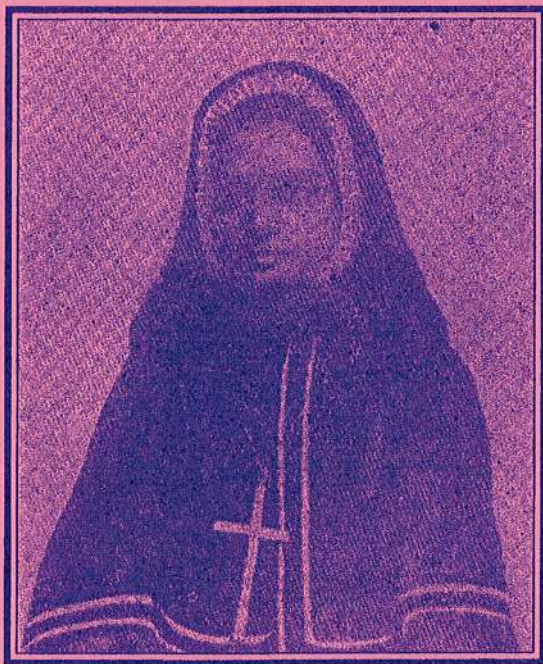


**Story of
Stigmatic Helena of
Gonawila.**



Story of Helena, the virgin of Gonawila

Or

The Biography of a Sri Lankan Stigmatic

English translation of the book "Helena Charithaya"

first published in Sinhalese in the year 1945

By His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris O.M.I.

Former Bishop of Chilaw.

Translated by Fr. D. F. Medagoda

Translator's note.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Stanley Fernando (B.A-Kalaniya), M.A. (Warwick U.K.) and Mrs. Glennie Fernando of Wennappuwa for spending their precious time to go through my script comparing it word for word with the original and suggesting valuable improvements to bring it to the international standards. I have done my best to be very faithful to the original version in Sinhalese written by the late Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris, O.M.I. the First Bishop of the Diocese of Chilaw. He was an erudite historian and an author of several books and articles on a variety of subjects.

Fr. D.F. Madagoda

N.B. Approval to print the English translation was given by His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Valence Mendis Bishop of Chilaw, on 22nd July, 2015, at Chilaw.



Father Garcia, O.C.



Sister Helena

Notice

Please note that all the facts contained in this book are taken from documents mentioned here and not the decisions of the Church. Therefore, the words which are used here such as wonders, miracles, apparitions, stigmata etc., bear meanings used in the common parlance and those words do not bear the strict meanings given by the Catholic Church. The right to decide on the sanctity (holiness) of the children lies solely in the hands of our Mother, the Holy Catholic Church. This book and the facts included here are not meant to anticipate the judgments of the Church whose most humble and most obedient children we are.

Author

IMPRIMATUR.

28.10.1945,

Chilaw.

Edmund Peiris O.M.I.,

Episcopus Chilawensis

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Story of Helena

Preface

On the night of February 8th, 1931, a very old and revered lady passed away in a catholic house in the village known as Gonawila (Bolawatta Parish) situated in the Othara Palatha, South Pitigal Korale. She was known among the Catholics of this village by names such as 'Sister Helena', 'Helena Gurunanse', 'Heiya Gurunanse' etc. Two days later her body was laid to rest at Gonawila Catholic Cemetery with great respect. A large crowd including some Catholic priests from Western and North Western Provinces were present at the funeral. Such a dignified funeral had not taken place in that province for a long time.

This noble lady was not popular for any worldly reasons such as wealth or power. But the respect paid to her remains was astonishing. Some people amongst the large crowd that flocked to Gonawila on that occasion spoke of some wonderful happenings they had observed in the deceased person's life; some praised her exemplary religious fervour; some spoke about the spiritual and physical favours they had received through her prayers. They felt that she had been an object of special divine grace such as the saints used to enjoy.

Now we come forward to introduce her noble character to Sri Lankan Catholics in their own mother tongue (Sinhala version). The facts included here are not based on hearsay but on contemporary, trustworthy and very reliable documents. We will show here in brief the main sources.

1. The diary of Rev. Fr. Florentino Garcia who was the Spiritual Director of Helena.
(Some information about the period between 1869 to 1897 is included there.)
2. His letters and the Certified Report which was written under oath.
3. Short notes on the examination of Helena, conducted by Very Rev. Dr. Christopher Bonjean O.M.I., the Vicar Apostolic of the Jaffna diocese to which Bolawatta belonged at that time.

All these are hand written in English, Latin, French, Spanish or Italian Languages.

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD:

This noble person was born in the village, Gonawila, in the latter part of the year 1848. This is how her details had been entered in the Baptismal Register of Bolawatta Mission.

Date of Baptism: 18th March, 1849 ; Name : Helena ; Date of birth/Age : 05 Months ; Father: Don Anthony; Mother: Helena Hamy; Village: Gonawila; Godfather: Pillippu Tissera, the son of Simon Tissera; Godmother: Celestina Perera, the daughter of Andrew Perera; The Name of the Priest who baptized : J. Cesare Mola. Name of the father was also mentioned as Don Anthony Perera (Short notes). Mother was also known as Algamu Korallalage Madalena Hamy.

Four sons and three daughters were born to this couple. Out of them, Helena was the youngest. The eldest, known as Carolis who

later became the village Headman, was also known as Karo Vidane. The father was a Buddhist and embraced Catholicism before marriage, but he followed the old superstitious practices and traditions of his earlier beliefs. People called him Adonis alias Adho Kapurala as he was engaged in pagan cults, charms, chantings etc. Children were baptized in their childhood because of the mother who was keen on bringing them up as Catholics. The eldest son Carolis followed the father's footsteps and was against Catholicism. But the three daughters were pious, exemplary and dedicated Catholics. Because of the differences of opinion on religious matters within family members there were frequent disputes and quarrels at home.

Helena did not attend school in her childhood to learn reading and writing or to learn her religion. Even at home she didn't receive any guidance about our holy faith. When she was residing with her Buddhist relatives in Makola, a village in Siyane Korale, she in her ignorance, visited Buddhist temples and shrines with her relations but never participated for ceremonies conducted there. But when she heard that her two sisters were preparing to receive first Holy Communion and Confirmation, she came back to her village with her mother's consent and went to Bolawatta church every day for two months to learn catechism. She was twelve years old at the time. Rev. Fr. Florentino Garcia was the Parish Priest. His Lordship the Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Semeriya O.M.I. came to Bolawatta in December, 1860 and stayed there for three months.

Helena was chosen to receive Holy Communion and Confirmation with her sisters because of the enthusiasm she showed in learning

religion and her great desire to receive Jesus. She went to Rev. Fr. C. Chounavel O.M.I. for her first confession. With this she turned a golden page in her life. To understand this well, it is better to mention here certain intermediate details.

MOTHERLAND

Village of Kammala enjoys a certain fame in the history of Catholicism in Sri Lanka. By about the year 1604, a Jesuit priest by the name of Balthasar Garcia preached Christianity there for the first time. Within six years, since the number of Catholics increased by more than 700 a new church was built. On the day of the consecration of the church, there was a grand festival and the villagers dramatized the Story of Creation and the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

Priests, who officiated at the religious services there, praised the good qualities of the new converts and especially the children's knowledge of catechism. Every Sunday, at the church, school children learned catechism by heart in the form of question and answer. The faithful showed special devotion to the Holy Cross. Once under the direction of the village chieftains they carried a large wooden cross in procession with music, songs and dances and planted it on a piece of land of a dilapidated pagan shrine. During times of droughts and sickness they used to go there and pray before the Holy Cross recalling to mind our sign of salvation.

