



Letter From Catherine McAuley

***Sister Mary de Pazzi Delany
Baggot Street***

***Convent, Limerick
November 15, 1838***

My dear Sister M. de Pazzi¹

Your letter was the greatest comfort to me, as from your communications I had reason to think you were ill – but your long letter, written as well as usual, has quite removed my fears.

The Kingstown business is a real portion of the Cross. From what you say, I should think you do not know all the circumstances. They were submitted to the Bishop² already and I cannot see any use in teasing him with another statement. Indeed, when I think of what my poor Sisters suffered, I do not wish they should return, though I feel very much for the poor souls they have left.

In my letter to his Grace I mentioned that Father Sheridan said I made myself accountable for the whole debt – by giving fifty pounds – and added, “perhaps, my Lord, I cannot be said to have given it since the builder took it from the table – a heavy parcel of silver.” This letter was forwarded to Mr Sheridan. Mr Nugent got it to read and conceived it charged him with taking away the bag of silver forcibly. He went to Sister Elizabeth in a violent rage, called me cheat & liar.³ He did just the same in Mr Cavanagh’s public office in Fitzwilliam Street, and from that time, no proposal Mr Cavanagh could make would be attended to – and a bitter feeling has existed towards the poor Sisters ever since.

Even Father Sheridan was greatly excited, and said that while I appeared to be a quiet simple person – I was cunning and clever. These things were never told to me until I pressed Sr. Elizabeth for her reason for disliking Kingstown so much, and for appearing quite in terror lest Mr Nugent should come whenever I was there. It has been said that not giving the profits of the second Bazaar occasioned the law proceedings – but we never promised it – and one hundred children were then preparing for Confirmation, for whom 100 dresses were bought.⁴

Two watches were given to that Bazaar for the children, but not for the building. Mr Nugent got £12 each time for putting up the tent – though we had all the trouble of getting permission from Col.

¹ The autograph of this letter is damaged by stains. I have been assisted in reading the text by a Photostat in the Mercy Congregational Archives (Letters of Mother McAuley: 1827-1839) and by two typescripts made independently: one at the Archives and one in Adelaide.

² Daniel Murray, archbishop of Dublin.

³ The reference to Elizabeth Moore indicates that the event Catherine describes occurred sometime in 1837 or 1838, before Elizabeth was replaced as superior in Kingstown by Mary Teresa White.

⁴ The “second Bazaar” probably occurred in 1837 and may have taken place in Kingstown, as the next paragraph suggests. Letter 52, written to Elizabeth Moore in Kingstown on August 31, 1837, speaks of preparing the girls in Kingstown for the sacrament of Confirmation.

Burgoyne⁵ – and borrowing sail cloth. In all, Mr Nugent has got from us eighty four pounds – and ten which Mr Sheridan sent me for him. I suppose he did not keep a regular account of the expense incurred, for he sent a measurer which he seemed to think we would not allow, for he sent some message the Sisters did not understand – about wanting to know the dimensions, etc. – the plainest work that ever was executed is charged at a high rate – and the promise that was made in the beginning of applying to the board of education – never fulfilled.

They give £40 per year to this school⁶ – which is as much under the direction of the superintending Priest and the Sisters as could be desired. I think the inspector would not make a remark which could be objected to. Religious instructions are given every day from 3 till half past 3, and any hour in the day we may say what we please to them – hence I could have no objection to be subject to the regulations anywhere. In Charleville and Tullamore the Inspectors are equally unobtrusive – the Priests and our Sisters are in full authority, sometimes three Priests teaching in the school at once.⁷

Now as to my return, I assure you I will not stay one day for recreation. You must be aware that great caution is necessary selecting persons to commence an Institution, where there is so much to fear and to hope. If a prudent, cautious beginning is made, there is every prospect of success. More judgement than I possess might be useful, but less would not distinguish between the characters that present themselves – as to steadiness of purpose, capacity for the Institute. A House of Mercy is opened, and I, please God, will leave this about the 4th or 5th of December.⁸

I cannot express the consolation Sister M. Teresa has afforded me by her manner of concluding the Kingstown business – and the few quiet lines she sent to Father Sheridan. Thanks be [to] God, I find the Sisters can act as well as could be desired when I am not at home – thought they cannot write a note then – but I hope to keep them in practice and to rest myself in future.

Doctor Ryan⁹ has just been here for nearly an hour. You would like him very much – he is very feeling and kind to all.

If it is necessary to give an immediate answer to the young person you mention, give her my affectionate regards and say that if she can now be admitted in Stanhope Street¹⁰, I advise her not to delay – and as her sister is there, it must be an attraction.

⁵ Colonel Burgoyne, Easton Lodge, Monkstown Road (Dublin Directory [1839]).

⁶ The poor school in Limerick, begun by the Poor Clares, was affiliated with the Board of National Education in 1833. The school received an annual grant of £40 from the Board to cover some of its expenses (Courtney, “Carful Instruction” 14).

⁷ Like Sr. Daniel Murray and many, though not all, of the Irish bishops, Catherine McAuley supported the national system of education established in 1831. She saw its educational benefits for poor children, and believed that under the right conditions – proper textbooks, strict observance of the end-of-day regulations about religious instruction (both Protestant and Catholic), good relations between teachers and inspectors, and attentive oversight by the commissioners of national education, of whom Dr. Murray was a member – the potential danger of proselytism, by textbooks or teachers could be averted. By 1841, Mercy schools in Carlow, Charleville, Cork, Dublin and Tullamore, as well as Limerick, were affiliated with the national board. The commissioners were charged with “administering the funds placed at the disposal of his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, for the education of the poor in Ireland” (Irish Catholic Directory [1838] 339).

⁸ According to Catherine McAuley (see Letter 102), the temporary House of Mercy for poor women and girls in Limerick was opened on November 19, 1838. Catherine left Limerick on December 9, 1838, the day after Mary Anne Bridgeman entered the community.

⁹ Dr. John Ryan, bishop of Limerick.

¹⁰ The motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity founded by Mary Aikenhead was located on Stanhope Street, in the western area of Dublin, below the River Liffey. The young woman has not been identified.

Sisters Elizabeth, Aloysius & Xavier unite in affection [love] to all. We have three very nice new Sisters and a fourth coming. Tell dear Sr. Genevieve her poetry was most acceptable. Sister Ursuline¹¹ might have chosen a happier subject for hers than the runaway from Kingstown. However, it was made the most or rather the best of.

How anxiously I long to be with [you] in the community room – alone – telling you all the queer things I met since we parted.

God bless and preserve you, my very Dear Sister. Pray for your fondly attached.

M. C. McAuley

I expect to get a pointer from Miss Roach.

I find this is written on the wrong side.¹²

¹¹ Catherine obviously meant to write “Ursula” – Mary Ursula Frayne in Booterstown. Evidently Ursula had sent Catherine a poem, possibly about the departure of the sisters from Kingstown. No individual “runaway” as such has been identified.

¹² Catherine wrote on side 3 of the folded sheet of paper, before concluding the letter on side 2. Miss Roach has not been identified. She was probably a woman with opinions about correspondence style or etiquette.