



## Letter From Catherine McAuley

***Sister M. de Sales White  
Bermondsey***

***December 20, 1840***

My Dearest Sister M. de Sales

I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like the Dance called 'right and left'. You and I have crossed over, changed places, etc., etc. – your set is finished – for a little time you'll dance no more – but I have now to go through the figure – called Sir Roger de Coverly – too old for your memory. I'll have to curtsie and bow, in Birr – presently, to change corners – going from the one I am in at present to another, take hands of every one who does me the honor – and end the figure by coming back to my own place. I'll then have a Sea Saw dance to Liverpool – and a Merry Jig that has no stop to Birmingham – and, I hope, a second – to Bermondsey – when you, Sister M. Xavier and I will join hands – and dance the 'Duval' Trio, back on the same ground.<sup>1</sup>

We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God – for whom alone we go forward – able to do anything He wishes us to do – no matter how difficult to accomplish – or painful to our feelings. If He looks on us with approbation for one instant each day – it will be sufficient to bring us joyfully on to the end of our journey. Let us implore Him to do so at this season of love and Mercy.

I am greatly comforted by the good account I hear of you. My poor old child<sup>2</sup> says you are a comfort to her – for which God will bless you, as her place is very arduous and trying.

Pray much for your affectionate


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<sup>1</sup> Mary de Sales White and Mary Xavier O'Connell had been lent to the Bermondsey community in mid-October 1840. Catherine intended to bring them back to Dublin when she went to England to found the Birmingham community in August – September 1841. In this paragraph Catherine uses as metaphors five English country dances that she had learned years before, perhaps in the Callaghan household. She never lost her love for dancing, and once closed a letter to the Baggot Street community with the injunction: "Dance every evening" (Letter 228).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Clare Moore, superior of the Bermondsey community, was one of the first twelve sisters in the Baggot Street community; in the years prior to her departure for Cork in July 1837, she had been a very talented help to Catherine McAuley, which Catherine never forgot.

M. C. McAuley

I am rejoiced to hear of the Baptism of your nephew. I wish the Princess Royal was such a fortunate child.<sup>3</sup>

I have so exhausted my words and thoughts writing a round of foundation circulars to each of the foreign powers that I never could have written this had not a lively spirit inspired me to dance through it - Air by Roderige – “Where ever duty calls me”  <sup>4</sup>- *no crotchet*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria, the daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, was born in 1840. She was the first of their nine children.

<sup>4</sup> More research needs to be done on this passage, but I suspect that Catherine is turning into a song a line on obedience from Alonso Rodriguez’s *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*, a work she is known to have read often to the Baggot Street Community.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine is evidently using the word ‘crotchet’ in two senses: to say that her dance metaphors are no mere whim or caprice, and to assert that the musical notes she had penned before the expression ‘no crotchet’ are not quarter notes (crotchets), but symbols of an even more lively tempo. The ‘lively spirit’ that has animated her letter writing is, she believes, no fanciful whim, but a gift of God, kindly accompanying her persevering attempt to fulfil her relatively heavy duties of correspondence.