In 1617 there was a rebellion caused by Nikapitiye Bandara resulted in the loss of peace and harmony in the country. Church also had to undergo various trials and tribulations. The church at Kammala too was destroyed by the rebels. To save their lives Catholics abandoned the village and went into hiding in the jungle. But once that crisis was over they returned to the village and

rebuilt the church. In 1628 a priest came and settled down in Kammala and made the true faith shine around adjoining villages even. According to contemporary records, in 1644, the number of Catholics in Kammala was 1000 and the number of children who attended school was 150. With the establishment of Dutch rule in Sri Lanka, from 1656 to 1687 there was not a single Catholic priest in this country. After the secret arrival of Rev. Fr. Joseph Vaz, (now a Saint, canonized in January, 2015) who deserve our veneration, the people of Kammala were once again fortunate to receive the sacraments of the Church and to listen to Good News. During the Dutch period, Chilaw and Puttalam divisions remained under the Sinhalese King. So, the Catholics in those areas were free to practice religion without the harassments of the Dutch regime. Therefore, Rev. Fr. Vaz and other Oratorian priests made Kammala their base and went about freely to Negombo and Colombo for divine services from time to time.

Several books of Rev. Fr. Gonsalvez were written in Kammala. In 1741, he made Bolawatta the centre of his literary activities. Till his death he lived there and so this village is fortunate to have his remains. In 1746, King Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe fearing a ghost sent through a charm by a wicked group belonging to a religious cult, had to satisfy the devil by burning a few Catholic churches as a burnt offering. These churches belonged to innocent people who were loyal to the King himself in the hill country. At the same time the sacred church at Bolawatte was also burnt down, but was reconstructed in 1769. Thereafter as the Dutch awarded the religious freedom to Catholics, the Church was rejuvenated and could successfully continue its services. British administration granted her full religious freedom in 1806. In 1835, Sri Lankan Catholic Church became a new diocese, but, the Oratorian Order which saved the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka from its death throes, ceased to function due to unjustifiable actions of the Portuguese rulers. Other European missionaries arrived here then. In 1847, administration of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church was divided into

two regions. The region North of Maha-oya was called the Jaffna diocese, and the rest became Colombo diocese.

In the month of August, 1850, the new church at Bolawatta (This Church was removed in 2001) was consecrated by His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. H. Bettachini. At that time, there was a big Catholic population in Bolawatta and Kammala, but in the adjoining villages the majority was Buddhist. Even in Godella and Gonawila there were pagan shrines and temples. Oratorian records mention of a church in Godella in 1844. It was in 1867 that a block of land was purchased to build a church in Gonawila.

RELIGIOUS STAIRWAY

From the inception, Rev. Fr. Florentino Garcia was the captain who guided the ship of Helena's religious life. From dangerous waves such as doubts, wicked temptations, physical pains etc. he steered, showing her the direction to the blessed vision of peace. He was an educated, pious hermit born in Spain, ordained priest in the Cistercian order established by St. Bernard. He came with another Spanish priest named Rev. Fr. Froilano Oruna on the 14th of August 1845 from Italy. They happened to be together in Italy doing religious service, after leaving Spain due to the oppressive laws imposed against the clergy by anti-religious government. After he served in Trincomalee for a short period of time, he was sent as Parish Priest of the Chilaw Mission in 1849. Then the parish was so large that it extended from Maha-oya to Deduru-oya. In 1850 it was divided into two and Bolawatte was entrusted to Rev. Fr. Garcia and Chilaw to Rev. Fr. Oruna. From then on till his death in 1900, Bolawatta was his main station.

When Helena made her first confession, she didn't have a clear idea on the Sacrament of Penance. But later on she had a better understanding of it and frequented the Sacrament.

Whenever she received Jesus in the form of Holy Communion, she detested the worldly pleasures and was very enthusiastic about saving her soul and felt a strong urge to dedicate herself to God.

Therefore, she tried to uproot and destroy fully any factors that contributed to sinful actions. On the days she received Holy Communion, she experienced a fervour similar to something burning within her. Even though she got the same feeling every time she received Holy Communion, it gradually faded away to be revived with the next receiving of the Holy Communion.

Like other young girls in her village at the time, Helena too paid attention to clothes and play. But on the days she received Holy Communion, she paid full attention only to her Master. The priests who taught catechism to her were Rev. Fr. Garcia, Rev. Fr. Francisco Xavier and other priests. She was permitted to make her confession and receive Holy Communion once in three months. Whenever she committed a sin, she had the habit of making penance by bowing down her head and drawing the sign of the cross on the floor with her head. During this period, although she was not aware of the proper methods of doing meditation and mortifications, she used to fast on Saturdays and all the Fridays in Lent. The life she led for three years was a period of some minor faults and a period of a mixture of fervor and tepidity.(Short notes).

RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

The arguments and objections of her father and the elder brother strengthened Helena's religious attitudes and developed her good

qualities. Even though they were Catholics, they led lives full of pagan practices. They blasphemed God not only in action but by words also. They followed strange practices such as sorcery, auspicious times, witchcraft etc. For a period of full three years, they tried their best to take their daughters to shrines and temples dedicated to pagan gods. They tried to prevent them from church attendance sometimes by hiding their clothes. But somehow she attended the Holy Mass daily by using various tricks. Although they ridiculed her piety, she displayed her belief fearlessly. Whenever her elder brother set up a small shrine in front of their compound to offer flowers to an idol as part of their pagan worship, she destroyed them. Once, she drank without any fear, water from a clay pot charmed with evil spirits just to insult and challenge the power of the devil or the pagan gods.

The elder brother seeing this, got very angry and beat her with a heavy stick until his anger abated. When the eldest child born to him was to be taken to a pagan temple to perform the customary pagan rites for new born babies, Helena intervened wailing to stop it by saying, "Even if you kill me, I will not allow this child of God to be dedicated to devils." The elder brother got angry for this and taking a heavy stick started beating her shouting, "I will kill you and will go to gallows myself." Her head and the body were swollen due to the beating. But Helena without showing any anger towards her brother, offered all her pain to God for her brother's conversion.

One day, her father set aside a phial of especially prepared oil, flowers, husked coconuts etc. with the intention of offering them to his gods and goddesses at the temple. Helena could not bear the sight. For a person who was dedicated only to true God by

baptismal water and holy oil, getting entangled with the enemy in hell by offering gifts to it, saddened her very much, and she wanted to prevent it by one way or another. She knew that the items set aside for daily offerings were not to be used by anybody before they are offered to the deity. So, saying, "Let's see whether it is Jesus or the devil that is powerful" she applied some oil from the offerings on her head. Then piercing a husked coconut she drank the water in it; other things also were touched and tasted. The reward she got from her father for doing this was a good thrashing.

VICTORY

Although the three years mentioned above was a period filled with difficulties, troubles and insults, it made Helena shine more and more in true religious piety. She emerged from this war not as an apprentice, but as an expert heroine in religious struggle. Just as the goldsmith cleanse^s a piece of gold from every impurity in fire, God too sets good men free of sins through suffering." (Ecc. 2.5) It is a difficult task to lead a life of purity while living in the world surrounded by troubles than when living a contemplative life among hermits. It is a mark of a heroic character. How dangerous it is for all of us to make the transition from childhood to adolescence! Carnal inclinations, impure temptations, strange and immoderate desires rise up like waves in an ocean. Going through this period is inevitable for the children of fallen Adam. But those who manage to escape the trials by not getting overwhelmed, or shaken by them are gifted with special divine grace. Helena spent the above mentioned three years without any strong impure temptations. (Brief notes)

HANDMAID OF GOD

Since she did not attend school in her childhood, she was unable to learn about the religion by reading books. The art of meditation and spending time with God was taught to her by a pious lady called "Rosa" who had been trained in a convent in Jaffna for a short period of time. Helena's sisters also received valuable advice from this teacher. This small group gathered from time to time and engaged in meditation. They prayed and read books on spiritual matters. With the passage of time, another few ladies with a religious bent of mind started to follow them. A wise lady named Christina was their leader.

