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Sister M. Rita Therese Clarke

With the old year's dying, a young life passed from among us, for the 1950, in its own last hour claimed one final death toll--our Sister Rita Therese Clarke. Because of her youth, there was an added pathos in her passing--she was not yet twenty-one. Though she was completely resigned, she wished earnestly that she might live to make final profession and "receive the ring" with her class in August.

The story of Sister's illness goes back to her second year novitiate when she was troubled with pain in her right leg. That summer, June 1948, she was taken to Mayo Clinic, where her case was pronounced cancerous - "destructive malignant lesion of the left Ilium." Examination on her second trip to Mayo's in December of 1949 revealed that the cancer had spread to her lungs. Her physician advised further x-ray, but reported that her days were "strictly limited." Her third trip last June revealed still further involvement, and after additional x-ray treatment she returned home.

Sister asked to go on mission, and was accordingly sent to Manhattan; but by the end of September she had to be brought home. She was taken to the infirmary on October 3, and on December 21st was transferred to Columbus Hospital, Chicago, for closely supervised administration of a new drug which was being tested there as a cancer cure by Dr. John F. Pick.

Sister received her first injection of the drug, known simply as "Ampule X" on Saturday, December 23rd, and a second on Tuesday, the 26th. Sister's response seemed nothing short of marvelous. On Christmas day she was able to eat, to move freely; the nodules on her head and hip were much decreased in size, and she experienced no pain. However, on December 31st her reaction when they aspirated the nodule on her head, was unfavorable, and required oxygen. At seven o'clock she prayed in accompaniment to Sister Constance who was attending her as nurse; at nine she still responded; at ten she was comatose; and at 11:10 she ceased breathing. Dr. Pick, watching, pronounced her dead.

A post mortem was requested and, permission having been granted, was performed. Mother Immaculate and Sister Constance witnessed the autopsy. The evidence made it clear that the tumors had been greatly decreased; the aim of the treatments, however, had failed sadly, with one advantage remaining: they had won a final week of comfort for a hopelessly sick Sister.

General though the feeling of regret was over this young Sister's passing, there was universal recognition that in a few short years she had traveled a long way. She had had one promising year at St. John's, but looking back on her professed life, she said, "I was not called to teach, but to be taught in the school of suffering. Patience, humility and love of the Suffering Christ were the lessons I had to learn." It was these virtues that brought her prepared, to the end of the road. Who shall say she died too soon?

Funeral services were held at the Motherhouse on Thursday, January 4, the Most Rev. Bishop McNamara presiding at the Solemn Requiem Mass. Father Gervase Brinkman was celebrant; Fathers Alphonse Coan and Benedict Pfeifer were deacon and subdeacon. Father Gordon Michels and Father Francis Blum were chaplains to the Bishop; Rt. Rev. Msgr. E. V. Hoover was assistant priest at the throne. Father Thomas O'Keefe was master of ceremonies.

Burial was made at Mount Olivet cemetery, Father Gervase leading the prayers at the grave.