

# PILGRIMAGE TO LISIEUX

Dr. Luxford Meagher

*The pilgrimage to Lisieux about which Dr. Luxford Meagher writes took place thirty years ago (1927). Many changes have occurred since then in Lisieux and other places mentioned. The magnificent Basilica has been built and blessed and is now used for public worship. But the reflections of the author are as pertinent today as when first written.*

IN my University days a friend drew my attention to the cult of the “Little Flower” then spreading at a rapid rate throughout the world. Marie Therese, she said, had obtained many favours for her. I prayed to the Saint and was cured of a condition which my doctor had assured me would require an operation.

Some years later, when travelling abroad, I met an American Protestant gentleman who had a child-like devotion to the Saint. Threatened with total blindness, he had recourse to her, and was favoured with an alleviation of his state. He could observe a hand passed before the face and was even able to distinguish one’s features dimly. Poor, pathetic man! Fate seemed to throw him in my way. After our first meeting in London, I met him again, quite accidentally, in Paris. What was really touching in his case was his whole-souled tender devotion to his protectress whom he looked upon as a sister. Filled with a crusading vigour to enhance her fame he abandoned the practice of his profession as an accountant and formed an association of clients of Marie Therese. Accompanied by his wife he went about lecturing on his own personal experience, and distributing literature concerning the Saint. He could claim that his own efforts had borne some fruit, for, as the world knows now, Marie Therese was canonised on the morning of May 17, 1925.

I thought about this gentleman many times after our last meeting and felt rather ashamed that in view of my own cure I had not been inspired with an equal passion of gratitude. So when, in 1927, my affairs permitted, I made a pilgrimage to Lisieux. I remember vividly kneeling one summer afternoon in that year, before the grille at the local Carmel, speaking to the Prioress, a sister of Marie Therese. I was making an extraordinary request, asking for assistance in paying a literary tribute to the Saint. The reply was: “Use the means at your disposal. Pray to Therese and she will give strength to your pen”. So, I make my prayer: “O Little Flower of Jesus, Marie Therese Martin, Saint of God, aid me now, ingrate that I am”.

Amid the thorns and brambles of my recital, may the reader inhale somewhat of the fragrance of the beautiful Rose of Carmel. Here then is the story of my pilgrimage to Lisieux in thanksgiving to the Saint:

A writer needs special qualifications for special tasks. For descriptions, he requires the courage to let his pen run on; for the explanation of an art, a knowledge of that art; for a dissertation upon science, a knowledge of what constitutes the scientific method. Hardihood suffices for some tasks. Alas, knowledge alone is not sufficient for others. Gifts of the spirit are needed, too. To be expert in hagiography means to be somewhat of a saint oneself. Merely to write about a saint is a pleasing task even though the result may not be brilliantly successful. And we may hope that the saints, kinder than all other subjects, will aid our deficiencies if we appeal to them confidently for support in the exercise of our talents. I like to think that special methods of approach are helpful in the case of individual saints. One could go, for instance, with the gloves off, to Saint John of the Cross; an upright intention would be enough in the case of Saint Ignatius; but who would introduce us to the Little Flower? Yes, humility is necessary in order to write about her. Humility, and also, confidence, for that is the spirit which she breathes, and the lesson which she teaches at Lisieux — confident approach to her Divine Lover. It seems to me that she represents Our Lord to us in His tender aspects, as the Infant Jesus, as Him of the Sacred Heart.

I went to Lisieux to say my own private prayers. Let us consider this matter from a worldly point of view. Here was I, a man in the world, going to consult a powerful advocate in Heaven, about my own pressing necessities. I went as a Catholic believer to the shrine of one who on earth was a weak little woman. From the Catholic point of view this is easily understood. If I deserved it, and as much as, and probably more than I deserved, and in spite of my demerits, and as a reward for some semblance of goodwill, I should get, spiritually, something—perhaps much more than I asked. Let us think about it from the point of view of an atheist. From this point of view, my action was worse than a waste of time—a folly. What are the facts concerning Marie Therese Martin? She was a young French girl who died of

