

The Maid Of Lisieux

By Rev. A. Power, S.J.

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CHAPTER 1.

GOLDEN JUBILEE.

Saint Therese of Lisieux died on Thursday, September 30, 1897.

When the project of celebrating the Golden Jubilee of her entrance into Paradise was laid before his Holiness Pope Pius XII he cordially approved and rejoiced that this honour should be paid to her who was, he declared, “the greatest Saint of modern times.” The Jubilee year is being honoured at Lisieux and in Carmels all over the world.

And how amazing is the story of the spiritual triumphs of this young French girl during the past 50 years! Millions of people of every age and clime and religious creed have fallen under her influence reaching them especially through her Autobiography written off-hand in obedience to superiors a year or two before her death. It is now recognised as one of the world’s great spiritual books, ranking with the Confessions of Saint Augustine, the Imitation of Christ, the Autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila. The authors of these famous volumes wrote when already mature in years and ripe in experience of men and books. Whereas Therese was a mere child of twenty-three with practically no knowledge of the world and its ways. Moreover, Augustine had to tell of years spent in heresy, waywardness and sin, Teresa of Avila had to confess to a long period of tepidity and carelessness. Angela of Foligno had also a sad story of infidelities to narrate in her Book of Divine Consolations. These, and many others, have interested mankind because they have wandered away from God before beginning to serve Him fervently. Their story was that of the soul in headlong flight from the pursuit of the Divine Lover.

A Difficult Task.

But Therese of Lisieux had the far more difficult task of making attractive the story of a life of complete innocence, a life of entire surrender to God from the very beginning; a life too, that was spent, not in the glare of footlights or amidst the roar of worldly applause, but in the uneventful surroundings of a Norman town and for the last nine years in the hushed seclusion of a Carmelite Monastery. For a woman of twenty-three to write such a personal and intimate narrative of God’s dealings with her soul, and do so without a trace of affectation, in a tone of convincing sincerity, with a candour and charm that disarm criticism, is surely a unique achievement both in the world of letters and in the annals of self-revelation. The book was published in October, 1898, and we are told that at once it produced a sensation – a great outburst of astonishment; copies were called for on every side and there began a circulation, which has exceeded that of any other spiritual book of modern times.

Her Secret.

And the secret of it all is that Therese had a great love story to tell, the tremendous love story that is the theme of the Bible and of all Christian Revelation, the romance that filled the Life of Jesus of Nazareth and His Mother Mary, and all the Saints, the romance that thrills us in the Confessions of Saint Augustine, and in the “Hound of Heaven,” (by Francis Thomson,) and that strikes a chord in every human soul and holds for each the promise of a divine Companionship which alone can make eternal existence tolerable.

Characteristics.

As we reflect on the career of this French girl, that began some 70 years ago, and has been unfolding gradually under our eyes since the 20th century began, and note the extraordinary swiftness with which her cult swept the globe, we may ask ourselves what are the qualities in her life, character, and teaching, that may seem to explain her phenomenal success in the spiritual order. For from the point of view of the worldling, who sets store chiefly on health and wealth, a successful career, abundance of friends, independence, amusements, art, literature, fame, a long life – she may be regarded as a complete failure. At school-age she entered on the austere life of a Carmelite nun – that is, a life of acute poverty, discomfort, absolute obedience, privation of home comforts, association with people at times trying, disagreeable or harsh; and in addition to the mental agony caused by the mental breakdown of her father, she was stricken very soon with tubercular disease, which, after months of intolerable suffering caused her death at the age of twenty-four. In that short career, wealth, bodily pleasure, success, played no part.

Yet perhaps no woman since Catherine of Siena has influenced, and continues to influence, so many human lives as this French recluse! To us believers it is another striking illustration of the truth that the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die in order to produce fruit. It is – one may reverently say – the story of Calvary over again. The Man whose words and example have revolutionized human thought and human existence more effectively than any other, died on a Cross, executed as a public malefactor by the official representative of the most flourishing empire the world has ever known.

She Foresaw Her Own Triumph.

In the story of Saint Therese, we may perhaps call attention to the following points as helping to explain the extraordinary impression she produced.

It is an interesting and probably unique fact that as death approached she foresaw and foretold the spiritual triumph that would be hers after death, and the world-wide favour she would win. A few of her sentences uttered from her bed of pain have become household words in Catholic circles, such as her promise to send a “Shower of Roses,” or the words inscribed on the plain wooden cross erected over her grave in Lisieux cemetery: “Je veux passer mon ciel a faire du bien sur la terre.” (‘I want to spend my Heaven by doing some good upon the earth.’)

On July 16, 1897, Therese received Viaticum from the hands of a young priest who celebrated his first Mass in the Convent Chapel, and next day she made the following prophetic announcement to her sister, Mother Agnes, “I feel that my mission is soon to begin, my mission to make the good God loved as I love Him, to teach souls my ‘little way’. I will spend my heaven in doing good upon earth. There cannot be any rest for me till the end of the world, till the angels will have said ‘time is no more’.”