In 1866 Rev. Fr. Garcia, after coming to know about their devotional activities and piety and their intention to remain unmarried, prepared a set of rules for them to follow. From then onwards, they gave up their lay dress, wore black frocks as religious nuns did and covered their heads as well with veils of the same colour. Although Helena associated them from the inception, she did not join that group immediately. Even Fr. Garcia, like a clever teacher without forcing her to commit herself, bided his time for the correct moment almighty God deemed fit. He advised her to meditate on death and the impermanence of the worldly life, while teaching her different methods of meditation. Pious Christina was helping her by teaching on renunciation such as distancing herself from parents, relatives and friends. From then onwards, Helena gradually trained herself on the path of religious life.

One day when she was meditating on heaven and hell, she heard a voice within telling her, "Choose between me and your parents. Ask yourself as to what you should choose."

Thereafter, a fierce battle ensued in her mind. Although she was not indifferent about worldly pleasures, she detested the wedded life seeing the hardships her brother had to undergo after his

marriage. But the thinking of her parents was completely different. The marriage brokers engaged by them tried to entice some young men in the village for her. But the youngsters who knew about her pious character did not show any willingness, either in words or in writing, to marry her. The elder brother who was incensed after coming to know this said, "If you don't marry as we say, I will shoot you and kill." Her only reply was, "Do as you please. I don't care. I will never change my mind."

The first thing a person who is preparing for religious perfection should do is to cleanse one's own character. That is to detach from sin and temptations. The daily examination of conscience will be a help for this. Therefore, Helena examined her conscience with great honesty, twice a day - in the morning and in the evening. While trying to get rid of the shortcomings from her mind, she made an utmost effort to develop her love for God. Her greatest shortcoming was her quick temper, and so she prayed to God asking for His help to overcome it. While she was giving up worldly pleasures by suppressing carnal desires, breaking away from the shackles of sin, trying to burn like a candle for the love of Jesus, she heard a voice in her heart saying, "Taste my inheritance". When she started questioning in her mind what this inheritance of Jesus was, she found that it was nothing but the Passion of Jesus.

Two years later, in 1868, Helena entered the religious group established by Rev. Fr. Garcia. He explains her spiritual condition at that time, as follows: "She was discouraged neither by the harassments or severe punishments of her brother. She became more and more pious with the difficulties she had at home. She gave up and detested everything the world valued. Although she never attended school, she learned the alphabet from her colleagues. Now she could read religious books, but could not write. Since her First Communion, she was fed with the same life-giving bread from time to time. She put aside all the ornaments

that other girls of her age used to wear. Her anxiety for loving Jesus increased more and more daily. Her spiritual director too taught her how to meditate on the fundamentals of our holy religion or the discipline of saints. She became even an example to her fellow members as she had trained herself very fast in that religious discipline." (Report)

Around 1869, one of her toes was bitten by a poisonous snake and she was close to death. But she fearlessly refused the use of charmed oil or chanting of mantras etc. even if she had to die. After a short while she received extreme unction and later she recovered.

CALVARY SCENES:

Since 1870, Helena's life took a turn in a strange way. She lost her peace of mind from time to time. Dangerous and unclean ideas and doubts about saving her soul came up as waves in an ocean. Her heart was covered with a great fear similar to the fear the humans would experience when the sky and the earth were covered in darkness. Full of grief, she prayed to God. One day when her spiritual depression was at its highest, Jesus appeared to her, in a mental vision and pacified her saying, "When the devil was making you suffer, and when you were feeling depressed due to doubts, I was near you. Even in your future sufferings, I will be with you." (Diary 14th August, 1870). Again, Jesus in a mental vision, had clothed her with a precious ornament, placed a floral crown on her head, saying that she would be undergoing torture and suffering and so would become a partner of His Passion. (Diary 11th Sept.).

Thereafter, she started suffering from a very high bout of fever; her hands and legs became lifeless, her throat was swollen and at times she became unconscious and underwent severe pains. Many people thought that she was going to die, but she never complained and bore everything with patience and offered them to God as a pleasant offering to Him. When her heart was rejoicing because of Divine Mercy, the devil, the enemy in hell, tried to deceive and mislead her by using many of its tricks. Once it showed her a ring and pleaded with her saying, "You wear this ring and belong to me". When that trick did not work, it beat her severely and vanished. (Diary 4th Oct.). #

A few days later when she was in deep contemplation, Lord Jesus spoke to her showing the Sacred Heart and said, "Enjoy my inheritance" and ordered her to venerate it by kissing it. She did so with fear and devotion. Although this was not seen with her naked eyes, since then she felt as if her heart was pierced with a weapon and a crown of thorns was fixed on her head. There was a severe physical pain too from this. (Diary 12th Oct.). After some days, a few drops of blood were seen on her forehead and the right side of her chest. She became afraid suspecting if these marks were some tricks of the devil. That was because she had not yet understood that the Passion of Jesus was His sacred legacy. (Diary 15th Nov.).

On the 8th of November, when she was returning home from church, she was bitten by a snake again on her right foot and she became unconscious and was almost dying. After receiving extreme unction, she recovered within a day. Then she saw this apparition: Like a mighty king, Lord Jesus ordered the devil who tortured her to go away. Thereafter Jesus lifted her and gave her

the authority to trample underfoot the creature of hell. Then it pleaded with her for permission to go away from her. (Diary 20th Nov.). In this manner, before she was made a partaker in his passion, she was strengthened and consoled with sweet words and pleasant apparitions.

Among the colleagues of Helena, there was a crafty nun, who had been trapped by the devil. She tried to deceive Fr. Garcia and other nuns, by relating false stories about divine apparitions and special graces she had received. Thus she did when she came to know that Helena had received such bodily marks. But they were self-inflicted wounds on her hands and feet. Rev. Fr. Garcia notes in his diary about her cunning ways.

THE INHERITANCE OF LORD JESUS:

Soon after Helena returned home after the festive mass of the Immaculate Conception on the 8th of December 1870, she experienced something strange. She felt as if her shoulders were being pressed down with an immense force and that her skeleton was being squeezed. Because of the pain she received from it, she lay down herself semi-conscious. Then Lord Jesus appearing in her mind, showed her three nails each about three inches long, ordered her to kiss them and said, "After receiving my inheritance in this world, you will enjoy it also in heaven." Eight days later, the Holy Cross was also shown to her by Jesus. From these signs she realized that she was destined to suffer. (Short notes)

Let Fr. Garcia himself explain this phenomenon to us. "Since this year (1870) December she went through a series of sufferings which we could say were similar to the Passion of Jesus. Every

Friday she lay on the floor thrice as if crucified. This is how this mysterious phenomenon would take place. At seven in the evening on Thursday she would be felled to the ground by an unexplainable power. Her hands and legs would get tightened up. Twice she would display pains of whipping for about twenty minutes. Then for about quarter of an hour, she would lay in a trance. At about six O'clock in the morning on Friday, she would suddenly fall on the ground as if she was burdened by a heavy cross, and stay in that position for about half an hour unable to get up. She would fall face-down on the floor. It was clearly observable that she herself was struggling to lift the weight that was pressing her down. After she was able to get up, she could read books even for two hours.

