

The heavenly visitor answered, "Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and as a petition for the conversion of sinners. Bring peace to your country in this way."

Jacinta and Francisco were silent. How could children convert sinners? Or end the terrible war that had been going on in Europe for two years?

The shining spirit seemed to read their thoughts. "I am the Guardian Angel of Portugal," he said. "Above all, accept and bear with submission the suffering which the Lord will send you."

With this he was gone, and suddenly the children found themselves with strangely heavy hearts. Why did the Angel have to leave them? Why couldn't he tell them more about how to convert sinners and when the war was going to end?

"Maybe he'll come again," suggested Francisco hopefully.

"And give us another message," added Jacinta.

Lucia nodded. "I think he will come," she said slowly, "but first we must pray and make sacrifices as he told us."

The Angel did come again in the fall of that same year, while the children were out in the fields with their sheep. But this time he bore a golden chalice in one hand and a Host in the other. Amazed, the children noted that drops of blood were falling from the Host into the chalice and that presently the Angel

left both suspended in mid-air and prostrated himself on the ground. Then came the beautiful voice they had learned to love:

Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of Thee the conversion of poor sinners.

The Angel repeated these words three times. The children joined in this sublime prayer to the Holy Trinity as best they could, but their amazement knew no bounds when presently the Angel arose from the ground, took the Host in his hand, and beckoned to Lucia. He was going to give her Holy Communion as the priest did at Mass!

As they saw their cousin approach to receive the Host, the hearts of Francisco and Jacinta filled with longing. How wonderful if they could have this great privilege, too! But of course this was impossible. They were not like Lucia, who had finished the course of studies for First Communicants. Why, they knew only a very little of the catechism!

Suddenly the Angel looked at them over Lucia's bowed head. Taking the chalice from mid-air, he indicated that they should approach and kneel before him also.



THE HEARTS OF FRANCISCO AND JACINTA
FILLED WITH LONGING.

The little shepherds stared. Surely the Angel didn't mean. . . .

He spoke: "Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God." Then he reverently gave the contents of the chalice to Jacinta and Francisco to drink.

Once again the Angel prostrated himself and, with the children, repeated three times the prayer, "Most Holy Trinity. . . ." Then he disappeared.