Events since that memorable date have proved the truth of her prophecy. The records of the “Pluie de Roses” (‘Shower of Roses’) published year after year tell how generously she has kept her word. “As Little Children.”

Another fact about Saint Therese that has won the absorbed attention of mankind is that she makes the road to God so simple, so accessible to all. Amidst the bewildering complexities of the world’s most sophisticated age, this nun has given a new and world-wide publicity to the great fundamental truth announced in Palestine long ago, that the surest passport to the kingdom of heaven is to seek God with the humility, simplicity and unhesitating confidence of the child dealing with its parents. Unbelief and despair are the besetting evils of modern life. Blindness to the supernatural has settled down over so many millions like a blanket of dark clouds blotting out the light of faith, which is as essential to the soul’s well-being as sunshine to the life of the rose. Therese in her brief career had bitter experience of what this terrible spiritual darkness could be like. During her last months on earth, the lights of heaven seemed to be completely extinguished for her. Yet her faith and trust in God never wavered. In the gloom, she clung desperately to His Hand; and at the same time accepted this appalling abandonment and desolation in order to win strength for those overwhelmed by doubt and separated from God because they cannot believe or hope.

That Therese was right, that her heroic loyalty and pertinacity in leaning on God by acts of faith and trust when all sensible perception and enjoyment had departed was not in vain, has been overwhelmingly proved by the miraculous seal set upon her work, and the testimony of millions of people who have experienced the power of her intercession. She has fully justified her daring words, “My mission is to make God loved by others as I love Him.”

Spirit of Joy.

“Splendid and holy causes are served by men who are themselves splendid and holy,” writes a modern hero remarkable for his loyalty to a great cause. [The reference is to Patrick Pearce.] What wonderful joy Therese has brought into the lives of men and women and children since her death! Evidence of it is found in every page of the records collected at Lisieux.

The peace and joy she communicates are the fruit of the joy that ever reigned in her own soul and that breathes from her autobiography, in spite of her cruel sufferings.

Just as Jesus who warned his disciples to expect bitter persecution and the hatred of mankind also said, “My peace I leave you, such peace as the world does not give,” and as Saint Paul, when cruelly harassed and persecuted, cried out to his converts, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice,” so Saint Therese in the highest part of her soul found immeasurable happiness in the possession of her Divine Lover, in the knowledge that she loved and was loved by Him. She promised to send down a “rain of roses”; and her plan was when she reached her Lover’s home, to seize and rifle His treasures of grace and scatter them with lavish hands on her fellow creatures still toiling and suffering on earth and struggling to reach eternal happiness.

During the past 50 years, countless acts of gratitude and innumerable letters sent to the Lisieux Carmel have formed a chorus of praise for favours bestowed – unprecedented in the history of mankind. They are records of personal favours of every imaginable kind, bodily cures frequently of a startling nature, spiritual blessings, conversions, the gift of prayer, success in missionary work, et cetera. But a characteristic note of every one of their testimonies is JOY. The writers speak of extraordinary visitations of consolation, interior peace, and happiness. Which all goes to prove that

Therese has served as a unique and fascinating interpreter to mankind of the tenderness and love of the Heart of Jesus. She drew her inspiration from the Bible – both Old and New Testament. And she presents Christ's message of love so persuasively that the most stubborn and hardened hearts have been touched.

Missionary Spirit.

A fourth characteristic is her extraordinary apostolic or missionary zeal. Although she was a recluse shut up in a quiet Carmelite Convent, in spirit she ranged over the whole wide world, contemplating the painful toil of active workers on the foreign mission fields, and longing to bring them help and comfort. That she succeeded in this, the endless chronicles of the "Shower of Roses" prove. So marked has this influence been that Pope Pius XI took the unprecedented step of appointing this twenty-four-year-old Carmelite nun, Patron of the Foreign Missions, along with, and on the same level as Saint Francis Xavier, who is generally considered the greatest Apostle since Saint Paul.

The Lesson for Us.

Now the supremely important lesson for us seems to be this: that Saint Therese shows what the Apostleship of Prayer means, and what it can effect. She achieved her missionary triumphs by offering to God her fervent (though often utterly dry) prayers, her daily routine of work, and above all her sufferings, for the saving of souls. We make this same morning offering. Hers was made with an intensity of fervour and love that captivated the Sacred Heart and brought about the marvellous results we read of.

The highest point, so to say, of her apostolic vocation was reached when, on June 10, 1895, she made the heroic oblation of herself as a "Victim of Love." Her fidelity to that offering was tested (during the two years that followed) in the severest way by appalling sufferings of body and soul; and she stood the test with superb courage. The story of these last months of anguish – the story of her "passion" and agonising death – is the most moving part of the record of her earthly career. But the glorious fruit that resulted is shown us in the chronicle of her supernatural activity from heaven during the fifty years that have elapsed since.

