

LISIEUX—INSIDE

BY

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WE walked steadily down the long, straight road, a Roman road no doubt, from La Pommeray where we had been to attend the 'peasants Mass' at the little hamlet in the apple country up above Lisieux. We had heard the new vernacular *messe des Paysans* sung by the J.A.C. (*Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne*—Young Catholic Farmers). Only the creed was in Latin. At the offertory we saw a procession such as is suggested in Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei*. A young man came in with a cross made up from ears of freshly harvested wheat (it was Sunday, August 7th, and the patronal feast of this church of St Lawrence was being kept), then another followed with a model of a chalice and hosts outlined upon it, then a third came in with a bunch of grapes in a bag. Here was the peasants' sacrifice, and they sang from the *Messe des Paysans* a beautiful offertory litany to a Gregorian litany chant. 'We offer our work, our joy and sorrow to God . . . the song of our angelus . . . the rippling of our corn . . . the procession of the seasons . . . the scent of the earth . . . the quiet peace of our evenings . . . our sweaty labours . . . our tired bodies . . . our sufferings . . . our dreams, our freedom, our hopes', and so on, each a sacrifice offered in union with the priest as he offered the bread and wine at the altar. After this there was the traditional circulation amongst the congregation of some new bread just blessed, and we each ate a little. And then a newly married couple coming round collecting a dowry from their village.

The church was crowded, the mayor of the commune was there, the Curé preached on the Sunday gospel. The J.A.C. consisted of about 20 young men and women dressed simply and alike; some of them went to Communion; one of the girls played the harmonium. At the epistle and gospel a girl read out the text in French. The preface and the pater noster were recited in French by a young man. After the Mass they sold *La Croix* and *Jeunesse Rurale*; and there were cakes and fruit on sale in the churchyard, and cigarettes. Later in the day there was to be Vespers and then country dancing etc.

Now we were walking the two and a half miles back to Lisieux, a little late for the twelve o'clock meal. We were met by the proprietress on the doorstep, wondering if we had gone off to the

seaside (Deauville) for the day. She said her daughter was *désolé* at not seeing us in our usual place at dinner. We sat down to a meal much of which came from the locality, beef and cheese, cider and fruit. It was a good meal as ever, and we needed it, having been to early Mass at the Carmel and started out again for La Pommeray immediately after our coffee and rolls, a three miles climb out of the basin in which Lisieux is situated—lengthened by taking the wrong way. All the time cars and buses passed us tooting endlessly on their way to the seaside—the world off to enjoy itself and each other, and enjoy the sun and the sea. It was hot and we were glad to reach the church and sit down on the wooden benches. Back in the hotel later we were tired; but we were seeing a side of Lisieux not seen by the pilgrims.

Every day at the Carmel the pilgrims proceed endlessly in and out—up to the shrine of St Teresa and away again, some fervent, some curious, some hardly knowing how to genuflect, rich and poor. (All the time we were there a working man in poor clothes sat by the shrine in the evenings praying, reminding one of St Benedict Joseph Labre.) Then the pilgrims go up to the vast new basilica with its great dome and its strains of Indian and Egyptian motifs in the architecture and its quite good stained glass; it stands like a great birthday cake over the town. They buy some mementos from the incredible bazaars of pious objects. And they go.

Lisieux goes on; and the prayer and simplicity of St Teresa go on—still there at the Carmel in poverty of spirit in the midst of the world, reminding us in spite of the somewhat contradictory basilica a little of similar apparent contradictions of St Francis's spirit. Her work goes on too, her own missionary work, her work for priests of which she spoke so often in her life. The new *Mission de France* has its headquarters and seminary established at Lisieux under her patronage. This is a seminary for secular clergy established by the French bishops to meet the many special circumstances of today. Some parts of France have suffered severely from what they call being 'de-Christianised'. In parts six out of ten people are not even baptised, we were told by Canon Augros, the Superior of the seminary, who has described its aims in some detail in a booklet, *La Mission de France* (Edition des Annales de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux, 33 rue de Carmel, Lisieux, Calvados, France). During our stay in Lisieux we were honoured by an interview with him. All he said is best summed up in some words from *Rise or Decline of the Church*, the great pastoral letter of the late Cardinal Suhard, who is regarded personally as the inspiration behind the Mission. He wrote: 'The Christian does not choose his method; it

is imposed on him by the environment of which he is part, and it is the action of the heaven'.