tuberculosis at the age of 23. She was very pious and good from childhood age, and at the age of fifteen entered the convent of the Carmelites at Lisieux and she died in it without going outside again. These being the circumstances, it could be said by a worldlyling that she “did nothing”. She lived a good life. She was a refined, intelligent person. She wrote some charming poetry in praise of God. She made no discoveries in the natural sciences. Her humanistic studies were not profound. To literature she made the contribution already mentioned, but it must be said she added the story of her own life which some consider a literary as well as a spiritual masterpiece. Only a comparatively few people knew Miss Martin during life, but almost from the instant of her death she forced herself upon the notice of the world by a torrent of benefactions covering the entire globe, and attained the status of a canonised saint, in very nearly record-breaking time.

Was hers a career that could influence the world and its thought and conduct? If a Gallup poll had been taken during her life to decide the question, the answer would have been “No”! But that this life should send its message throughout the whole world, and that this little girl should have instructed the proud and the learned; even that she should have become famed merely through the revelation of her experience of the inner life—all this is incredible, unless one has Faith. It is a proof of the Truth of the Catholic Faith, which was the scaffolding upon which she climbed to Heaven, and of the existence of God. God was her theme, and her message has vibrated through the world.

One cannot make a pilgrimage to the town which a saint has made famous, without receiving intimations, as it were, of the saint, in the surrounding country. One approaches Lourdes, for instance, through country which awakens solemn and deep thoughts. Do you think that God had His reasons for placing the scenes of the apparition of His Blessed Mother amid the moving and sad beauty of the Pyrenees?

It is somewhat so with Lisieux. Rouen is the natural gateway to it. Now, I think that God sends His pilgrims to Lisieux by way of Rouen, to enliven their Faith, in preparation for the revelation of cloistered sanctity. Remember that Marie Therese built her sanctity upon the edifice of fidelity to the Catholic Faith, and that she lived eight years in a convent. Rouen is a reminder of the immemorial truth and beauty of the Faith; of its capacity to inspire the human mind and sanctify souls.

### *JOURNEY TO ROUEN*

Come without guide books to Rouen, and let us see what kind of a city it is. Let us make a beginning with Dieppe, the port of my arrival in France. I am going, remember, desiring confidence, to Lisieux. At Dieppe, I write down in my diary: “Dieppe is dingy and dreary. Its streets are narrow and t’he cobble-stone paving of the road seems unusually bad. The railway station stands at one end of a long street which pursues an undistinguished career into the town. The buildings are of two storeys, very drab. Every second shop is an “alimentation”, filled with sweets and shortbread dainties. Who eats all these things? Some giant must live here. His loaves lean against the wall in a baker’s shop, half the thickness of a man’s body, and exactly its length, slashed so that they represent a tiger’s skin. Purple and silver-coated sweets sit in lonely fashion on little glass slabs, snubbing their noses against the glass panes. Housewives delve among the browned biscuit dainties, carrying on, during the process of search, animated gossip with the proprietress. There is no life at the quay-side. Is it a half-holiday? Even the Chamber of Commerce is shut. But the idea of a half-holiday in an industrious French city is slightly laughable. So I am forced to reflect that I must be libelling the inhabitants, and that this must’ be the hour of siesta. The Church of St. Jacques, with its square tower, and projecting gargoyles, is badly in need of repair.”

Preliminary to its departure from Dieppe, the train played its usual tricks. To begin with, it rolled out of the station eight minutes too early. I trundled across the square “heying” to it. Poor thing, it was too slow to elude me. The amiable porter who clambered through my compartment assured me that the schedule was correct. I knew better. I had travelled on the line before. The train very soon gave several jolts, but we were not really under way. She backed and puffed and clanked into a sister station where papas, mamas and basket-laden children watched her antics with unconcern. Back again she came. A railway official mounted one of the driving wheels, near my carriage window, watched for a grand moment, and then blew a bugle and waved vigorously. After a few more jolts, and a shudder, followed by an appalling quietude, the little train nerved herself for the effort to Rouen. We came, after a journey in rain, through sodden fields, to Rouen, at six in the evening, and jostled with a great crowd out of the garish, great

station, which at the moment was disorderly with much reconstruction.

