

For in the solitudes of your life  
 a blissful solitude with Him opens out  
 full of grace.  
 For He Himself is calling you  
 opening the door for you.  
 Your self-realisation is "to enter  
 with soul wide-open  
 in a surrender of boundless self-dedication  
 to your Creator and Lord,  
 offering Him all your desire and longing  
 and your whole freedom  
 that His Divine Majesty may dispose of you  
 of your person and all you have  
 according to His most holy Will."

For this is "the great universal law:  
 the more entirely a man surrenders to God  
 the more complete his giving  
 his joy in giving  
 to His Divine Majesty  
 the more bounteous shall he find Him in return  
 the more apt will he daily become  
 to receive in full measure  
 the graces and gifts of the Spirit."

"Sacrifice of himself and all that he has  
 to God  
 as though he were a snowflake falling from heaven."

[*To be Continued.*]

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## CARMELITE TRIPTYCH

BY

LANCELOT C. SHEPPARD

Some twenty years ago Pius XI pointed out how important is the rôle of the contemplative in the Church. He said that they who assiduously fulfil the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labour in tilling the Master's field; for unless the former drew down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, the evangelical labourers would reap indeed from their toil a more scanty crop.<sup>(1)</sup> It is true that his words were addressed to cloistered religious,

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(1) Apostolic Constitution *Umbratitem*, Acta Ap. Sedis, xvi, 383.

but they are none the less of universal application.

Signs are not wanting that the truth of the Pope's words is beginning to be understood outside the cloister. It is surely not without significance, too, that Pius XI should, just a year after writing the words quoted above have canonized St Theresa of Lisieux and made her Patroness of Missions, and a year afterwards declared St John of the Cross a Doctor of the Church. St Theresa was a Carmelite nun living in the direct tradition of the two great Carmelite teachers, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, and the Little Way that she describes in her *Histoire d'une âme* interprets to modern readers the essence of the teaching of these Carmelite masters, and points out its application to modern needs and conditions. In this she is important as they in their day, no less than in our own, were important for another reason—namely, that living as they did in full flood of the counter-reformation they yet carried on the traditional in their teaching on the spiritual life and prayer. They were masters, certainly, original therefore, but their doctrine develops and carries forward the traditions of medieval spirituality, and reaches back thus to the early days of Christianity.

If there was one distinctive mark of the old school of spirituality and its exponents it was this: that they held out contemplation as the normal reward of the spiritual life. It is a pity therefore that the helpful spiritual teaching of the older masters of prayer has so often in later years been obscured, and that so many fail to make the fundamental distinction between what may be called that contemplative prayer which comes within the purview of practical life and the extraordinary mystical states which belong to the very few.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the difficulty has been caused, no doubt, by the many controversies, turning to a great extent on nomenclature and classification, among theologians. But not entirely so. It is reassuring to see signs of an awakening interest in these matters, and we may perhaps find that the influence of the Saint of Lisieux counts for much therein. In spite of a very great deal that has been written about her, the reading of what she wrote—the story of her life—shews clearly that her Little Way is still the hard way of the Cross, expressed in very different language. no doubt, but her teaching in substance the same as that of her master St John.

Conditions of modern life call for that teaching and its application with ever increasing urgency; the whole future of religion and its part in the world will depend not so much on external

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(2) Cf. *Western Mysticism* by Dom Cuthbert Butler, O.S.B.

activities—however good they are in themselves—but on all those contemplative souls—monk or nun, priest or layman—who will be that little leaven which shall, please God, leaven the whole.

For such reasons as these Mr Sencourt's <sup>3</sup> and Miss Sackville-West's <sup>4</sup> books seemed opportune at the present time. Particularly does the idea of a framed portrait of St John of the Cross arouse interest—a portrait with the background fully painted in, not so as to distract from the main subject, but as an explanation of the man, the friar and the saint of sixteenth century Spain. For St John of the Cross has been so often woefully misunderstood—from Huysmans in *La Cathédrale* with his *un savant et un saint qui n'avait aucun sentiment de l'art . . .* to Miss Sackville-West's "there was an element of pantheism in him."