This is the conception which inspires the seminary as it sends out priests in groups to dioceses all over France; some to work in factories, thus forming a Christian cell in the midst of those whose loss to the Church Pius XI so deplored (these offer Mass in the evening and are building up the Church, in a way from the beginning, in conditions where she has hardly penetrated before); others go to the ports; others go into the country, working in groups of say six or nine over a considerable area, re-Christianising the country in places where there has been no parish priest for many years. These meet, once a week or so, and discuss their problems, report successes and failures. It is emphasised that this is no new religious order. It is the ordinary secular priesthood working as missionaries under the French bishops for the conversion of a pagan society.

Everywhere in Lisieux the Mission was spoken well of. A freemason to whom we spoke was obviously baffled, he assured us that they were all Marxists; he was the librarian and they came to borrow books from him! Thus in Lisieux the seminarists prepare themselves for their work. They work in self-governing groups, deciding how much study and how much manual work they will do and at what times etc. They penetrate everywhere in this town which was a stronghold of Protestantism many years ago, and more lately of anti-religious radical socialism. They play in the town football team; they go to the State youth club (not usually frequented by Catholics); they do manual work, building etc., and they visit the sick.

The new mayor of the town is a young M.R.P. man, and he discussed all these things with us. We told him of our experience at La Pommeray and he illustrated the present experimental nature of the vernacular liturgy we had heard by telling us that at another nearby parish the priest insisted on having the prayers read out in French, and the people were *furieux*. The old early Gothic cathedral is still the centre of the town. Here each day in the lady chapel where St Teresa used to go to mass we took part in a dialogue mass. The other principal parish church was half destroyed in the Allied bombardment which wiped out the entire centre of the town in order to block the retreat of the Germans. (The preservation of the Carmel, the Mission, the basilica and the cathedral is attributed to the protection of St Teresa.) But already the masons are at work rebuilding the Gothic church, copying the tracery work of their medieval forbears; for this, the central Government gives generous

grants as it comes under the heading *beaux arts*. Meanwhile a fine building has gone up beside it, a big hall (temporarily the parish church) and presbytery, this to be used later as a community centre.

Here then at Lisieux we see a ferment of religious activity and zeal which may serve to inspire similar work elsewhere. We suggest no slavish copying of detailed methods. St Teresa's spirit was ever one of great freedom. And Canon Augros kept insisting to us that no set way of life or set answers were laid down for the work of the Mission. Everything depended on circumstances and the problem to be solved.

The key lies in the dictum of Cardinal Suhard already quoted. To determine whether in England we could benefit from some similar organisation of priests trained for inter-diocesan work and for special apostolates we have to ask: are there parts of society in England which have on the one hand become largely 'de-Christianised' and which on the other hand cannot be reached by the ordinary Parish Priest? And are there men who feel a call to a vocation to re-Christianise England as priests but who are unable to find a fulfilment of their vocation in the existing seminaries, or in the religious orders?



REVIEWS

THE CITY OF GOD. By John H. S. Burleigh. (Nisbet; 12s.6d.)

In this publication of the Croall lectures for 1944 Professor Burleigh makes no claim to put a new interpretation on St Augustine's teaching. Taking *De Civitate Dei* as representing St Augustine's most mature thought he provides an introduction and commentary in six substantial chapters which sketch the background and philosophy from which St Augustine wrote, outlining St Augustine's teaching on Scripture, the Incarnation and the Church, and lastly a chapter is devoted to a subject peculiarly St Augustine's own, the philosophy of history. Professor Burleigh is equipped with a knowledge of the classics and a familiarity with Greek and Roman philosophy which are indispensable for such work. In addition the book is marked by a scholarly detachment equally indispensable. Some readers may regret that this detachment can go so far as to quote writers as distinct as Harnack and Gilson with apparent indifference. When conclusions are drawn they are frequently informative and shrewd, as for instance on page 55 where a distinction is made between problem of evil and problem of sin in what has been called St Augustine's Manicheism, and again on page 192 there is a valuable remark about the significance of the Incarna-