“Did I want a room?” Madame of the Hotel de Dieppe enquired.

“Yes.”

“At vingt cinq francs?”

“No”!

“One then a storey higher, at quinze francs?”

“Perhaps!” The maid, whom I recollected from my visit six months before, showed me the room. Upon debate, though it was otherwise suitable, I fled the Dieppe, considering vingt francs per meal too high a sum for my pilgrim’s purse. “Americain,” whispered Madame to her maid in answer to an inquisitive inquiry. “Americain” strode down the cobbled Rue de Jeanne D’Arc, to a turning which led to the quay. Here, the Hotel d’Angleterre receives me, does its best’ for me, a la carte, and with a warm small room, I am content. Rouen is spread outside this cold night, but, I repeat. I am content within doors.

I awoke, after what seemed a century, to find the town astir with early travellers. Rouen’s face is washed. It is not so cold, I find. There are picturesque hills in the distance. The sun is shining on the garish station. My room costs 12 francs. A sheer gain. comparing it with the Hotel de Dieppe. Besides, I like this place much better. Framed in my open casement is a square of sky displaying Paradisal colours. All schools of art with all their theories, yield their contribution at this moment to my luxury. The colours change as the clouds evolve. Pleasant thought . . . the entertainment tax does not apply! My first journey is towards the Cathedral, half a mile away. I gasp when I see a wonderful door with its archway; the lop-sided carved figures which, as though borne in a wave, climb over the arch and meet at its apex. (This reminds me of the Votive Kirche in Vienna.)

“Madame!” I apply in my halting French, to a lady in the square who bears a market basket. “Est ceci le Dom?” I strive to lessen her wonderment by another try. “Le Cathedral?”

“Non, m’sieu’,” she replies, with expressive kindness. “Par la le Cathedral.” Over the tops of the huddled shops shows a spire, spiritual, delicate as a rock crystal, seemingly made of wood, encrusted with ornamental devices, a knob at the top, racing upward.

“Tournez premier a gauche,” I am directed by a gentleman. Through a narrow street, I face this building. Between two of its aspiring towers a pigeon launches. All about, beauty wavers. The Cathedral is an embrace. The Almighty is enfolded within the cincture of that enduring prayer. At its foot a pretty, vivid life dashes on. Brightly-coloured cafes receive the shoppers, young girls trip off to business, cabs trundle over the cobbles, bare-headed housewives push hand-carts home with freights of cauliflowers. The church I had mistaken for the Cathedral was that of Saint Maclou. I enter the Cathedral and assist at Mass. I hear the hour sounding solemnly from the Cathedral tower. A deacon in surplice sings a Benediction hymn. The women, with sweet, sad voices, take it up. After the Mass the worshippers are soon dispersed. The perspective of the Cathedral, looking down the aisle, might be likened to the long, long, thoughts of youth.

Rouen is a city of memories. It has rich associations for Catholics. The Maid of Orleans died here. Of Rouen’s industry the guide-book mentions hardware and soft-goods, leather, chemicals, metallurgy, dyes. But if you wish to learn about its industry for yourself and to understand a great deal of its history, all you have to do is to gaze upon the Seine. A great picture is spread out before you. The Seine, with its broad expanse and many bridges, is a noble stream. Its commercial importance is increasing every day. It bears upon its muddy waters, mighty freights of export and import wealth. See this traffic streaming proudly by, at an hour when the City’s multitudinous noises are being stilled. What strange craft! Motor-tugs with bows leaping from the water. Slow, heavily-laden barges, coloured vividly, their decks almost flush with the wavelets: a barge with a cargo of granite paving destined for Paris streets, straining upon the tow-rope.

The solid quay sides are chafed by the high shoulders of tramp ships of French registry. Factories and cranes line the river. An enormous, suspension foot-way bridge, an engineering freak, rears its feathery proportions into the sky. It serves as a system for conveying a ferry by means of a cable across the stream at this point. The wind plays strange pranks with this bridge. High up there, you can feel it playing rock-a-bye. You climb a series of steel ladders enclosed in the pylon. Having climbed a hundred feet or so, you are assailed by a horrible feeling. Looking down between your

legs, you perceive you may fall through a variety of open spaces, for the whole thing is no more than a network. It is a piece of Meccano fashioned for the entertainment of adults. No one but a madman would cross. Yet, obviously some do, for a lady sits in a box at the foot of a tower, with a roll of tickets for sale.

