

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SAINT. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX. Translated by Ronald Knox. (Harvill Press; 21s.)

It might be said that two movements of piety meet and focus interest in this book. Here at last the English-speaking devotee of St Thérèse can hear her tell her story as she herself originally set it down in those twopenny notebooks the Lisieux Carmel provided for the purpose. But he will also hear her in a translation into his own native tongue which has an appeal of its own as being the last book that one who has a special place in the affections of the Catholic community in England completed before his death last year.

The critical notices in English periodicals which marked the appearance of the facsimile edition of St Thérèse's writings in 1956 will have made sufficiently familiar the literary and diplomatic history of *L'Histoire d'une Ame* and the advantages for scientific hagiography of the publication of the authentic documents. The general reader for whom the present handsome volume is intended will for his part rejoice to find the Thérèse he meets in these pages both reassuringly the same as and refreshingly different from the Little White Flower of her sister Pauline's (Mother Agnes) famous original edition. Mother Agnes indeed in her work as editor, considering the period and the circumstances, produced what is now shown to be a minor triumph in distilling the essence both of Thérèse's personality and doctrine. The millions who made *The Story of a Soul* a best-seller for some fifty years have not been deluded, as regards the main lines at least, in their picture of the Saint, and they will remain grateful to it now that its day is done. But now Thérèse herself takes over in this new authentic edition which will no doubt have a success as great as, and more lasting than the old. For here the Saint who has always been admired and loved becomes delightfully alive as the details of her picture are filled in with her own accents, her own turns of phrase and above all her own expansiveness: *The Autobiography of a Saint* is nearly half as long again as *The Story of a Soul*. The calm and peace which, as the fruits of her little way, so marked Thérèse, and to which she frequently refers ('I assure you that there is nothing overstrained about the attitude of my soul; that is all calm and peace'), did not spell out a flat, dull, ironed-out, restrained personality. These happy pages reveal that these characteristic supernatural qualities of hers enjoyed a truly peaceful co-existence with her own natural traits and gifts which included, as Mgr Vernon Johnson points out in his Foreword to this book, a lively vein of humour.

The way St Thérèse produced the three writings that together form her autobiography sets problems for any translator. One's antecedent apprehension is all the greater when the translator is a literary figure

of importance in his own right. Ronald Knox has come to grips with his task with characteristic boldness. But his most ardent admirers who have always been somewhat puzzled by the ambiguous reception of his major work of translation may be largely reassured. After all, as Mgr Knox was so ruefully aware, the Bible is a special case, and to set about translating it is the easiest way of asking for trouble. On the other hand, one might also have wondered whether the years of intense labour devoted to the Bible might not have made the change of key required for St Thérèse too exacting a task. And indeed in the third paragraph of this book one hears a familiar echo in one of those inversions so characteristic of the Knox 'O.T.' style. But this proves to be, practically speaking, but a final flourish, a last farewell to an ancient theme. And throughout, her English translator accommodates himself admirably and triumphantly to the familiarity, the intimacy, and at times the chattiness of Thérèse. Perhaps the wartime Aldenham conferences to that unexpected congregation of school-girls, which punctuated the translation of the Old Testament and in which Ronald Knox so loyally entered into the world of his listeners, played their part in keeping his hand in for this his last work.

The division into chapters in this English edition is the translator's. Making such divisions is always a tricky business; but it would, I think, be a fair criticism to say that in the first and major section of the book Thérèse's own division of her life into four parts to which Père François de Sainte-Marie, O.C.D., the editor of *Manuscrits autobiographiques*, drew attention, has here been slightly obscured. An error on the first page of Père François's Introduction to this English edition should also be noted. As is made clear from what follows, the notebook to Mother Marie de Gonzagues was begun on June 3, 1897 (not 1896), and completed not in September but in the early days of July of the same year.

RONALD TORBET, O.P.

ART IN CRISIS. By Hans Sedlmayr. (Hollis and Carter; 35s.)

The writer of this book, who is Professor of Art at the University of Munich, takes his cue from the idea (first put forward by René Huyghé) that 'Art is for the story of human societies what the dreams of an individual are to a psychologist'. Taking 1700 (that is, the end of the Baroque) as his starting point, he sketches subsequent Art History, picking out certain recurring motifs and enthusiasms which seem to him to be signs of advancing madness, if not of diabolic possession. It is a tempting thesis. 1700 marks the end of the Baroque; it marks also (or is reputed to mark) the loss of belief and the rise of secular thinking. It was to be expected, surely, that this would lead to a psychological