CHAPTER 2.

NORMAN CONQUEST.

Lisieux has conquered the world!

The little Norman town has emerged from long centuries of obscurity to become a household word on the lips of mankind. Yesterday, scarcely known except to students of William the Conqueror; today, it is as familiar as Sydney or New York.

And why? Because a little French girl spent some years in that town loving God with a great passionate love; then told the world her love-story in enchanting language, and so completely won the heart of mankind by the magic of her song, that all needs must listen, and, listening, follow whither she leads.

And the path she treads soars upwards; upwards to the wind-swept heights where the human soul comes face to face with God.

The way is narrow and steep, but she is such a winsome guide, she so bestrews the path with flowers, she speaks in such persuasive tones of the sunlit mountain peaks where her own soul dwells, that none need fear to follow.

Her Theme.

Her theme is fascinating because it is the theme that is nearest and dearest to us all, even though at times we realise it not.

Her theme is God and His love: and about that, we all want to learn.

Every human soul is thirsting for God, since every soul is thirsting for happiness. And final and complete happiness God alone can give.

Saint Therese, at the very dawn of reason, made the momentous discovery which many make but late in life, some not at all, that her soul belonged to God, was created for God, could be happy only in possessing Him.

Columbus-like, she discovered this new interior region of her soul, and spent her life absorbed in contemplating the beauty of that inner world, filled with the light that is God Himself.

The Palace of the Soul.

God is found in the soul as in no other place whatever in the universe. God constructed the soul that He might reveal His beauty to it. Just as the eye exists for light, so the soul for God. The eye has no explanation without light; but, given light, its purpose is manifest at once.

So with the soul. It is a riddle to which God is the answer. The soul is made to be God's residence; the workshop of His activity; only in such a spiritual, intellectual, thinking substance can God display the wonders of His grace.

Most men are blind to these truths. They are too busy, too distracted by the external world, by the fascinating panorama of the ceaseless play of creatures, to give attention to the presence and activity of God within themselves.

And yet, the soul needs God: cannot exist or be happy without Him. And so, when anyone speaks persuasively, authoritatively, with the ring of sincerity about God, all must listen.

God's Poet.

The poet charms the world by singing sweetly of nature's beauty or of human loveliness.

The saint sings sweetly of the Lord of Beauty and also enchants our souls. For if the beauty of the creature is so irresistible, sways us so masterfully, will not the Beauty of Him, Who created all other beauty, draw our hearts like a magnet?

And so, little Saint Therese is the poet of God; Hers, too, is a love-song; and she has become a Queen of Hearts – a veritable ruler of mankind, by teaching us the sweet art of Love.

Mary Magdalen.

When Mary of Magdala met Jesus, and, under His piercing, pitiful look, woke up from the nightmare of sin to the daylight reality of God and His love – then, at last, she discovered that her soul was made for God, and she leaped up to new life in the sunshine of His presence.

Saul of Tarsus.

When Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the road to Damascus and for one ecstatic moment caught a glimpse of the radiant beauty of the divine Countenance, then he, too, realised the purpose of life; he knew that he was being asked by God to give up everything for the sake of love; and that glimpse conquered him for ever.

With the soft persuasiveness of childhood, Saint Therese has brought home to multitudes of her fellow creatures the fact that God loves them, that He wants their love in return, that He created them expressly for this.

And thus, she is the Apostle of Divine Love.

Her Place Amongst the Saints.

How shall we estimate her place amongst the saints?

The story of her rise to fame is hardly to be paralleled in the annals of the Church.

Fifty years ago she died in obscurity, in a poor Carmelite Convent in Normandy, whispering indeed to her intimate friends as she lay dying, startling little prophecies of what the future had in store for her; but utterly unknown to the world at large.

Today there is, perhaps, no saint in the Calendar so well known in all the five continents.

Yet there are not found in the story of her life any of the unusual or startling incidents that mark the lives of many others who have scaled the heights of sanctity.

The Maid of Orleans.

Jeanne D'Arc, when she was a girl of eighteen, struck men dumb by demanding to be made General-in-Chief of the armies of France, in order to save her country from ruin. And, amazingly, she compelled the French warriors of the day to grant her request, and, in justification of her audacity, led them to victory, and changed the course of history.

Then, her work being done, she died a death of shame, burnt as a witch in the market-square of Rouen. The blazing fires that sprang up on that May morning in 1431 and consumed the body of that innocent saint have served as a beacon to blazon her virtues to the world.

She died as Christ died, amidst hatred and execration; but, like Christ, she triumphed through death. Her martyrdom was the beginning of her apostolate, and today the world, both within the Catholic Church and without, echoes to the praise of the heroic French girl who dared everything for the sake of Love – Saint Joan of Arc.