At 9.00 a.m., suddenly she would be felled down again on the floor and stay stretched as if nailed to a cross with her hands and feet. During these occasions, no immodest posture was seen. It is difficult to say exactly how long she would stay in the crucified position, because the duration varied. If she was in a trance, she would suffer only for a short time, but a lot, otherwise. The second crucifixion took place 12 noon and the third at 3.00 p.m."

As stated above, since December 1870, every Friday she was crucified three times. But on these occasions there was no flow of blood from her hands and feet. From the inception there was bleeding only from the right side of her chest. From Good Friday 1871 onwards, there was bleeding even from her hands. This did not occur always in the same way. Sometimes it was only from a hand and at another time it was from a hand and a foot. Sometimes this happened only at the first and/or the second instances; sometimes, at the third instance only. Although this

strange crucifixion scene took place every Friday since then, it would stop showing external signs of the Passion when and if her Spiritual Director or the Bishop ordered her not to let it happen for a said period of time.

“The pains she suffered for a period of about a month were known only to her spiritual director and her colleague appointed by him to help her on those occasions. This nun was an honest, affectionate and experienced lady well versed in spiritual matters. These things were not divulged to Helena’s parents or sisters. But the secret was revealed to them from November 1871, when she was unable to take her meals as she suffered the pains of crucifixion three times a day. At the inception, they thought that she was suffering from a physical ailment. Therefore, they tried to give her some medical treatment. However, when they came to know the truth, they were frightened and without harassing her, allowed her to continue with the ministrations from her own sisters and companions.

“As it was impossible to prevent a strange story of this nature from spreading around the village and the country, there were many versions of the happenings going round among the villagers. They tried to witness this incident with their own eyes to satisfy their curiosity. Then her Spiritual Director ordered her to refrain from receiving the external signs of the Passion, and from getting into a trance for three weeks to control the unnecessary gossip and squabbles of the villagers, and also to test Helena’s obedience. She totally obeyed the order. During the three-week period, although she did not eat anything, she walked a distance of one mile to Bolawatte to teach catechism to the children.

As soon as the prohibited period was over, she resumed her suffering as usual with the external signs on Thursdays and Fridays. She suffered the severest pains of crucifixion daily for three weeks during Advent. On each occasion the bleeding took place from the wounds. In that year, on the eve of Christmas, since she was in good health and it being not a Thursday, and since there were no signs of the Passion, she came early to church for the midnight mass. At about 10.00 O'clock at night, it was noticed that her hands and feet were being bound by a secret power. When her friendly colleague saw this she led her to the sacristy. Here she suffered all the pains of crucifixion. Streams of blood flowed from her wounds. As there was a large crowd attending the Holy mass on that day, it was impossible to restrain them from witnessing the sight of Helena undergoing Passion. She was in a trance for a longer time than on other days, until the midnight mass began. However she came back to participate at the midnight mass. Thereafter, large crowds, even from faraway places of Sri Lanka, flocked to Gonawila to see her.(Report).

NEWS STARTED SPREADING

The manifestation of the Passion of our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, who suffered so much for the deliverance of mankind, is a heart-rending vision, when it occurred through a mere human being. The exposure of such a vision on this earth is very rare. According to the historical writings of the Catholic Church, the first person to receive this honour was St. Francis of Assisi. It has been confirmed with proof that there had been three hundred and twenty one persons who

have received this special grace since then, through the mercy of God. In Goa, India, a nun who had lived at St. Monica's convent and passed away in 1683 also has had this great blessing. (History of Cath. Church in India by M.D'sa. Vol I.p.224) The wound marks caused due to grace of God do not get infested or emanate bad smells like those of other wounds that occur due to defects in the human body or to any other external reason. These wounds get healed not through the power of medicine, but through the grace of God. There may be so many questions raised by medical experts and theologians regarding such matters. This booklet is not sufficient to discuss all such. However, one must keep one thing in mind. About these wonderful happenings, the higher authorities of the Church act very cautiously. It is the right of the infallible Church to make decisions about such matters.

When Gonawila news started spreading all over Sri Lanka, people from all parts of the country flocked to see Helena at her parental house and its vicinity. Especially on Thursdays and Fridays massive crowds thronged to her place. As her parents or her brother couldn't cope up with the situation, Fr. Garcia gave his permission to stay in a small room near Gonawila Church, during those two days. Even then, the crowds did not lessen in number. Before the situation got out of hand, Fr. Garcia on 8th October, 1871, informed the Administrator of the diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. Christopher Bonjean O.M.I., in writing, about this matter. Further,

through the Parish Priests of the adjoining missions, he informed the people that seeing Helena on Thursdays and Fridays has been prohibited. The main purpose of the people who flocked to Gonawila was to see some wonderful happenings. So they did not care much for practical arrangements and at times they even disobeyed the orders of the Hierarchy. There is no need to mention the unlimited types of unruly acts that could take place when a crowd of about three thousand people, waiting impatiently, keen on seeing some strange phenomena, flocked around a small house. Quarrelling and exchanging of vicious and vituperative language were the order of the day. However, the hearts of some hard sinners who watched the passion of Helena had melted like wax. Her elder brother who earlier had hated her, decided to lead a good life after seeing her devout life and her extraordinary behavior. Devotees of other religions, who lived in nearby villages, gave up their wrong beliefs and embraced the true religion.

About the wonderful news of Bolawatte, there were debates even in newspapers and publications in Sri Lanka. Some said, "Daughter of Adho Kapurala is a witch and is possessed by the devil." Those who were against Catholicism alleged, as they usually do, that it was either an amusement of Roman Catholics or a trick of their priests. But higher authorities of the Church did not make any statement regarding these incidents until an impartial investigation was conducted. Moreover, the Bishop of Jaffna issuing a notification on 18th

January 1872, prohibited the faithful to visit Bolawatte to see Helena, and assign those strange happenings manifest on her were by the power of God.

On the 3rd of March, H.L. the Bishop ordered her, her companion, and Rev. Fr. Garcia to go to Kurunegala since it was not suitable to solve a grave problem of this nature surrounded by impatient villagers. Even though her parents objected to it, she immediately obeyed the orders of her Superior. When she was staying in a room at Holy Family Convent, Kurunegala, the Passion took place as before. There, Helena was examined in two ways. It was the responsibility of Dr. Dias, M.D., who was the Chief Doctor of Ceylon Medical Service, to examine on her physical condition. There was not even an iota of suspicion to think that he will show any favouritism towards Helena as he was an expert in the latest medical field and also a non-Catholic. The Canonical examination was conducted very meticulously by the Bishop himself

REPORT OF THE DOCTOR

The Doctor examined her three times. First examination was held on 13th March 1872. His Report was handed over to the Bishop on 9th of April. We reproduce here a small section of it. "I found on each hand in the space in centre of the palm an oval space of about three quarters of an inch in length and

about half an inch in breadth, in which the skin was smooth and of a darker tinge similar to that of some cicatrices; in the centre of this space there was a hardened and raised mass like dry blood. This was about half an inch in length and less than quarter of an inch in breadth; the mass appeared to be made of several smaller masses adhering together. One similar mark was found in the dorsum of each hand; these were in places corresponding to the marks on the palms. Four marks similar to those on the hands were found on the feet, two on each foot, and one on the dorsal and another on the plantar surface. These were a little larger in their dimensions than those found in the hands. But were in every other respect similar to them.

On the right side, a little below and to the outer side of the breast, I found a mark two inches in length; here the skin appeared to be superficially cracked, this being surrounded by a margin of smooth and dark colored skin about one quarter of an inch broad; this was situated horizontally.