### *THE GOOD-NATURED SACRISTAN*

"M'sieur desire un tour?" The old man with the demoniacal red in his robe addressed me thus, and tapped with his staff upon the Cathedral floor. I judged him to be an official of the nature of verger. The time was half an hour after noon. I did not wish to be interrupted just then. I shook my head in answer to his inquiry, and stayed to marvel at the architecture of the nave. But when departing he had swung the wicket gate behind him, I repented and recalled him. I asked him to come and show me the mysteries behind the great altar. A couple, young American lovers, and I, were his audience thus late in the morning. He told us a great deal, and pocketed his fee with a gracious smile which revealed a not-too-disfiguring loss of front teeth. You could count the hairs in his beard. He wore court shoes with red pom-poms. His staff was the cousin to a halberd, and he looked as if he had stepped straight out of the frame of a Franz Hals portrait. His suit was black and slashed, and his manner, at once confidential and affable, had an intermixture of the grand. He came back to us to explain the miracles of the stained glass. The secret, now, he explained, was "inconnu". Notice the vividness of the colour! Thirteenth century! In one window was the temptation of Joseph by Potiphar's wife; in another the story of the Good Samaritan. He pointed to the word "Australia" inscribed upon a tablet commemorating the Diggers who had died in the 1914-1918 war. He recalled Australia's part in the conflict. He drew attention to the Cardinals' hats suspended from the roof. "You 'ave," he said, "in Sydnee, in the Cathedral of—"

"St. Mary's," I suggested.

"Yes," he went on, thankful for the help, "the 'at the Cardinal Moran. It is 'suspendu' from the roof." We gazed down the aisle. Its blackness was intense. "Perspectif admirable," said the old man, giving utterance to my thought. "Alors," he remarked, when I was about to depart, his bright eyes beaming with fun. "Bon retour to Sydnee." "Melbourne," I said, quite unnecessarily. "Ah, Melbourne," he rejoined. "You 'ave the Maoris there. No? The aboriginals then! With the lips broad and the nose flattened." He flattened his own nose and pursed his lips and laughed with great joy. I was sorry to part from this prince of vergers.

### *STREET SCENES IN ROUEN*

After a morning spent in the Cathedral, one becomes weary of its grandeur, and of the past.

Let us turn our steps to the streets, with their frivolities, and revive our interest in living humanity. What a business one sees in the shops! The swing doors of one big store are never still. Chattering women pass through. The street re-echoes to the note of the tram-conductor's horn, the torturing squeak of the approaching motor-car. An imposing array of dainties is borne upon glass trays in the confiseries. These are "patisserie." Cunning little cakes filled with jelly and cream, browned biscuits; cakes upon which one pours cream from a silver jug; chocolate cakes. Watch them vanishing! A lady comes in from her shopping expedition, and saunters by the counter, halting before a tray of delicacies, with a silver fork impaling a macaroon. This she consumes, seated at a tall, marble-topped table, musing upon the passing crowd. All these cakes will be gone by tomorrow. They will be replaced by reinforcements moved forward by the stout, flour-flaked baker who, with hands akimbo, has suddenly invaded, the chocolate den. An immense fellow, gazing over the heads of the ladies nibbling afternoon cake, he resembles a Triton among minnows. He sums up the stock. "Pouf"! It will not suffice. He knows everything about baking cakes. He dominates the shop. The history of cakes is written all over his face. One expects to see the tartlets and napoleons rising up on end to curtsy to him. In the alley by the side of the shop, his two smug-faced apprentices, clad in white, their four-cornered hats stuck on at a jaunty angle, take a breath of the street. They seem, like youngsters all over the world, to be very little anxious to return to their labours, and proud to display their uniforms. Will a "reform" ever arise, for the prohibition of tarts? If it should, I can imagine the baker defending the practice of his art in some such aphorism as "No tarts, no temptations. No temptations, no virtue." What a world!