To the Maid of Orleans men's eyes were drawn by the very strangeness and novelty of her enterprise; by the picturesque, chivalrous story of her achievements; by the pitiful tragedy of her death.

The Maid of Lisieux.

Not so with the Maid of Lisieux. She has accomplished the more remarkable feat of weaving out of the ordinary monotonous events of daily life – a story that fascinates the world.

Jeanne D'Arc, in obedience to angel voices that urged her to fight for France, donned her armour and led the French soldiers to victory, teaching them the while to avoid sin, to lead good lives and serve God.

Therese of Lisieux, obeying the voice of her Superior, wrote the story of her simple, uneventful life, and lo! the book became the instrument of her apostolate; the channel through which her influence was to flow out all over the earth.

“As Little Children.”

And what is the theme of this book?

In one sentence, it is this Gospel lesson, “Become as little children if you would become great with God.”

Little Therese shows us in actual, living reality what this teaching of Jesus means, and how it is to be carried out.

Her mission in modern times is surely providential.

The modern world is full of pride of intellect, self-sufficiency, and rejection of the supernatural.

It rejoices in linking itself up with the animal world on the one hand, and cutting itself off from God on the other. It rejects the divine sonship, but works feverishly to discover some clue that may triumphantly establish its descent from the ape.

Herald of New Life.

Surely, the Maid of Lisieux is a portent in the midst of such a world!

Just as the birth of the Babe at Bethlehem was a startling event in a world full of idolatrous temples, where vice was enthroned and worshipped as a god; so the apparition of this saintly child, all aflame with love, in the midst of the cold rationalism and indifference of the nineteenth century, treading her way through the world with the simple grace and dignity of a queen, exacting the homage which men inevitably pay to beauty, purity, and truth, is an event that challenges attention.

The Shepherdess of Lourdes.

God’s ways are not our ways. When, after the orgy of philosophic denial and scoffing at religion, which culminated in the French Revolution, God wished to revive the age of miracles, the instrument He chose for the purpose was an unlettered shepherdess, a child pasturing her flock on the slopes of the Pyrenees. As the Angels came to simple folk at Bethlehem to herald Christ’s birth and the inauguration of a new era of supernatural activity on earth; so, at Lourdes, Christ’s Mother appeared to Bernadette to tell her of a new period of activity in the world of grace, which would result from revival of devotion to Mary; so that Lourdes would become a centre to which crowds would stream from the ends of the earth to find healing of body and soul.

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them.”

And so, in our iron age of highly developed commercialism, when lust for money and craving for pleasure so absorb man’s energies that God is forgotten, His very existence denied, it was necessary that the value and meaning of simple faith and trust should once more be brought vividly home to men’s souls, and the instrument God chose to effect His purpose was Teresa Martin; and through her simple thoughts and example God has spoken to the intellect and the heart of humanity.

CHAPTER 3.

ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL.

It is surely a striking fact that the most popular and successful saint of the Church for the past seven centuries – since Anthony of Padua died in 1231 – should be a Discalced Carmelite nun; a young, highly-gifted, warm-hearted affectionate girl to whom the Carmelite life – with its spirit of complete self-renunciation, its rigorous austerities, its constant prayer, its entire separation from the world – made such a strong appeal that she was full of eager impatience to be allowed to enter the cloister before the canonical age. Having entered, she spent nine years of entire contentment (though also of great suffering) in the monastery, and died with a prophecy on her lips about the marvellous work she would do for the Church – of the “Shower of Roses” she would send down from heaven to brighten and sweeten this cold, grey world. In the story of her life, written a few months before death by command of her Superior, she told her secret. And were there nothing to show but this record of a perfect life enshrined in that glorious book, “L’Historie d’Une Ame,” (The Story of a Soul) the Order of Carmel would still have an imperishable monument to point to as justifying its existence.

Its members could say: “See how the Carmelite idea works out in practice. See how applicable it is to modern conditions. See how it can satisfy a generous nature bent on scaling the mountain peaks of sanctity.”

But, then, besides this record of the earthly career of Saint Therese of Lisieux – this wonderful revelation of her interior life and of the intercourse of her perfect and innocent soul with its Maker – we have the further justification of the Carmelite idea in the startling approval given by the miracles of Saint Therese.

Miracles.

Miracles are God’s sign-manual whereby He sometimes shows His approbation of men and their doings and ideas.

Mankind has, of course, ever found it essential to have means of distinguishing truth from falsehood, the genuine from the forgery, real gold and jewels from glittering imitations.

And this is equally necessary in the world of ideas. We live amidst the clash of opposing doctrines, principles, systems – and we must have means to discover Truth, especially in the matter which of all others is most supremely important for each of us to be certain about – namely, the purpose of life and our final destiny.