I examined Helena on the 13th March, the day following the first examination during a fit, I saw her at about 3.00 p.m. She was quietly sitting and the hands and feet were not bleeding. I then waited in an adjoining room, the door between the two rooms being wide open. At 3.30 p.m. her sister informed me that Helena was going into a fit and I hastened to her. She was lying on her back, her arms stretched, the hands being about 18 inches from the sides, the dorsal surface being pressed to the ground, the legs

stretched and over each other, the lower part of the right leg crossing in front of the left, the plantar surface of the right foot being closely applied to the back of the left foot. Blood was issuing from the palms, the dorsum of the right foot and the plantar surface of the left foot. It came from between the masses of dry blood forming the centre of the mark; a portion of it was bright red, but the larger part was dark red, from each of the four places about a dram of blood escaped. She was apparently slightly conscious at first but, soon appeared quite unconscious. Her eyes were closed, on attempting to open them forcibly there was some resistance in the lids, however, there was not much difficulty in opening them; the eye balls were found turned upwards; only the white of the eye being exposed to view. The mouth was firmly closed; the lips could be easily separated but not the teeth. The tongue was behind the teeth. The pulse was 100 per minute and the breathing was very slightly hurried. She was in this state till 3.50 p.m. just for twenty minutes. When she seemed to recover consciousness, she opened her eyes and began puffing with her mouth, as some people do when oppressed by a close atmosphere; and raised her hands off the ground with an effort, as if something held them down. She made a motion of her body and legs from side to side, and seemed to free the feet with an effort, the feet parting, as if something which held them together had given away. After this she made an effort to rise up to a sitting posture which she accomplished with the assistance of her sister and friend. I found she had bled from the back of each hand, the

mat being stained red with blood, and also from the plantar surface of the right and the back of the left foot. These being in a position in which I could not examine them during the fit. There was no bleeding from the side or head. She appeared exhausted and asked for some water to drink.

The third examination was on the following day, the 14th March. I saw Helena at 7 p.m. she was in a fit at the time, and I was informed by Monsignor Bonjean that she fell in a fit just before I entered the room while she was conversing with Him. I found her apparently quite unconscious, and lying on her left side, the arms stretched in front, the right wrist crossing over the left, the wrists being firmly pressed against each other, straight, somewhat bent forward from the body. At the place at which she was said to have fallen, there was a drop or two of blood. On examining her head, I found blood issuing from three places on the scalp, from two places situated in the interior part. There was only small quantity like two large drops among the hair on the third place situated just posterior to the top of the head and a little to the right blood was following somewhat more copiously, it had trickled down to the neck. On trying to separate the arms, they were joined to be somewhat firmly pressed against each other and the attempt was desisted from. No bleeding occurred from the hands, feet or side. This fit lasted till 7.15 p.m. Just 15 minutes, when she gradually recovered her consciousness and with a seeming effort separated her two arms from each other..... I was quite certain that, this

lady or her helpers were not involved in any act of fraud.”
(Report of the Doctor)

The then Mother Superior of Kurunegala convent, Rev. Mother Marie Josephine confirmed that after the occurring of passion as described in the earlier paragraph there were marks of lashing on the back of Helena’s body, (Mission des O.M.I., 873, pp.389, 391)

TRANCE AND DIVINE DISCUSSIONS :

During the agony of Passion, Helena had been mostly in a state of trance. Since her sensory system did not function properly, there was no recollection of memory derived from her five senses namely body, mouth, eyes, nose, and ears. Yet her power of remembrance, mental power, powers of courage, intelligence, and determination were always very active. Sensory system and power of memory of a person who had become unconscious stops functioning. Hence, when Helena was in a trance, she was unaware of the actions and movements of people around her. Even pain inflicted on her body was not felt by her. Once, when she was in a trance, a western doctor with the idea of testing her, placed a piece of cloth soaked in a powerful chemical called ‘Ammonia on her nose for some time, but she didn’t regain consciousness. Then the doctor kept that cloth over her mouth and nose in a way closing them for a little time but even then she didn’t regain the consciousness. Even though this proved that there was no fraud in her, she had to suffer for two days, due to

the aftermath of the inhalation of that strong chemical.(Diary 5th Jan.1872)

But even under these circumstances, if either her spiritual director or the Bishop gave her any order, she would follow them immediately. Rev. Fr. Gallo S.J. who was highly regarded in India as a theologian, came to Bolawatte to see Helena During this visit he celebrated Holy Mass and gave her Holy Communion. Following day being a Friday, she suffered the agony of crucifixion thrice. That was witnessed by both Rev. Fr. Garcia and Rev. Fr. Gallo. When she was in the state of trance, Rev. Fr. Garcia ordered her to free herself from that state. At that moment, without any concern over the other things happening outside, she immediately obeyed her Spiritual Director and opened her eyes and woke up. (Report: Diary 29th Oct, 1871)

When she was in a trance, God revealed certain matters to her. She also conversed with Him mentally. She had pleasant dialogue with the Blessed in heaven. She received these heavenly graces during her meditations but did not utter a word to anyone about these other than to her spiritual director, and the Bishop. "It is good to conceal a royal secret, but good to declare and publish the truth about God and God's benevolence". (Tobit 12.7)

At the inception of her receiving stigmata, she doubted whether she received them through the grace of God, or by a trick of the devil. She prayed to God saying, "Lord, if this is

not from you but a delusion, please remove it from me. How can a weak person like me bear up such a big responsibility such as this?" Then, Lord Jesus and Mother of God appeared to her in a vision and spoke to her in a kindly manner and told her, "Don't be afraid to accept it. You will not be cheated." Since then she did not have any doubt regarding this strange occurrences.

A friend of Fr. Garcia, a hermit in Europe by the name of Don Antonio who had come to know about the wonderful things of the Sri Lankan nun through newspapers, sent a letter to him asking her to pray for him. When Fr. Garcia went in search of her with the letter, seeing that she was in a trance at that moment, requested her to pray for his friend and for Don Lewis who was once his assistant in Rome. When she regained consciousness, looking at him with a smiling face, informed him that both his friends were still alive; that Don Antonio was making indefatigable efforts for the glory of the Church and that in his difficulties he should adopt the example of the serenity of mind, piety, and mercy shown by the Holy Father, although his time was coming to an end; and that Don Lewis was preaching the Word of God very assiduously. (Diary 19th Oct 1872)

So often Helena received revelations about the hardships that were faced by the Church, about the plots hatched by the enemies of the Holy Father, and also about the hostilities that are brewing against the Catholic Church in Spain. (Diary 10th March 1873; 5th June 1874). She offered to God, all the

pains of her agony for the progress and the freedom of the Holy Church and for the repentance of sinners. Once St. Therese of Avila had appeared to her in a vision, showing her the thorns embedded to her heart, and in a mournful tone ordered her to pray for the pitiable situation in Spain.(Diary 7th Sept 1874).

This is how she explained to Fr. Garcia about another message she received once she was in a trance. "There is a pious queen living in Europe. She recites the Holy Rosary daily and offers it to God on behalf of the Holy Father. She requests her husband not to harass the Pope by joining forces opposed to the Catholic Church. If he refused this request, she had pledged that she and her children would leave him. Although the Kings have decided to destroy the Pope within this month, Lord Jesus informed me that it won't happen. But the Holy Father will suffer just as Jesus had suffered. Definitely the efforts of the enemy to kill him will end up in failure."(Diary 28th June 1872)

The Second part of the eighteenth century was a very troublesome period for Catholics in Europe. The new scholarly thinkers publicly placed naturalism at a higher pedestal than the real Author of nature, and His Holy religion. The leaders of people, who were conceited by economic development and national pride, rejected the idea of heaven, and peace, by subjugating justice to power. Hence the kings of powerful nations in Europe were always ready for warfare. They hated Catholic religion which preached peace and

harmony. In order to foment revolution, in all countries, clandestine groups consisting of criminals sowed wrong concepts about freedom and discipline.