It is, therefore, all the more unfortunate that *Carmelite and Poet* does not live up to one's expectation of it. In great part, for the events of St John's life and their sequence, it follows the monumental work by Fr Bruno, O.D.C., *St John of the Cross* (London, 1932), a translation of the first French edition with additional matter by the late Fr Benedict Zimmerman, O.D.C. This was the first satisfactory life of St John of the Cross, and is based on all the available documents; in following it it would seem that Mr Sencourt could hardly err. Yet err he does. From many instances one may cite the account of St John's clothing and profession (he seems to have "telescoped" the two clear accounts in Bruno) his life as a Carmelite, and the episode of the Saint's imprisonment at Toledo.

The escape from the prison in the Carmelite priory at Toledo he all but denudes, whether by compression or intentionally, of any element of the miraculous. He is, of course, entitled to do this, but since he refers us to Bruno for his facts readers also are entitled to know his reasons for differing from his authority. In treating this important episode in St John's life, while he describes in almost too lurid detail the hardships the Saint underwent, he fails to bring out clearly the facts underlying the case. It was a question of a conflict of jurisdiction, and both parties acted in good faith, but the Calced, however abhorrent to modern sentiment is their treatment of St John, seem to have kept generally within the letter of the law against rebels in Bl. John Soreth's Constitutions of 1462: *de contumacibus et rebelli-*

(3) Robert Sencourt: *Carmelite and Poet. A framed portrait of St John of the Cross with his poems in Spanish.* (Hollis and Carter, 15s. 0d.).

(4) V. Sackville-West: *The Eagle and the Dove. A Study in Contrasts.* (Michael Joseph, 10s. 6d.).

*bus et se erigentibus contra majores et officia.* When this is known (and it is clearly stated in Bruno, and by Fr Benedict Zimmerman in his edition of *The Book of Foundations by St Teresa*—London, 1913) it shows the whole question in an entirely different light.

Mr Sencourt concludes his account of St John's escape "(St John) found refuge with Santa Teresa's nuns at San José. . . . Here he remained two months." The only authority for this statement, given at the foot of the page, is "Bruno, pp. 180-190." Reference to these pages shews, however, that St John left the convent that same night. The nuns were able, fortunately, to admit him to the enclosure for a short time—but long enough to evade those who were searching for him—because one of the nuns who was ill wanted to go to confession. Having heard her confession he went into the church (outside the enclosure) where he spent the rest of the day until evening, when he went to the hospital of *Santa Cruz*.

One would hardly expect to find words of praise for Nicholas Doria in a life of St John of the Cross; anyone who wonders, however, whether all of Mr Sencourt's harsh epithets are justified, should read the relevant pages in Bruno.

The chapter "What English literature explains" (chapter 20) is, to say the least, misleading. One feels that a sharper distinction should have been drawn between Christian and non-Christian mysticism, for the comparisons proposed to us are capable of unfortunate interpretation to the reader who is not prepared to ponder.<sup>5</sup> We are told in another part of the book of St John's attachment to the Church and the Mass; such a statement concerning one whom the Church has declared a Doctor would seem unnecessary had not the author written what he has on page 200-1. It is untrue that St John's works do not mention the Mass, yet Mr Sencourt has to put the statement in italic.

*Carmelite and Poet* is not easy reading. We are continually made to pause and wonder whether the author really meant to say what he has written: on page 22, for example, he speaks of "the solemn office of the Eucharist, in which Bread and wine were offered to God, that by making them holy He might change them till by mystery they became to those that received them the very Body, the very Blood, the very soul and power of Christ himself." From other passages in the book we know that Mr Sencourt understands the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist,

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(5) Surely if he needed an authority for the fact "that valid mystical experience is given to others than the conscious and deliberate contemplative Christian" Mr Sencourt could have found better than the Anglican monk he quotes on page 211.

but such statements as the one quoted are unfortunate.