We must, of course, use our own intellectual faculties in this as in other departments – they were given to us for that purpose. Our natural reason and power of distinguishing the genuine from the imitation must be called vigorously into play in our religious life as in ordinary daily business.

But in certain matters connected with the soul and its life after death, we find ourselves, in spite of all our investigations, groping in the dark, and must look for guidance to Him Who alone has full knowledge of the future. Such guidance He has at various times given by revealing His thoughts to chosen souls, whom He supernaturally enlightens, and sends as heralds and messengers of the Truth to the world.

God’s Sign Manual.

But these divine messengers must be furnished with credentials; their right to teach must be guaranteed by Him who sends them as His spokesmen. Now it is by miracles that this guarantee is given. It was to His own miracles that God’s Chief Prophet and Apostle – Jesus of Nazareth –

appealed in proof of His right to teach. And miracles have accompanied His messengers all down the ages, as Jesus Himself promised they would. The history of Catholicism has miracles woven into its very texture; not only during the life of its Founder – from His miraculous conception and birth, all through His public life, to His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven – but also all through the unfolding of His religion and its development in every part of the world.

Many Christian sects and non-Catholic bodies reject miracles – refuse even to listen to the evidence for them; whereas the Catholic Church consistently appeals to miracles as part of her credentials, and reminds us that her claim to find miraculous manifestations in connection with her saints is itself a proof that she is the Church founded by Christ, who so clearly promised that miracles would accompany the preaching of His Gospel.

The Church Not Afraid.

The Catholic Church is not afraid of her principles. When confronted by the rationalists of the nineteenth century – who jeered at ecclesiastical miracles as the product of heated imagination or as downright trickery and fraud – the Catholic Church challenged the scientific world to come to Lourdes and examine the multitudinous cures taking place there for which no natural explanation could be found. In the beatification and canonisation of her saints, the Church habitually and regularly appeals to miracles as an irrefragable proof of the sanctity of her children.

Since the death of Saint Therese (Sister Therese) in 1897, the Church has witnessed an unprecedented outburst of miraculous activity, a whole torrent of beneficent graces and favours granted through the intercession of this Carmelite nun. And just as this “Shower of Roses” is a guarantee that Soeur Therese is God’s friend, so also are they a guarantee of God’s approval of the Carmelite idea and the method of life pursued by those men and women who give themselves up to prayer and penance for the welfare of the Church and the Interests of Christ.

Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make.

Another way of looking at the matter is this. The Carmelite idea is proved to be solid and reliable by the long experience of centuries, and by the number and kind of people who have flung themselves wholeheartedly into the Carmelite life, convinced that in doing so they were taking steps to secure the highest development of their spiritual nature.

For no one would be justified in taking up the life led in Carmelite monasteries unless morally certain that such life tends to the expansion and growth of the soul along the lines in which God intends the soul to progress.

At first sight, of course, it may seem that to enter the precincts of Carmel is like entering a prison; and, after all, a jail is not, one would imagine, an ideal place for furthering one’s personal development, either of body or soul.

To become a Carmelite nun means cutting oneself off from intercourse with the intellectual world of literature, art and science, and from all the various means of mental expansion which are provided in books, pictures, works of art, architecture, drama, and music.

How can it possibly tend to the expansion of the soul to take such a step?

Moreover, it means also cutting off, to a large extent, the pleasure of affectionate intercourse with one’s relations and intimate friends – the crushing of the heart by denying it the high and holy gratifications which arise from honourable human love.

Yet, see how eagerly Teresa Martin, in spite of her artistic and poetic temperament, in spite of her passionate and tender love for her father and sisters, yearned to be shut up within the Carmelite enclosure – never again to see the happy world whose beauty and charm she so thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed!

The Prisoner of Bethlehem.

We may, perhaps, most easily find an answer to this paradox by turning our eyes to a scene that is a familiar subject of contemplation to every Carmelite nun – the Birth of Christ at Bethlehem.

There in the little country town, whilst bankers and usurers are busy counting their money in Jerusalem, and King Herod is planning new crimes to shield himself against possible rivals, and far away in the West Emperor Augustus is ruling his wide dominions, and Roman legions are tramping all round the Mediterranean – amidst the crash and roar and tumult of Roman civilisation – certain shepherds are speeding along the road to Bethlehem in search of a precious object.

And what do they find? A Woman and her new-born Baby in a stable. That is all.

Yet there, in that sacred stillness, a great world-revolution is being prepared. The whole future of civilisation lies enshrined in that lonely cave on that starry, frosty night.