Inside the Cathedral at six o'clock in the evening, all is black, save the surplice of the priest, who, from the high, carved pulpit, recites the Stations. The altar and the roof are concealed by the darkness. The great archway of the nave

reveals the insignificance of the worshippers. Benediction follows. Is it seven so soon ? Now, the Rue Jeanne d'Arc is alive with coloured signs. Here and there, an old lamp in a darkened side street winks knowingly like some Micawber who possesses an interesting and not disreputable past.

Rouen had shut up shop on Saturday afternoon when I left by train. My last look took in the busy Seine; the thronged quay basin with its fleet; the lively cafes; the stout stone bridges; the mediaeval houses. I passed the church of Saint Ouen and caught a glimpse in a street gap, of the church of St. Maclou, a marvel hemmed in with oldest houses. Framed in the window of my compartment, I saw the Cathedral dominating the town, its oldest, spireless tower frowning in lonely grandeur, sharing the horizon with the other two churches. Lovely Rouen.

#### TO LISIEUX

The way to Lisieux is tedious. The train is slow. It rocks more villainously, for no reason that I could tell, than any train I have ever travelled in. We pass, some miles from Rouen, a broad river, flanked by a long, high mountain range, with a village near. Here, an alluvial flat has been swamped. The afternoon draws on. The country becomes quite flat, little cultivated, and by degrees, not cultivated at all. It is thickety country, uneven. We seem to be darting in and out of burrows. Woods flash by. Early Spring blossom shows here and there in the young trees by the line. Soon the country becomes all undulations. Secretiveness is its character. Bernay is a village clinging to the banks of a canal. Lisieux is heralded by long lines of single-storeyed factories, every division of which blazes with fierce light. The industry ? My companions tell me it is "vetements" (clothing). From the train windows one saw foundries also.

"Lisieux". The sign is repeated half a dozen times upon the station platform. Many travellers alight here. It is a big, broad station, the only one in the world from which I have been allowed to walk away unchallenged. There is a running to and fro in the station yard. I step into a cab which is one of an array of carriages and motors surpassing that which I had encountered at Lourdes. A feeling of expectancy comes over me as we go off down a badly-lighted street. It is half past five o'clock. The footpaths are unconscionably muddy. Let me say that Lisieux is a bundled-together place. Here, in the centre of the town, the miller's flour bags are falling almost into the accountant's desk. There, a bright shop is filled with the objects of devotion, including portraits of Marie Therese. The image of the Saint smiles at me through the dusk. We pass a busy cross-road and find ourselves in a street with unpicturesque shops. It is a lop-sided street which descends. Upon a height to our right, by our passage-way, is the heavy church of St. Jacques, with a great archway. This is the end of my journey, so I enter. It is intensely cold inside; also dark. Marie Therese, in marble likeness, is here, holding her shower of roses, beside a humble altar which shields the Blessed Sacrament. I make my prayer here. With thankfulness, I make it again at my bedside at the hotel. I am happy. Poor little mortal, I pray to the smiling Saint, this recently-honoured dignitary of Heaven, for all I want and for my friend. It thunders outside, but a feeling of protection comes upon me.

#### SCENES IN LISIEUX

A young woman flew like a little black raven into the estaminet of the hotel, half an hour before the dejeuner next day. A strange time to take coffee, I thought. She wore a travelling costume. She glanced around with the brightest of black eyes. She left pretty quickly, but at the door she stopped. "Say, you don't speak English, do you?" she said.

"Yes," I replied.

"Oh, what a relief. That's just fine. Say, is this the only place they have to eat? I'm just famished. I want some place else to eat. I don't care what it is, so long's it's not here. Ugh, what a place!" (The estaminet is just what it looks like; an uncomfortable place to gulp down coffee.) "Say, where do you do? Oh, in there! Well I guess I'll just go in." The little woman went towards the dining-room door. I informed her that it was twenty minutes to dejeuner.