The description of St John's times and country provide much that is often wanting in the lives of the saints: but it is accompanied by the habit (irritating to one reader at least) of giving everyone a Spanish handle to their name. St John appears throughout as Fray Juan de la Cruz, St Teresa is Madre Teresa (when she is not Santa Teresa). The many errors and the consistent writing for effect spoil this life of St John; it is called a framed portrait, but the frame is so thoroughly baroque that our view of St John is distorted by it.

*The Eagle and the Dove* is a study of St Teresa of Avila and her namesake of Lisieux. Miss Sackville-West has succeeded in drawing a life-like portrait of St Teresa; with St Theresa of Lisieux she is less successful. One feels that she is trying hard to understand her subject, yet a certain (forgivable perhaps) repugnance to the whole style of the *Histoire d'une âme* makes constant war with the author's good intentions. Miss Sackville-West provides, none the less, the key to some of those things which are likely to repel one type of mind not only in the life of St Theresa of Lisieux, but in the whole of the popular literature concerning her. She tells us that St Theresa was the daughter of a French provincial jeweller in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Whatever her teaching the style of it naturally reflects her age and circumstances.

Miss Sackville-West is inclined, it seems, to make too much of the intricacies and multitudinous distinctions of mystical theology: it would have been better perhaps had she mastered some of them. She would not then have declared that St Theresa of Lisieux was no true mystic. She says that "S. Thérèse practically re-invented the doctrine of Carmel for herself." It is true, of course, that before she became a nun Thérèse Martin had begun to "set herself a rule of life entirely consonant with St John's and St Teresa's precepts of love and abnegation . . ." but it should be borne in mind that in addition to St Teresa's works, some of which Miss Sackville-West allows she had heard in the refectory, St Theresa of Lisieux tells us in her autobiography "I have received much spiritual light through the works of St John of the Cross, and at the age of seventeen and eighteen they were my only spiritual food." The book, in fact, illustrates the difficulty a non-Catholic has in understanding the depths of the Catholic spirit; despite her good intentions the authoress is just out of tune.

Miss Sackville-West, with some justice, compares the Little Way of St Theresa to a lane by-passing the main road to heaven, though she makes it clear that it is still the way of the Cross.

St John of the Cross has left us an autograph drawing in which he, too, shews us the way to heaven: the narrow direct route is the hardest, but still the quickest, for it is the road of Nothingness. It is to this road that St Theresa of Lisieux directs us and labels it her Little Way.

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## OUR CLAIMS FOR MERCY AND JUSTICE

BY

LUIS OF GRANADA, O.P.

*Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey*

What love can be compared with this, that Thou, seeing that I was condemned to burn in eternal flames, moved by the compassion of Thy heart, shouldst descend from heaven to the prison of this world and taking the likeness of a sinner, shouldst stand in my place and be sentenced to death for my debts? What plea of charity urged Thee so far, and was to urge Thee much farther, were it needful?

O Jesus, our Redemption, our Love and our whole desire, what was the pity that moved Thee to take such a burden on Thee? How could I not love Him who showed me such clear testimonies of His intense love? He would be more senseless than the beasts, more cruel than tigers, harder than the rocks and iron, who would not let himself be conquered by such love.

Not only our love but our confidence is strengthened by this blessing. For how should I not hope for grace and glory and forgiveness of my sins when I have such payment and such a Paymaster, who came forth from the presence of God for them. If it was just that the innocent should be so punished and the treasure should be so cheapened because He wished to pay the debts of sinners, would it not be just that the guilty, for whom He paid, should be delivered from their evil doings and justified before God? Would it be right for justice to enter the house of the saint who owed nothing and execute on him such a terrifying rigour of justice and yet not have the mercy to visit the guilty, release him from his misdeeds and free him from penalties? It is more marvellous that God should be judged, condemned, publicly disgraced, and should die on the cross than that His enemy should be treated as a friend, and the traitor adopted as son after he had repented of his past treachery and turned to God; and since the greater action has been performed there is no reason for doubting of the lesser.

Arouse Thy mercy, then, O Lord, and show clemency to the guilty, since justice arose and showed its harshness to the innocent, for though sinners do not deserve mercy on their own