

height which in the mass-mind it is desecrating.

The saint whose aspiration was to be ignored, unknown, forgotten, has blazoned out into a world-wide flame and in the process of her glorification has paid the price of all such popularity. We cannot doubt that she pays that price gladly 'for the salvation of souls' that has gone with it, through it, or in spite of it—who can say?

She herself is 'trodden underfoot' more painfully than in the oblivion she aspired to, but her charity is without any doubt sufficient to sanctify this further sacrifice.

'SO LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN'

A MEDITATION ON MATTHEW 5:16 UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF ST THERESE

BY

H. C. GRAEF



HE who called himself the Light of the World said to those who followed him: 'So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven'—and from that day to this the light has been shining in the hearts of men.

What exactly is this light that shines in the disciples of our Lord, that, very near our own time, shone with such splendour in the great little saint of Lisieux? Though Jesus calls it 'your light', it is not a light that is ours by the very fact that we are human beings, as is our memory, our reason or our will; it is something that we have received in a very special way, for it is the divine gift of faith. And this light of faith that is in us our Lord bids us not to hide under a bushel but to let it shine.

It seems an easy command. When a man has been given a beautiful thing he quite naturally loves to show it to others. Yes; but there is a wrong way of showing it. The Pharisees, too, had received great gifts: zeal for the Law of God, for the purity of their religion, for austerity of life; and they lost no opportunity of showing them to men. Yet our Lord severely rebuked them. For though they had received much light, it was not the Light they caused to shine—it was their own little achievements which they 'showed off'. Our Lord means something very different when he tells us to let our light shine. Light, indeed, shines of itself; its very essence is to shine—but only if it be not obscured by a dark object blocking its passage. If we place it under a bushel, the light will *not* shine.

There is something in us fallen men that corresponds precisely to this bushel, and that is our self-will. The light of faith may indeed be in us—but there are all our sins, our imperfections, our hundred little pettinesses and self-indulgences—and we are, maybe, surprised that our faith seems to be so little ‘contagious’, that it has no influence on others—in fact, that our light does not shine at all. Now our Lord tells us to let it shine; he actually commands us to do so. We cannot *make* it shine—that it does of itself; the work *we* have to do consists in removing the obstacles. There is no better teacher to show us how to get rid of them than St Thérèse. Her whole short life was spent in making a relentless war on her faults. Picture a pretty little girl, almost spoilt by an affectionate well-to-do middle-class family, easily given to romantic dreams and tears of self-pity—surely, humanly speaking, rather unsuitable material from which to fashion a Saint. But she had the light in her which we all have received in Baptism, and gradually all the obstacles that prevented it from shining were removed.

On that Christmas night of 1886, from which she dates her ‘complete conversion’, the Lord gave her the grace once and for all to overcome her childish sensitiveness, which made her cry on the most trifling occasions. From that time she went from strength to strength, eagerly seizing every occasion to renounce herself, until ‘little by little’, as she herself writes, ‘self-sacrifice became easy’, and the light was ready to shine before men.

But, it might be asked, does not this mean to go out into the highways and there to proclaim the faith? It certainly can mean that, if a soul has this particular vocation, as a St Dominic, St Francis, or St Catherine had it. But it need not necessarily mean that. If we let our light shine, that is, if we live to the full the life of faith, God himself will see to it that it illumines others. To the eyes of the world a Carmelite Convent is the very last place in which to let the light shine before men—thin voices behind a shuttered grille, long hours of prayer alternating with unexciting work, the fasts and disciplines of about fifteen to twenty women known only to a few relatives and friends—could a life shine less before men than theirs? It is our work to let the light shine—but it is God’s to make it known to men. Most of such hidden lives will, indeed, shine before men only in heaven; but from time to time God selects one and places it on a tall candlestick as he did that of St Thérèse, so that it may give light to the whole household of the faith and even to those outside it. ‘that they may see your good works’.

Good works—it is a word that Protestants have disliked ever since Luther inveighed against the ‘Werkgerechtigkeit’ (justice through

works) and proclaimed his *sola fide*. But it is our Lord himself, not only St James, whose Letter Luther called an 'epistle of straw', who enjoins good works. The metaphor of the light and its connection with the works is perhaps even more deeply understood in our days than when these words were first uttered. For light both is and produces energy. So also the light of faith that is in us, unless its activity be hindered through our own fault, must be productive. As the sun necessarily gives warmth, colour and life, so a living faith will necessarily blossom forth into good works; for, as St James says, faith without works is dead; it contains no productive energy.

These works, without which faith is dead, need not be big works; only very few are called to found Orders or effect large-scale conversions. To support an old nun on her way to the refectory, to smile sweetly at a disagreeable Sister, to endure patiently a painful illness—these were the good works of Sœur Thérèse, in which some of her own Sisters in Religion could find very little to admire. What, then, made them so precious in the sight of God? If we read her Life carefully we shall be struck by the extraordinary purity of intention with which she offered even the smallest actions of her daily life to her heavenly Spouse. She fulfilled to the letter St Paul's injunction: 'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God'. Our most insignificant occupations, even down to such natural necessities as eating, drinking, sleeping, can be wholly transfigured by supernatural charity.

For the text we are considering reaches its climax in its last words: 'and glorify your Father who is in heaven'. This is the test by which we can judge whether our works are really the flowering of the supernatural life of faith in our souls or just natural activities: whether or not they make God known to others and lead men to glorify him. If they have this effect, then they are truly 'good' works; but if they accrue only to our own fame, we may be sure that they are purely natural—or even worse.

The works of the Saints point away from themselves to God. One day St Thérèse looked at a heavy sheaf bending under the weight of its grains. 'This ear of corn', she said, 'is the image of my soul, which God has laden with graces for me and for many others, and it is my ardent desire to bend always under the weight of his gifts, and so to acknowledge that all comes from him'.

This, perhaps, is the greatest work of the Saints, their perfect self-effacement, which makes it possible for them to say: 'No longer I, but Christ in me'. Then is God's glory their glory, and their glory is his, and the priestly prayer has found its fulfilment: 'In this is my Father glorified: that you bring forth very much fruit'.