

A LITERARY MASTERPIECE

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SOEUR THERESE.

[The following beautiful tribute to "The Little Flower" was written by Francis Doogan, who later, to the regret of all who knew him or read his writings, passed away at Greymouth (his home town) in his early manhood. Since his death the humble Carmelite nun, towards whom he manifested so great a love and devotion, has received canonisation.]

How applicable to the Ven. Soeur Thérèse, the Little Flower of Jesus, at whose name every head should bow, are the lines of Francis Thompson:

Time shall reap, but after the reaper
The world shall glean from me, me the sleeper!

The charm of the Little Flower's Autobiography has captivated the world. Since her death in 1897, at the age of 24, it has been hurried through innumerable editions, and published in almost every language. The first edition was sold at the rate of 33 copies a day, which is probably a record for this class of work. Each copy was 6/- net. Carmelite Nuns are not given to book-producing. Indeed, very, very seldom does their work come before the eyes of this sad, workaday world. The Little Flower wrote her autobiography in obedience to her superiors, who, it can clearly be seen now, acted merely as God's agents. The influence the Little Flower is exercising through her autobiography can be compared only with that of a St. Ignatius, a St. Francis, or a St. Teresa.

There is a spiritual and literary beauty about the autobiography which cannot fail to attract. In parts it is a prose paraphrase of *The Hound of Heaven*. The veil is drawn aside and we see a God Who, if known by men, must be loved, and Who stretches His hand from out the heavens to help all who seek Him. God has everything for us in His arms. No one can describe the charm which pervades the volume. No Catholic home, no home at all, should be without a copy of the life of the Little Flower. An Oxford don, after reading Wellington's *Despatches*, was asked what he thought of them. He replied: "They make one burn to be a soldier." When I read the autobiography I had to admit to a friend, "They make one burn to become a saint."

"It is now some eighteen months since I made the acquaintance of an English translation of the autobiography of Soeur Thérèse of the Child Jesus," wrote a Presbyterian minister. "I opened the book here and there, and was at once arrested with the beauty and originality of the thoughts; I found there had fallen into my hands the work of a genius as well as of a theologian and poet of the first order. Returning to the first page, I read the book from cover to cover. The impression proved as lasting as it was extraordinary." This letter was penned three days after the minister was received into the Catholic Church.

When the Little Flower was thirteen her

eldest sister, Marie, went to join their sister Pauline in the Carmel of Lisieux. From that day the Little Flower determined to enter Carmel. She told her father of her desire, and, she says, "He spoke to me like a saint. Approaching a wall he showed me some little white flowers like miniature lilies; and, taking one of these flowers, he gave it to me, explaining to me the care which God had taken to make it blossom forth and to preserve it. I thought I was listening to my own history, so striking was the resemblance between the Little Flower and the little Thérèse."

At the age of fifteen the Little Flower accompanied her father on a pilgrimage to Rome. The pilgrimage is described in the autobiography, and poetry marks almost every line of the description. "Before reaching the goal of our pilgrimage we had to pass through Switzerland, with its lofty mountains, their many peaks lost in the clouds, its rushing torrents, its deep valleys profuse in luxuriant growth of giant ferns and purple heather. Now we were high up the mountain side, while at our feet a yawning abyss seemed ready to engulf us. A little later we were passing through some charming village with its cottages and graceful belfry, over which fleecy clouds floated lazily. Further on, the calm, clear waters of a great lake would blend their azure tints with the glories of the setting sun."

"In Venice, the scene was completely changed. Instead of the bustle of a large town there was a stillness, only broken by the soft lapping of the waters, mingled with the cries of a gondolier as he gracefully plied his oar. Assuredly it is a city of great charm, but likewise of sadness. Even the Palace of the Doges, with all its splendors, is afflicted by the spirit of melancholy." A verse from that Catholic poet and lover of the French, Ernest Dowson, fitly describes the feelings of the Little Flower and her father on their journey to and from the Eternal City. It is taken from a poem entitled "Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration":
They saw the glory of the world displayed;
They saw the bitter of it, and the sweet;
They knew the roses of the world should fade
And be trod under by the hurrying feet.

"How interesting is the study of the world when one is about to leave it!" She did not love the world, and her only desire in this life was to be the spouse of Jesus Christ, and to be clothed for His sake, in the white robe of virginity and the red robe of martyrdom. The autobiography is of such absorbing interest because it tells of union with God, a desire burned in the soul of every man. No matter how hard they try men cannot erase His image from their hearts. "He who will escape Him only runs to His bosom," says Meister Eckhart, "for all corners are open to Him." The masterpiece of the saintly young Carmelite has already taken its place with two other remarkable volumes—the autobiography of St. Teresa and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

F. D.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

UNCONVERSANT.—Brisbane and New South Wales have large percentages of Catholics. New York and San Francisco are also very Catholic, and there is plenty of employment there.

INQUIRER wants the name of the author of *Geraldine*. We read it years ago in Tivoli but have not seen it since. If we made an attempt to guess the author's name we should say it was Constance Sherwood, but our memory is not good.

CRITIC.—"Quick" is a fine old English word, meaning "live." Thus, the quick and the dead means the living and the dead. The word ought to be revived in those days when only athletes escape being killed by motorists.

C.F.—*Antonio* was written by Ernest Oldmeadow, the present editor of the *London Tablet*. You can get the novel, which is a very good one, from our Manager.

STATISTICS.—It is impossible to tell the number of pilgrims attending Rome for the Holy Year. First, because the year is not over, and secondly because we have nothing to guide us except the railway returns up to May 15. It is stated that 270,000 pilgrims travelled by train up to then. As the reports of revolution in British papers kept pilgrims away during the early part of the year, we might take these figures as representing the number that poured into the city from the end of March.

READER (Taranaki).—We cannot advise you where to get a second-hand motor bicycle. Our advice would be DON'T! Maybe a young puppy would do you instead. We can tell you where to steal one, and will sleep better if you oblige us. You won't need alarm clocks when you get him.

STUDENT.—Since the decree of May, 1918, the impediment does not apply to marriages between baptised non-Catholics and pagans. The New Code lays down that the sponsor at Baptism contracts spiritual relationship with the baptised person only. The opinion of experts is that the Antioch Chalice is not older than the fourth century.

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