The shepherds came with haste, for they had seen a heavenly vision and had listened to heavenly music, and their hearts were all aflame to find Him of whom the angels sang so sweetly; they had tasted His fragrance and must needs find Him who is the Source of all sweetness, and what they found was not a rich child, robed in silk, glittering with jewels, cradled in luxury; not the famous and powerful ones of this earth, seated on thrones, wielding a sceptre, issuing words of command to trembling millions. But they found just Mary and Joseph – two simple country folk, stamped with the badge of poverty, the great hallmark of the world's teeming millions. But in the care of these two people, they find the world's Treasure – heaven's most precious Jewel, God's supremest gift to the race – the Child that is a Divine Person.

A Carmelite nun is ever seeking to find Jesus, to taste the sweetness of His Presence, to enjoy His blessed gifts, and also to entertain Him, to offer Him a loving welcome in the midst of a cold, disdainful world, engrossed in its own material affairs.

But the Carmelite contemplative is not merely hungering for her own spiritual ease or enjoyment – she is seeking Jesus and His gifts in order to communicate them to others. Charity and zeal for souls are the very breath of her life.

Carmelite Zeal.

Think of the two great Carmelite women whose interior life is so fully made known to us by their own writings – Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux.

What is it that stamps them both at once as filled with the spirit of Jesus? It is their inexhaustible charity, their insatiable longing to help souls, to relieve misery and distress, to comfort the sorrowing, to rescue those in danger, especially in spiritual danger.

And see how God has answered their prayers in ways beyond their wildest dreams! Since through their writings (in both cases undertaken through obedience) they have exercised such extraordinary influence on the lives of millions of their fellow creatures.

Those writings – the story of their soul experiences – are all instinct with the fire of the love of God, and are the fine fruit of their souls' intimate communing with God; and so they fascinate the world.

For mankind is ever longing to get authentic news of God, and listens enraptured when the true singer and inspired messenger appears.

Had the Carmelite Order done nothing for the world but produce those two saintly women, and enriched it with their writings and their example, then the existence of the Order would be amply justified.

Why Not Lead an Active Life?

Sometimes one hears unkind remarks about Carmelite nuns. Why don't they lead an active life of charity? Why not bestir themselves to help their neighbour? Why shirk the responsibilities of life, of home duties and family ties? Why not help to build up the nation and work for the increase of its material welfare and prosperity?

Such remarks are the outcome and expression of that narrow outlook on life that makes men judge everything by a material standard. But the most precious things in life cannot be so judged or measured.

The world's greatest Thinker spent His time chiefly in teaching simple folk the truth about God and the value of the human soul, and in insisting upon the supreme importance of securing one's eternal salvation. Jesus of Nazareth set little store on this world's goods; nor did He aim at those more intellectual good things which men prize so highly – fame, success, high achievement, the inscribing one's name on the honour-roll of history. He did not directly contribute anything to the advancement of science, commerce, political method, and yet He was the world's supreme Benefactor by giving to it a treasure, which gold and jewels could not buy – namely, the treasure of His own thought.

Christ's Thought.

The Christian revolution was the outcome of Christ's thought leavening the life of the world. And that rich treasure poured so lavishly from the soul of Christ was the result of His soul's intercourse with God.

His human lips spoke truths, which He had learned not from men but from the Eternal Wisdom. "I say to you that we speak what we know and we testify what we have seen." (John 3:11) "He that comes from heaven is above all: and what he has seen and heard, that he testifies." (John 3:32)

Now, it is in a similar way that the Carmelite enriches the world. She does not directly contribute to increase the world's stock of gold, but she does something infinitely better – she keeps it rich with the golden love of God. And here again I appeal to the story of Saint Therese of Lisieux. Her father was wealthy and she could have led a comfortable and elegant life had she chosen to remain in the world. Her love for the beautiful in nature and art could have been gratified to the full.

She might have become a great writer, a great poet, and adorned her country's literature with another illustrious name.

Yet she deliberately turned away from all this, captivated by the beauty of Christ's thought and Christ's ideal, even though she saw clearly that His beckoning finger led to a path that was strewn with thorns.

Therese is an ideal Carmelite. In her, we see what Carmelite methods and principles can produce when they find suitable material to work upon.

And why is it the Order can produce a saint like Therese? Because the Order is filled with the principles of Jesus. This Heavenly Carpenter alone has the secret and the cunning to shape souls to holiness. His thoughts must fructify in those that aim at loving God greatly.

And Carmel is a valuable asset to the world, just because it enshrines and guards so faithfully the thoughts and principles of Jesus of Nazareth.

Guarding His Secret.

You may have heard of families in older countries that guard jealously for centuries the secret of some special process in the manufacture of cloth or dye or machinery or medicine. By means of this secret process, they produce goods very valuable to mankind, and by faithfully preserving this knowledge, they are benefactors of the race.

Well, Carmelites are people who guard carefully the secret of Christ's teaching. They keep His principles in full vigour by shaping their own lives rigorously according to them. And sorely does the world need people like this, since the Christian ideal has to struggle for existence amidst such adverse pagan surroundings.