Madame of the establishment and mademoiselle of the estaminet appeared and confirmed this information. I acted as the interpreter. "Cc n'est pret," remarked Madame. The strange lady did not enter the dining-room. "I'd just like breakfast," she said. "A nice little bit of ham. They've got good ham here, haven't they? Well, I want it fried, but it must be well fried, and eggs and coffee and rolls. That's quite a tall order, I suppose," she laughed, "hut my train goes at 1.50, and I've just got to get to Paris." Madame told the lady she could have the breakfast a la carte and anything else she desired.

“Oh, that’ll be stacks,” said the visitor. Then (turning to me), “What a frightful place! Do they understand anything here? Fancy you living here. Are you English? Australian ! Oh, say! You are a long way from home. But whatever made you come to this place to live?”

I did not wish to appear a fool in the eyes of my little American acquaintance, so I told her truthfully I had come upon a visit.

“Oh, well,” she said, “ifs a very interesting place and all that. But to live here . . . .”

Lisieux has a population of 15,000. It is busy, industrious, flourishing. Marvel of marvels, it has more work than souls to do it. One sees such notices in the windows of factories, as “Workmen Wanted,” “An Apprentice Required.” The town is old. It is well-preserved. It was a fair-sized town when it’s lord, William the Conqueror, seized the throne of England. The heavy buttresses, and galleon-like bulging of the upper storeys of the houses, give the key to the construction of the most ancient buildings in the historic towns of England. The very same man who built a house in the Rue aux Fevres in Lisieux might have built that grocer’s shop now before the eyes of my imagination, whose ceiling beams are as thick as a man’s body.

The town guide-hook says with rightful pride: “Lisieux offers to those who are enamoured of the past’, a spectacle unique in France, of innumerable wooden houses, a marvellous open-air museum.” Truly the museum survives. These wooden monuments amaze me. This feeling gives way to one of slight repugnance. In narrow streets outrageous gargoyles look down from their posts at the cornices of upstairs rooms, poke out their tongues, leer, and seek to subdue the stranger with their grotesque and impudent fun. It is easy to see what kind of cronies were those house builders of the twelfth, thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their jests were crude. The workmanship is rough. Bur what a sense of the grotesque they had ! They did not scruple to immortalize the homely humour of their town, the follies and frivolities of Jean and Jacques What’s-His-Name. They understood decorative art, but they imported the spirit of the tavern into it. They made fun of Hell. They pilloried the demons. In this town of Lisieux it looks as though the village pot-boys had won a building competition and had been set to work. Some of their jests are obvious, poorly conceived, brutally frank. They are about eating and drinking. The conversation of these gargoyles is upon merely mundane topics. They hold their sides and burst with laughter.

### *A WAYSIDE SHRINE*

The thought struck me this morning to go away from Lisieux into the open country. So, after lunch, I walk down from the higher places of the town, to the Place Thiers, in front of the Cathedral. Things are quiet this afternoon. A shop with a faded front competes for foreign custom on the outskirts of the Place, with its pert sign, “Au Robinson.” In any of the cafes hereabout, I can drink, if I like, 5 o’clock The. I do not like. I took some “the” the other day at the hotel, and can recommend it as an insipid luxury, well suited to the purpose of Lenten penance.

The Cathedral of Lisieux is in the Place Thiers; that is to say, on one side of it. It is dreaming. This can plainly be seen.

It is noble, unchanged, unchangeable, while the shops and buildings in the square live a fitful, hum-drum life. It has no adornment. Its external architectural feature is the use made of the geometrical square. This tones down everything, including the beautiful Roman arch over the main doorway. Even the gargoyles, the grinning dogs through whose extended gullets the rain-water is guided off the roofs of the other church buildings, are here wanting. The Cathedral, sad to say, seems a little out of place. That is because the shopping centre around is commonplace.