As a result of this, throughout all nations in Europe, activities against the Holy Church raised their ugly heads. In Spain, a group of enemies of the Church started a movement that expelled the clergy from the country and confiscated their property. A similar course of action sponsored by the government took root in Italy too. The populated areas which belonged to the Church for eighteen centuries were robbed by them. In the year 1870, Pope Pius IX was under house arrest at the Vatican. At that time, France was governed by King Napoleon III. He sometimes acted supporting the Church and at other times against it surreptitiously. The Queen Eugene being a faithful, devout, noble lady, tried to guide her husband in the correct path. But the King acting contrary to her advice destroyed the country, lost the kingship and died in exile in about 1873. In like manner, King Victor Emmanuel who plundered Church property died in disgrace amidst reproaches from the just. But the Holy Father Pius IX who was very much harassed by them, though living at the Vatican as a prisoner, governed the Church for 32 years winning the goodwill and praise from Catholics as well as non-Catholic scholars, entered heaven in peace in 1878.

THE DECISION OF HIS LORDSHIP THE BISHOP

After examining all the matters about Helena, His Lordship the Bishop, presented a written Report to "Propaganda Fide" in Rome, in 1872. Though, we are not aware of exact content of the report, we can come to know of the decision he had arrived at through another letter. On the 12th of May 1872, he wrote to Rev. Fr. Garcia as follows: "My dear Father, I don't think that you are disturbed by the anonymous letters written by uncouth writers about the young girl Helena of your parish, Bolawatte. However, I feel that it is my duty to express my opinion regarding the matter. Although we subjected to close scrutiny all matters with regard to her, after keeping this girl at Kurunegala Convent for several weeks, I was unable to come up even with the slightest evidence of fraud or imposture perpetrated by her character, and that there is no reason to think that she is not a true and genuinely devout child. I examined her with the greatest attention and I witnessed several occasions when she was in a trance. Although I judged everything about her for quite a long period of time, without overlooking any aspect of her character I did not see any fraudulent behaviour or the slightest tinge of falsehood in her character. Not only that, what I always felt was that Helena is indeed an unpretentious, faithful girl with a pure heart. My opinion of her now remains the same as it was then. I think that time has not come yet to take a decision on the wonderful news

about her. I have imposed a prohibition on allowing the visitors to see Helena when she is in a state of trance.

Until I receive a pronouncement from Rome, as the Bishop, I think it is not necessary to make an order for any other arrangement except the above. Without doubt, her behavior does not leave room for any blame. There is one more matter I would like to mention before I finish this letter. Sometime ago, when I came to visit your mission, a large number of your spiritual children, especially males, received Holy Communion. There had never been such a large crowd before. I would like to mention here about the joy I felt in my heart after seeing that most uplifting sight. On that day, we had the fortune of reconciling with God, a few miserable sinners who had been estranged from the Holy Church and had given up taking part of divine services for five, ten, fifteen years, or more. It is my utmost duty to offer my thanks I owe to God who, after accepting joyfully the prayers and agony of little ones, had showered previously unknown graces on sinners. I hereby give my permission to do whatever you wish to do with this letter."

Garcia wrote as follows regarding the religious development mentioned in the latter part of the Bishop's letter: During the retreat conducted by His Lordship the Bishop, power of the intercession of Helena's prayers and dedication was greatly felt. Hardened sinners of Kammala, and the devil-worshippers of Gonawilā made their confessions on their own free-will. Most of them attended the services in a good

state of conscience and mind. (Diary 22nd April 1872; 4th May 1872)

AFTER THE INVESTIGATION

After returning from Kurunegala to her village too, the Passion continued as before. "In the evening of Thursday, on the festival day of the Assumption of Our Lady, Rev. Fathers Roux, Boutin, and Perrard came to see Helena. They were surprised after seeing the blood which was flowing down her face. The blood streaming down from her head made her face an unseemly sight. On Friday they went to watch the sight of her nailed on the cross again. (Diary 26th August 1872). As before, crowds had come to see her resulting in altercations among them. Furthermore, parties inimical to her caused trouble to her and the administrators of the Church. Rev. Fr. Garcia debated within himself whether unlimited praise of Helena would impede her religious tranquility. As such, he advised Helena to pray to God asking Him to free her of any external show of the Passion. The reply she received from God was that she should not be frightened to act in allegiance to God's wish and that the external signs of Passion will cease to occur in another two years' time. (Diary 4th May 1872) On the 5th March 1874, Rev. Fr. Angelo Cardano and Rev. Fr. Perrard came to see the Passion of Helena. But it did not occur. When questioned about this by Fr. Perrard she gave the following answer; "I am unable to do otherwise. I am felled to the ground, bound, and subjected to Passion by the holy will of Jesus Christ. It is

not His will to occur such a thing today. I have no control over this. (Diary 9th March 1874)

Although the external signs of the passion disappeared from then onwards, internal pains continued. Visions and divine discussions occurred from time to time. "Last Saturday, when she was in a state of trance, she had a vision. A chalice filled with fire was offered to her and she was ordered to drink it. Dedicating herself whole heartedly to Lord Jesus she drank it to the full. From then onwards she was filled with a new spiritual enthusiasm. Unlike earlier, now she feels suffused with more vigour. Although before this Lord Jesus treated her as a child, from then onwards He will not show any such favoured concern towards her (Diary 2nd May 1874). After her serious illness, she had more visions than before. Last Friday, she was offered a cup filled with blood to drink. She wondered whether the agony of the Passion is going to resume in her.(Diary 7th Sept 1874).

HELENA'S FATHER

The special kindness shown to Helena by God was a reason for most of the people to feel repentant and turn towards God. The villagers gave up wrong beliefs and embraced the true religion, but her father followed the old traditions of other religions and offered sacrifices to devils and evil spirits, repudiating the true God. This was a major cause of vexation for Helena and she begged God and prayed for her father. In 1874, on the eve of the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, she saw

a dreadful vision about her father. In the vision, she saw some black men driving a vehicle with a gray covering. When she asked them where they were heading, they replied that they had come to carry her father away. When she prayed crying, "Jesus have mercy on him", the persons who had come in the vehicle went away. Then, when she prayed to Jesus for her father's conversion, Jesus told her, "I am ready to accept your request, but when he ignores my mercy how can show my kindness to him?" Because of this vision, her heart was leaden with sorrow. She cried for her father's soul, full of tears. Lord Jesus informed her that, "On the Day of Judgment you shall come to know how profoundly I suffered for his sake. Because of the love Jesus bore for her, He will act patiently without giving him severe punishment"(Diary 22nd July 1874). A few months later, while she was in a trance, Jesus exhorted her to pray for the soul of her father. (Diary 11th Oct 1874).

The result of her obedience to that order, Rev. Fr. Garcia explains as follows: "Due to the prayers she offered for a number of years, I think, my dear Lord Jesus accepted the prayers of Helena on behalf of her father. In order to change the hardness of his heart, the plan selected by the Lord was a severe affliction of the body. During the period he was sick, he did not want to hear a single word escape from his daughter's mouth about his soul. When he was suffering from rheumatism he accepted help only from his daughters other than Helena. In the month of December 1880,

however, from time to time, he saw in his dreams that he received confession from me and that he was cured of his sickness.