As a barren desert is hostile to life, so the world is hostile to Christ's principles; and as oases are essential for travellers across the desert, so spiritual oases are necessary in the blinding, sandy wastes of this infidel world to preserve for souls the blessed and nourishing waters of Christ's teaching.

A Carmelite convent is such an oasis. In all the great cities of the world these homes of silence and prayer and penance are found, where religious men and women seek close union with God in prayer, in order thereby to win grace and peace and eternal happiness for their fellow beings.

CHAPTER 4.

“LITTLE FLOWER OF JESUS.”

A flower is beautiful – so exquisitely beautiful that we know nothing to compare it to in this rough world of ours; rather it is the standard of comparison for other beautiful things. To Teresa Martin, with her artistic temperament, a flower was a perfect type of the soul clad in the wedding garment of God's grace.

The soul owes its supernatural beauty to the light and sunshine of grace that stream upon it from God's infinite Being. God is the central sun whose radiant loveliness the soul shares by basking in His presence. Just as the rose needs the material sun for its existence, and without the heat and light of the sun it withers and dies, so the soul must absorb this supernatural light and heat, which it receives from God, and if it is cut off from that light and heat, it, too, withers and dies. Like the flower, the soul cannot weave this garment of beauty for itself. God alone can clothe it.

Teresa Martin reflected that if her soul was a heavenly flower, Jesus was the Gardener to whose care it had been entrusted; consequently, her soul was His flower. His one ambition in her regard was to make the flower grow in grace and loveliness until it should be ripe for transplanting to the gardens of heaven.

Moreover, there is a third quality of an earthly flower that helped to make the simile more complete – namely, that it is so fragile, so weak.

The giant trees of the forest, which have braved the storms of ages, are types of strength, and seemed to her to represent the great apostles and saints of the Church, whose lives of activity have so astonished the world. But she was weak; she could not be like them. Then she noted the little flowers that grew close to the earth beside the great trees; and they seemed to her, in their delicate beauty, types of her soul. And so she called herself the Little Flower of Jesus.

Her Canonisation.

Her canonisation means that the Church, using the teaching authority which Christ gave her, declares by a solemn sentence that Teresa Martin's soul is safe with God; declares that she has attained the end for which God created her, to be happy with Him for ever; that she is a model we can safely imitate, since we know that she has made a success of her life; she has surmounted all obstacles, has passed the final examination, and has been crowned by God.

Surely, nothing ought to interest us so deeply as the news of the final success of a soul in the struggle for life eternal. For this struggle is also our supreme struggle. The business in which Saint Therese succeeded so gloriously is our business; the path she trod is the path we also must follow. Death, which to her was the gate of life, we also must pass through; and we desire that when we pass these dark gates our eyes may rest (as hers did) on the radiant, approving smile of Jesus, our Judge.

Her Fascination.

Now, the attraction, which Saint Therese has for the world, the secret of her fascination, seems to lie largely in this, that she casts around all the stern truths and realities of life and death, of judgment and eternity, the charm of her own beautiful soul and personality.

Down at the root of all the unhappiness of life lies the element of fear. We are voyaging over a stormy sea; life is full of danger for body and soul. The future is uncertain. We seem to be the play-toy of incalculable forces, like sailors afloat on a boisterous ocean in a crazy craft. And looming ahead for each is the black storm cloud of death, that dread experience of which all are terrified.

When, lo! like a radiant vision, this child stands before us with words of grace on her lips, telling us how she conquered fear; how she transformed the sorrows and dangers of life into sources of golden gain for her soul, and how she made friends with Death.

How She Conquered Fear.

For she, too, had been afraid. Her soul, too, had been oppressed with anxiety. But light shone in the darkness, the light of God's own teaching about the value of humility. She opened the Bible and read these words of the Book of Proverbs: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me." (Proverbs 9:4.) She gazed long and lovingly at the arresting scene described in the Gospel where Jesus, holding a little child in His arms, utters this memorable sentence: "Whosoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." A golden sentence that has burned itself into the hearts of mankind!

Jesus came into the world to conquer fear. The world was afraid, because it lay under the shadow of sin, and knew no way of escape. In order to drown fear, men plunged ever deeper into orgies of

dissipation, rushed more madly into the black night of self-indulgence, to escape the anguish of remorse and terror.

God alone could bring relief, and it needed some very drastic method, indeed, to remedy such an appalling and deeply-rooted evil. And this freezing terror that gripped men's souls was the fear of an angry God – the fear of what may befall the soul after death as the result of sin.

Now, if you really fear a person, only one thing can help you to conquer that fear – namely, to be persuaded that this person loves you. We see this in the case of the child. The child shrinks in terror from a stranger, but it is quite happy in its mother's arms, because it knows the mother loves it.

We are God's children, and to remove our fears He must display His affection visibly and sensibly. He must prove that He loves us. To do this was the mission of Jesus Christ.