Crossing a canal, we go out of the town by the Chemin d’Assement. The ascent is continual, between hedges upon a bank, and pollarded trees. The countryside is green; the herbage lush; the trees shivering in winter nudity. Heavy, well-fed cattle graze contentedly by the farmhouses. This is like, yet in an indefinable way, unlike, an Australian scene. The landscape is like. but the farming quite unlike. The country is broken; the trees are strange, the farm-houses scattered but solidly built, of brick. This might be the country we have seen about Doncaster. The holdings are no larger; the farm-houses similar. Moss of a most delicate form, clothes the bank, and here grows a kind of capeweed and another flower belonging to the age of innocence—the buttercup. This grows in clusters, in clumps. Its counterpart and rival is a white bloom, without scent. A cousin is of light-blue. The three, like girl chums, adorn the bank in pretty confusion. The blue smiles as does the Little Flower. Perhaps it was after this bloom that the Little

Flower received her nickname. I come, in this country path, upon something which makes the countryside very different from that in Australia . . . a shrine above the bank. In the rude shelter of a little box raised upon a post, stands the Virgin and Child. Here, the only place in miles, the bank displays a tribute of violets.

Lisieux was gathering for the firesides when I returned through many miles of road, into the busy town. Children were playing upon the cobbles, carts and motor-cars contested discordantly for the echoes of the streets. Before the pastry-cooks' shop stood a white-jacketed apprentice boy, in sabots, studying the possibilities of the window and counting out the answer in sous.

### *THE TOMB OF THE SAINT*

The spirit of Lisieux can be studied best in those whom it attracts. Who can go away empty spiritually ? Not the happy priest from Buenos Aires who stands upon the steps of the Memorial Chapel in the Rue Livarot, recounting, with eyes uplifted in devout expression, his various pilgrimages—Rome during the canonization ceremonies of the Saint, Lourdes, Paray-le-Monial.

“Extraordinaire—terrifi” . . . he ejaculates, indicating the intensity of the devotion to the Saint in his own country. He can scarcely tear himself away. Paray-le-Monial is his next objective. He is going this afternoon at 1 o'clock. It is now half-past eleven. He has been praying in the chapel at all hours. He raises his hands in his expressive Latin way. “Lisieux is a little Heaven,” he says. Not any more likely to go away empty-handed is the silent woman with the refined face, and her poor epileptic sister, who pray, rapt, before the altar, long after the end of Mass; not the tired-looking man, nor the women in black habits whose gaze, directed towards the tabernacle, is undisturbed by the currents of people who pass by them . . . not the young girls whose sympathetic faces are directed towards the Saint's tomb, nor the fathers of families who stand there, holding their little boys by the hand. None of these, assuredly, can go away unsatisfied. I have a vivid recollection of a man with spiritual gaze of middle-age, with an incisive manner, who sat near me in the hotel dining-room. A land-owner with a charitable way of life, he had bought a home in Lisieux, and was waiting till circumstances freed him to come to the town with his family to live. His mother was an invalid. For the present, the north of France was his home. He comes to Lisieux several times a year. I felt lonely when he was not there. He said goodbye to me very simply, in what I hope was a spirit of prophecy—“We shall meet again,” he said, “if not here, in Heaven.”

For the pilgrims, the end of the pilgrimage is to kneel in silent worship before the tomb of the Saint. The effigy of the Saint is directed towards them. The hands clasp the crucifix and are bathed in rose petals. A shower of rose petals bestrews the ground. The fragrance of rose petals and lilies is wafted through an opening of the glass, which, behind magnificent gold-decorated iron gates, walls the tomb.

A devout congregation attends Mass in the Memorial Chapel, and even in this less busy season, the church is filled. All streets pour their stream of worshippers into the rue Livarot. At eight o'clock, the pilgrims are returning to their hotels. There is another Mass between eight and half-past eight o'clock. Benediction is celebrated at five o'clock in the afternoon. We who come in from the world, take assurance, for from behind the grills to the right hand side of the altar, come the responses to the Litany, sweet and plaintive, given by many voices.

### *THE SAINT AND HER CLIENTS*

Since the Saint died, devotion to her has spread over the world. In the Memorial chapel are tablets recording the thanks of people in every part of the globe, of the humblest, and the most exalted, rank, lay-people and religious, civilians, and also soldiers, some of whom, we may guess, directed the military destinies of France in critical hours. These testimonies are remarkable not only for their number, for they cover the walls of the chapel, but also for their fervour.