“At last, God’s grace being profoundly active in his soul, he decided to get his sins forgiven by summoning me. I heard his confession, and since his sickness was very serious, I gave him the Extreme Unction also. As soon as he got little better, forgetting his pains, he attended holy mass. Unlike most of the sinners of this country who come back to the Church just to get a Catholic burial, he returned to God with a genuine intention. Now he listened to the advice of his daughter Helena willingly. He had a great faith in her. (Diary Jan.1881, 408 – 10 pages). On 10th August 1884, at about 7.00 p.m. Helena’s father expired. Eight days prior to that he had received the Extreme Unction and Holy Communion as viaticum. From time to time, till he drew his last breath, he repeated the most Holy and sweet name of Jesus. His death was an exemplary one. Thus, all the wishes of Helena about her father were fulfilled. It had strengthened Helena’s piety and love towards Jesus. She was at a loss to think as to what gift she could offer to Jesus in return for the noble grace given to her father. The day after his death, I went even to the cemetery to bless his mortal remains (Diary Oct 1884, 431-2 pages)

RELIGIOUS FEATURES

God created us. Hence, we belong to Him wholly, including our souls, body and the power of intelligence, power of determination, physique, and powers of functioning of all the parts of the body. As God had planned our existence, so our final place of rest also should be in Him. A creation without any relevance to its Creator is worthless. Also, it is meaningless. All animate beings and inanimate objects declare His greatness in their own way. Since the human being is an intelligent creature, he should recognize God, and feel one with Him through his own free will. God ordered human beings, "Love the Lord thy God, with your whole mind, your whole soul and your whole strength"(Deut.6. 4). To love Him with our whole heart is our utmost duty. Love is the power of unification. There is unity among people who live in love. When united as one in mind there will be one united gathering. "People, who love God, live one with Him. God also lives in them.(1 John 4.16)

This unity with God begins on the very first day when sanctifying grace is planted in our soul at Baptism. The transformation that takes place in the soul on that day is truly wonderful. By infusing a strange power to our intellect and our will, we come to believe the truths revealed by God, to understand them correctly, and to love Him, believing that He is our only wealth. We, the human beings, because of the sanctifying grace become children of God and inherit the right to Heaven. As long as we remain in a state of grace, all

our good deeds will be pleasant in the sight of God, and we can amass merits to increase our glory in heaven. This divine grace received at birth will be lost by mortal sin, and will be debilitated by venial sin to fight against evil. However, through confession we can make the lost grace shine in its original brilliance

Love of God changes in direct response to sanctifying grace. Furthermore, any act that is performed according to this new nature will strengthen that nature itself, and will make it grow. The more the soul strives hard, the more that new nature will develop. In addition, faith in divine love and other heavenly virtues will be activated with speed. The Holy Spirit will specially turn his gaze on such souls and will adorn them with His seven gifts.

In like manner, on the day of Baptism, the spark of divine fire kindled in the soul will burst and scatter in every direction for a new life to be born in the powerful realm of the soul superseding even the senses and will manifest itself as warmth of great intensity. A soul burning with the divine love is united with God so much that it is oblivious to everything else in this world except God. All the objects, including oneself, will be excluded from his vision, and he can observe God only. Then like St. Paul, he also can say that, "I am living, but now it is not me, but Lord Jesus Christ lives in me." (Gal. II.2), "My Lord, my all." (St. Francis of Assisi).

Let's think about certain religious virtues seen in Helena's character. Most of the people think only about "miraculous" things written, or spoken about her. These things are special gifts from God and not undeniable signs of someone's personal righteousness. Like other Apostles, Judas Iscariot might have worked wonders like casting out devils and healing the sick. But that didn't make him a righteous man. Most of the saints did not perform miracles during their life on earth. They may have led a hermit's life in seclusion, but their characters were resplendent with very high religious values.

One of the most important among many of Helena's religious virtues was her faith in God. Since she didn't have the opportunity of learning about the truths of religion during her childhood, there were some shortcomings regarding her faith. But as soon as she acquired a good understanding of her religion, faith became the driving force in her character. It was this vibrant faith that made her attend Holy mass and receive Holy Communion with such an ardent devotion. She behaved as if she saw Jesus Christ with her own eyes concealed in the Holy Communion. On the days she received communion, she felt as if her heart was suffused with love of God. As a result of her piety towards the Omnipresent Almighty God, she behaved herself always in the presence of the Holy Trinity and Jesus. About this, Fr. Garcia says as follows: "She now enjoys Divine Union in the most admirable manner. She told me that, she feels that Holy Trinity will never leave her. She was remorseful she

will never be able to thank Jesus sufficiently for his Divine mercies.
(Diary 2nd Oct.1871)

Because of her unflinching faith, she felt very sad about the superstitious practices and misdeeds of her father and her elder brother. She tried everything within her power to dissuade them from such practices. On account of this, she had to undergo much distress and punishments from them. Her faith and piety were the result of the honor and respect shown by her to her Spiritual Director, to His Lordship the Bishop, and the priests of the Church. Because of this faith, she offered her prayers, anguish in her heart, pains and agony of passion borne by her etc. for the intentions of the Holy Father, his freedom and well-being, as well as for the glory of the Church. When the news about the miraculous deeds performed by God through her started to spread, some people harassed her by ridiculing her with vulgar jokes. Some spread obscene vituperations. However, because of her strong faith she endured them all with an imperturbable state of mind.

She did not have much knowledge about the matters of the world, but the deep understanding she had about God was amazing. "Now she shares the fruits of faith with others. Though her pupils did not know the transformation that had taken place in her, they listen to her religious instructions with a great respect and devotion. Once, a sinner who had been instructed by her came to me to make a good confession. His understanding of confession was so great that I don't think, even I could have explained confession with any greater clarity" (Diary 30th April 1871). "She feels that she is specially illumined when teaching others... It seems that she had a wonderful power to teach others. Many people benefitted from listening to her words (Diary 10th Nov.

1874). In the month of January 1878, Helena visited a convent in Colombo for a certain need. Many people came to see and talk to her. Some on hearing her pious words wanted to know more and more about the religious way and spiritual life and tried to keep her from leaving. (Diary Jan.07, 1878).

She not only had a special knowledge about religious truths, but through the grace of God, sometimes she was aware of the religious state of herself as well as those of her companions. A crafty nun who lived in the same convent as Helena lived tried to mislead her spiritual Director by pretending to have seen some visions. After coming to know the intentions behind her deeds through the light of divine guidance, Helena informed the Father about her wicked plans. Fr. Garcia writes as follows about this: "Helena delightfully enjoys the company of the Holy Trinity. So she had full knowledge about her religious perfection and about the suffering she had to undergo in future and about the person named 'G....'. I am sure she came to know about the condition of the soul of the one named 'G....' through no other means than the grace of God" (Diary 26th Nov. 1871).

As divine love burnt like a great conflagration within Helena's soul, all sins like worldly pleasures, attitudes, undue attachments, human pride etc. were consumed by this fire. This led to a bond of unity between her untarnished soul and God. Her soul was drawn towards God. Her desires and thoughts were directed towards Him in an unhindered way. Living in Jesus' presence and having conversations with Jesus became a permanent feature in her life.