A Drastic Step.

I have said just now that to conquer our fears God must take some drastic step, must do something that will appeal to us with irresistible force in order to have no doubt about His love, and make us really trust Him. And certainly, He has done something very drastic and far-reaching indeed. The Second Person of the Trinity, the Mind of God, became Man, was born in a stable, came to us as a child, died for us on a cross, and rose from the dead, all to demonstrate the tenderness, the delicacy, the utter unselfishness of His love.

Now, what happened to Teresa Martin was this: She woke up to this great truth of God's love for her soul: she realised deeply that God was her Lover, that her soul was of priceless value to Him, and realising that, she put away fear.

Jesus had cried out: "Become as little children if you would be great with God," and she has shown us how this direction is to be carried out in actual practice.

This, then, is one element in the appeal she makes to mankind: she shows us how love can conquer fear.

Her Charity.

Another element is her wonderful charity. Once she has tasted the sweetness of loving God – once she has discovered this great secret for conquering fear – she is all eagerness to share her treasure with others.

And, behold, this young nun, dying of tuberculosis, in an obscure convent in a remote little town, has a heart as big as the world, and wants to share her happiness with all mankind. And in her distress at her weakness and helplessness, she turns to her Heavenly Lover and asks Him to find a way to realise this seemingly impossible ambition.

Secret of Her Influence.

Now, how did God hear her prayer? What means did He employ to make her influence felt to the very ends of the earth? Chiefly two: First, at the bidding of her Superiors, she wrote the story of her life, the story of God's dealings with her soul, and that narrative became in a wonderfully short space of time one of the world's great books. I think it is safe to say that no spiritual book or life of a saint of modern times has exercised such a widespread influence for good, has been read with spiritual profit by so many people of all nations, as the "History of a Soul," by Soeur Therese of Lisieux.

Through that book the little Carmelite Sister of Lisieux has preached to the world as few missionaries have ever preached; has touched hearts in a way to be paralleled only in the lives of great saints like Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Vincent Ferrer, Saint Bernardine of Siena.

Shower of Roses.

The second means by which God fulfilled her wishes was by granting extraordinary favours on behalf of those for whom she pleaded. The “shower of roses” that has so astonished the world since her death has been the means of drawing all hearts to her, because it has shown the marvellous spirit of charity that filled her soul.

The sorrows of the whole wide world she made her own. Every form of human suffering claimed her sympathy; to every appeal, she turned a ready ear. She is the Sister of Charity of the whole wide world, equally at home assisting soldiers on the battle-fields of France and Flanders, comforting missionaries in the frozen lands of the Esquimaux (the Eskimo, Inuit and Yupik peoples) or in the wilds of Central Africa, coming in person to relieve the wants of a starving religious community in Italy, bringing light and consolation to the Pope in his many anxieties, restoring health to poor sick folk in the last stage of cancer or tuberculosis.

Her charity it is, her marvellous tenderness, her power of loving and showing her love in a practical way by bringing help, that has endeared her to all.

Her Triumph.

And yet how gloriously she has triumphed!

And her triumph, which is so like the triumph of the Risen Christ, is another proof that God’s Hand is with the Catholic Church. For what other body in the world could dare to do what the Church has done in her case? Or, if they dared, could hope for any success in the attempt?

Civil States pile up monuments of bronze or marble to perpetuate their soldiers, statesmen, artists, philanthropists. Men tell with pride the story of David Livingstone, penetrating with missionary zeal into the heart of darkest Africa; of Florence Nightingale moving like an angel of comfort amongst the stricken soldiers of the Crimea; of other benefactors of mankind, whose external activity tells of generous and noble hearts beating within.

But what body in the world, except the Catholic Church, could honour a mere child as the Catholic Church has honoured Saint Therese of Lisieux? In doing this, the Catholic Church is giving actual, palpable evidence of her discernment of the supernatural beauty and qualities of the soul.

The Church, too, honours and praises deeds of valour, lives of patriotism, great external achievements in the cause of humanity. But she alone has the divine instinct to recognise the greatness of humility and of love of God even in a child. She knows that the Carmelite nun in her cell may be as great a benefactor of mankind, may be as powerful an influence for good, as the soldier on the battlefield or the preacher in the pulpit. And the Church knows this because she knows the power of prayer – knows the irresistible might of love for God. And I say to you that this insight, this divine instinct, that makes the Catholic Church hold up for our admiration such lives as that of Saint Therese of Lisieux, is a strong proof that the Catholic Church is God’s Church, since in thus holding up as a model one whose whole life is a living demonstration of Christ’s teaching about humility and the child-like spirit, the Church shows she is still guided by His Spirit, still

animated by His principles, still setting store chiefly upon the supernatural treasures which Jesus told us should alone be the object of our solicitude during our pilgrimage here below.