A grateful client has written: “To Therese, beautiful rose of Carmel, who established and blessed my hearth.” What will be said of the Saint in the years to come? We may give the answer, by examining the inscriptions already in her memorial chapel. Some of those who owe her great gratitude are persons who have been frightened in the face of impending calamity. This calamity the Saint has averted. She has secured death-bed conversions. Soldiers have been saved in battle; or have been cured of terrible wounds. The nature of the favours received by many is not revealed, but the heartfelt expressions of thanks are eloquent. As the instrument of grace for souls long lost to God, the Saint seems

to possess extraordinary power. One grateful client records that her own brother “died like a Saint, after 15 years of forgetfulness of God.” A soldier says, “Thanks to the Blessed Therese of the Infant Jesus who saved me on two occasions.” A Queen expresses her gratitude thus, “To the Blessed Therese, all my thanks for a cure obtained through her intercession.” A captain of Zouaves writes: “Severely wounded in the war, I was dying. The Blessed Therese had pity on me and gratified me with one of her roses of cure.” One inscription reads: “In acknowledgement of a very great protection to the armies, X, 1920.” Another inscription states: “Sister Therese has saved my soul and my honour.” “A poor sinner’s acknowledgement.” A little Spanish girl writes: “Thanks to the dear Saint, protectress of my family.” Another: “That the Lord may exalt the beauty and the attractions of this celestial star, to whom I owe so much light.”

### *THE LESSON OF LISIEUX*

The favours received through the Saint’s intercession are varied. It would appear that she is indeed “The redoubtable champion of desperate causes.”

What was the Little Flower like in life? Here is the description given me by a relative of the Saint. “She was an extraordinary child, full of piety from a very early age; sweet and kind. Simplicity was the keynote of her character. She loved her family very much. The Saint looked very much like her portraits.” (All who knew her seem to agree upon this last-mentioned point). One lady remembered Therese as a happy little girl with beautiful hair reaching to below her knees, romping in the street on her way to school. “She was very fond of animals. She was loved by the townsfolk. She was simple, direct, trusting with a great confidence in the goodness of God.” Old grannies love to revive memories of her. “A child so high,” one will say, placing her hand at the level of the knee.

The cabinet of relics at the Memorial Chapel testifies to the personal appearance of the Saint. She had a wealth of lustrous brown locks. It is a touching display. A baptismal dress; the first Communion veil and dress; the little veil and the great veil, worn on the occasion of her religious profession; the habit which she wore, her rough wooden sandals, a discipline.

The toys of the Saint as a little girl are preserved in her father’s house. Here is her bed, and the little childish trifles such as a girl of the middle class possesses, a doll (a most unintelligent-looking doll!), a very unreal doll’s bed, and the most impossible of perambulators. In addition, all kinds of toys scarcely touched, one would judge, or touched by the gentlest hands; a skipping rope. The room where Therese played and slept looks out on a lawn rising by a gravel path. Let into the side of a shed near the high brick wall enclosing the garden is a little model of Bethlehem manger, of a type which she must often have constructed. The Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph are here, protected in the Grotto by a roof of rushes. The patient animals breathe on the Divine Child. His bed is of delicately-shaped grass shoots.

What has been the result of the pilgrimage? I asked myself this question upon leaving the town. I thought I ought to try to be a little more humble and that all the while, so long as I persisted in this course, I would be able to repose great confidence in the good God and His condescension toward very little souls. Confidence, confidence, confidence. These words were drumming in my ears, as the wheels of the engine rolled me back toward Rouen. Confidence! That was the keynote. Yes, just to try and to keep on trying hopefully in the spiritual, as well as the professional, sphere. Arguing the matter out, one supposes that there must be a sacrifice of one’s will in attaining the desired result’. What is this sacrifice? It may be likened to a sight in Nature. Who, in travelling upon the ocean has not seen the little wavelet thrown for a moment in the wake? Its crest forms, foams, breaks, and in an instant, is dispersed in the mighty current. Such a mighty current is God’s will. We, poor souls, are like the sea foam, borne by that current, destined to come at length to rest upon the shores of God’s eternity. And the method of our progress, which consists in a complete abandonment to that will, Therese shows us.

Nihil Obstat  
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