Let Rev. Fr. Garcia who had knowledge about the state of her soul, tell us a little more about these matters. "Helena enjoys the companionship of Lord Jesus in a splendid way". (Diary 26th Aug. 1870). "The matters revealed to her by Lord Jesus are wonderful. Today I spent two hours in discussion with her, but it was as if I had spent no more than five minutes with her. Lord Jesus is teaching her everything". (Diary Jan. 1871, page 174) "I informed her that hereafter she has to pay more attention to His work and that He would look after her work. She told from that time onwards, when she was attending to other outside work too, she had felt that Lord Jesus was living inside her heart. She is marveled at this noble privilege granted to her. (Diary, Nov. 1971, page 246) "She tells me that, there is no existence for her now other than that of God's. She has no doubt whatsoever that she is living in the presence of Jesus and He is teaching her. (Diary 23rd April 1871)

But don't think of Helena's life was one full of peace, and devoid of troubles. Just as the goldsmith puts a piece of gold in the furnace to examine it by fire, God also tests His saints. (Wisd. 3.6) The sturdiness of a tree can be ascertained only in the face a storm. In the same way, the quality of love is proved only when one is in the middle of adversity. Since Helena's bodily pains were described earlier, it behoves us to mention, in brief, some of the mental sufferings she underwent. The light and the happiness of a soul that loves God are the resplendent Divine presence. Hence the departure from that presence is the most painful thing that can happen to such a soul. At times, when God wants to check the attitudes and the firmness of their love, He distances Himself from

them. Then the soul is engulfed in darkness and it appears to him as if heaven and earth are in rebellion against him.

There were such instances even in Helena's character. We shall mention the words of Fr. Garcia here. "Now this innocent girl has slipped into total darkness of soul, and is tortured by wicked temptations. She heard Lord Jesus telling her in a voice lacking in any compassion that He had removed her from His communion because she had directed her heart elsewhere. She feels that she is in the clutches of the devil. May God have mercy on her and protect her from being snared in such a dreadful trap. (Diary Jan.1871, page 193). Just as it was a few days ago, she is still in darkness. As incidences of trance etc. stopped on Ascension Day, she lives in darkness and amidst fearful temptations. But any visitor who comes to see her will always be treated with kind words to console him and make him happy. All of devil's utmost efforts to break her faith ended up in failure". (Diary May 1872, page 279)

She suffered much pain due to great doubts that sprang in her heart about the purity of her soul and about the special graces received by her. The enemy in hell also scourged her in so many ways. By showing her false visions, he tried to lead her astray. Being incensed over the benefits people received because of Helena during the retreat days, the devil tortured her in the most grievous manner. He showed to her that her Passion, trances etc. were all her tricks and through which she misled me and the Bishop, and insulted the Holy Church, and that all her actions were done with the power of the devil. On the final day of the retreat, crying in a sorrowful manner, she informed me and Christina that as she had cheated others and her crime must be made known

everywhere". (Diary March,1874, page 325). Further, her heart and soul were overcome by wrong ideas against the theological virtues such as faith, hope and divine love". (Diary March 1871, page 196). One day, the devil tested Helena by showing her a vision. Disguised like a guardian angel as if in the presence of Jesus and His Mother, he appeared to her. Ordering the disguised angel to look after her, he spoke of various things. Helena, immediately recognizing the devil's trickery ordered him to get out. Then the devil, having no other alternative, disappeared leaving his masquerade and taking his real form -that of the dangerous enemy from hell".(Diary 20th Nov.1871).

But withstanding all these troubles, Helena enjoyed an utmost state of peace and tranquility in her heart. That happiness which emanated from her heart was reflected on her face also. Fr. Garcia says that, "Always, her face shone with an angelic radiance." (Diary 25th Nov. 1872). The happiness and the sadness she received from the Holy hands of God was her source of joy. That was also the reason for her humility. She is anxious to bear the heavy cross (sufferings). She tells me she is afraid of losing this great inclination in her. The reason for this was that Lord Jesus is showing His loving grace towards her and always teaches her religious truths and divine practices in the sweetest of language. Her humility increases in proportion to the extent God grants His graces to her. By listening to her words, I too receive great consolation. She is, without doubt, one chosen by Lord Jesus". (Diary page 230)

ARRIVAL AT THE HARBOUR

As said before, after 1874, the external signs of the Passion did not occur though internal pains continued to afflict her. As time went by the number of people who came to see her dwindled, and so did the commotion created by her. Since then, her life was comparable to a calm pond without any ripples. As the members of the religious order founded by Rev. Fr. Garcia were actively engaged in activities like teaching children to read and write, and conducting catechism classes to the newly baptized Catholics, Helena, too, involved herself in that work with great fervour. However, she spent as much time as possible in prayer and meditation. "Now she is totally devoted to preparing the school girls for their examinations. From time to time, when she was in a state of trance, she had visions of the souls in purgatory. On one occasion, she was taken there and suffered immensely as a result. After that, full of pity for those souls, she tried to collect some money to offer Holy masses for their deliverance from purgatory." (Diary, May 1877, page 388). In the diary of Rev. Fr. Garcia, there are sporadic records of Helena's religious development up to the year 1888. (Refer pages 421, 424, 442, Dec., 1888).

When the Bishop visited Bolawatta in August 1881 he showed special kindness to Helena and promised Fr. Garcia that he would look after the welfare of her, and her companions. (page 418). This brought great relief to our aging priest. In August, 1889, his Golden jubilee, or the 50th anniversary of ordination, was celebrated in every part of the parish on a very grand scale. On the 25th of March 1900 he breathed his last peacefully. The devout,

faithful parishioners buried him in the Bolawatta church with great respect.

THE FINAL PERIOD

The passing away of her great teacher who showed her the religious path from her childhood and who navigated her soul to the harbor of good hope through perilous seas, was an incalculable loss to her. His replacements that came to Bolawatte parish, albeit showed kindness and respect to her, the loss she felt couldn't be compensated until her death. Apart from teaching the children, she inculcated knowledge about our true religion among the pagans in the surrounding villages and induced them to join the Church. Whenever she came across a Catholic living in sin, she would exhort him to turn back to the correct path by speaking to him in a kind manner. She assisted the priests to carry out the work of religious associations of the parish in the correct manner.

The devotion of veneration to the Holy Face of Jesus was inaugurated in Gonawila Church due to her single-handed efforts. It is continued to this day without any break. Until her death, the religious and worshippers of all walks of life and from all parts of Sri Lanka came in search of her, seeking her prayers on their behalf. Although, she was honored by many, she spent a life of great humility. She never uttered a single word about the special graces endowed to her by God. She even went to the length of trying to conceal the marks of stigmata on her palms and feet, which at times brought back happy memories momentarily.

THE DEATH

Having completed 82 years of age that shone with virtue, and full of heavenly merits, Helena passed away on the 8th of February, 1931 at Gonawila. During her last moments, all her spiritual needs were attended to by Rev. Fr. Boulic who was the most senior both in age and service, and a religious missionary highly esteemed in our country. As soon as the news about her death spread, large crowds of devotees flocked to pay last respects to her remains as they would to the body of a sacred person. With the permission of the Archbishop, her remains lay in state in Gonawila Church for one full day, and on the 10th, after the Holy Mass, her remains were interred in Gonawila cemetery respectfully carried there in procession comprising a very large crowd of clergy and laity. Whatever that may have happened to her dead body, her body of reputation remains to this date. We do not know the Divine Wish. But we devoutly pray that if there is any Divine Will beyond our understanding regarding the glory of Helena, the servant of the Divine Son of God, that the same be fulfilled.

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.(1 Cor. 2. 2)”

**PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE
STIGMATIC**

HONOURABLE HELENA OF GONAWILA.

God our loving Father, We thank you whole heartedly for the life of your servant Honourable Helena who had a special devotion to the Passion of Your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. By giving her the gift of bearing on herself the marks of the Sacred wounds of the Passion of your Son, you have shown us a way to reach Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the many blessings given to us through her intercession. Considering the holy and exemplary life she lived, grant us the joy of honouring her as Blessed Helena.

We ask this through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This Printing was Approved by His Lordship Valence Mendis Bishop of Chilaw on 2nd August, 2016)

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(E/copies –English/Sinhala- from :jbpdissa@hotmail.com)