

upon the character which they have previously formed than on the years of labour that they put into life. Patiently, quietly should a man fashion and temper that sole real tool with which all that he does is finally achieved. The only thing or person on which he can always depend is himself; on himself, then, above all, must he concentrate. The preacher, the organiser, the administrator, is such in virtue of his own soul; because he has learnt to control himself, he can hope to control others; because he can set in order the household of his heart, he may dream of arranging in due and precise relation the affairs and work of others; only if he has found the way to God can he dare venture to lead others in the same pathway, since only he knows whither it leads. Only a man who has built carefully his character may hope one day to build the world "nearer to the heart's desire."'

BERNARD DELANY, O.P.

SCHOOLS OF HOLINESS

III

ST. BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS

Star differeth from star in glory, says St. Paul, and we are well accustomed to variations, amounting sometimes almost to contradictions, in style and type and expression of holiness as exhibited by the lives of those whom the Church has officially pronounced to be saints, to be persons, that is, who are proved to have practised the Christian virtues—not on occasional impulse, but with such regularity as fairly deserves to be called habitual—in a heroic degree: in a degree (that means) which is conspicuously above what is recognized as constituting a normally good life. But even with this preparation one is scarcely ready to accept Bernadette of Lourdes as a saint, for at first sight (and perhaps increasingly with further acquaintance) her life presents

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itself to us as so remarkably devoid of the features demonstrably common to all the other saints known to us, that it is a real difficulty to associate her with them. A well-known authority on this subject, whose judgment and critical ability meet with respect in all quarters, has given it as his considered opinion that 'in all the annals of sanctity it would be hard to find the counterpart of the history of Bernadette Soubirous': for, he continues, 'she did nothing out of the common, she said nothing memorable, she gathered no followers around her, she had in the ordinary sense no revelations, she did not prophesy or read men's secret thoughts, she was remarkable for no great austerities or striking renunciations or marvellous observance of rule or conspicuous zeal for souls . . . and yet she is to be proclaimed a saint . . . and for all future time, as long as this earth shall last, the Holy Sacrifice will be offered in her honour, and petitions will be addressed to her to intercede with God, the common Father of us all, to bless the creatures who are the work of His hands.'

Heroic virtue has always been associated in our minds with just such manifestations as here are truly stated to have had no place in her story, and one cannot help wondering how, then, she can have possessed what seems in no way to have revealed itself in her words or actions and, therefore, as it appears, in no way to have influenced them?

But, indeed, not with Bernadette alone, but with other saints too, one suspects at times that these outward manifestations that seem to us to be the very stuff of their sanctity may in fact obscure rather than reveal the secret of it: may perhaps stand towards it in something of the same relation that the vocal or instrumental rendering of a musical theme does to the inner *motif* of which it is the only feasible, perhaps, but not really the inevitable and essential expression. Words are, as experience so often proves, but a clumsy vehicle of utterance of the 'word' in one's mind: and it may be that audible music (even though we be unable to conceive of any other kind) is just as awkward a medium for the expression of musical reality. What if the circumstances of Bernadette's life were such that her humi-

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lity for instance, was already expressed and guaranteed by them? That her heroic readiness to do or to suffer whatsoever God might demand of her had no wider scope than the gentle bearing with such trivial occasions as occur to the most ordinary persons in daily life whether in the world or in the cloister : that her charity had no larger field for its exercise than in silence and obedience and cheerfulness under the irritating, but still not intolerable, curiosity of strangers or the nagging of a ' commonsense ' Reverend Mother : that her patience (the root of all virtue) had no greater strain put upon it than to bear with the importunities of well-meaning but inconsiderate admirers? It might be, then, that the essential sainthood, truly hers, had no more adequate instrument for its expression than these very narrow opportunities, which though they detracted from its appearance did not affect its reality or its heroism. One might find a parallel in the case of an artist with nothing but inferior materials to work with, or of a statesman with only the affairs of a village to administer. It will be enough if we can find in her life evidence that this was indeed so, and that only by force of circumstances which were not her own responsibility did her reach so limit her grasp.

The life-story of Bernadette (she was christened ' Bernadette,' but from the first was always known by this affectionate diminutive) is short, and except for the great event of the Apparitions of Our Lady (the whole eighteen were comprised within a bare two months) was entirely devoid of unusual incident. She was born on January 7th, 1844, when Louis-Philippe was on the throne of France, and the first Apparition took place on February 11th, 1858, when she was fourteen, undersized, weakly, speaking the Lourdais *patois* and not yet able to read or write French. Her parents, feckless and incompetent by nature, but good Catholics according to their lights, rapidly muddled away the small property with which they had started their married life, and for several years before Bernadette had the first of her visions they had been living in the utmost poverty in a hut which had formerly been the gaol of the little town. They had barely the necessary furniture, and

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never a sufficiency of food. It is said that sometimes the children would pick wax from the church candles at funerals and other solemn functions, and chew it to allay their hunger. They used to go about the town and the surrounding roadways and fields searching for bits of old iron, rags, bones and suchlike refuse, for which they would get a very few sous from a *chiffonière* of their acquaintance, and so add a little to their miserably meagre provision. Bernadette as the eldest, but also because she had that instinct for leadership which is so often the obverse of the talent for service, directed all these little expeditions, and in many ways supplied towards her sisters and her brother for the neglect of their slatternly mother. But there were days when she was helpless under the agonizing suffocation of asthma, from which she suffered at intervals all her life through. She was no prodigy: indeed, the consensus of contemporary opinion is that, intellectually at least, she was more than ordinarily dull—she could not learn her Catechism, for instance! But all who knew her at that time were agreed that she was quite markedly gentle, with the brave pitiful gentleness of those who know suffering—the patient, helpless suffering of the very poor—from their own experience, and are not embittered but rather sweetened and ennobled by it.

Still, to make her out to be a saint at this period of her life would surely be extravagant. She was a brave little girl doing her best, with everything against her: and her best was very small. Yet who may dare say that in God's eyes, with Whom there is no boundary of big or little or time or number or space, *anything* can be small? The bigger one is the less one is conscious of distinctions between things less than oneself, so that it is not difficult to understand that God reckons all things not by their size or importance (as we estimate these) but by their intentions, within their limits: and that a thimble-full may be as vast as an ocean, and accomplishment be no more complete than effort.

Then came the Apparitions. One is conscious of an impression of incongruity and more than ordinary strange-

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ness when one reads of them. For, first, the circumstances of the original appearance were entirely unfavourable to the expectation of any such thing, and Bernadette herself did not so much as suspect that it was Our Lady whom she saw—she said ‘a girl, not bigger than myself’; further, in her account of what she saw, repeated again and again to a host of questioners, she never varied from her primitive statements, though her descriptions of Our Lady’s features, dress, and attitude were quite out of harmony with what must have seemed most natural to her from the type of ‘pious picture’ then (and, alas, now too!) in popular vogue. It will be remembered that when a number of images of Our Lady (some of them accepted as unquestionably ‘good’) were shown to her for recognition, she rejected them all, sometimes with exclamations of horror, but gave a distinct measure of approval to a copy of the very ancient Byzantine Madonna attributed by legend to St. Luke, which no doubt the good people who were examining her thought at best ‘quaint,’ even if not altogether repulsive. This quite uncultured village child knew, without knowing how she knew or anything else about it, that true art does not mean the accurate presentation of the body of a thing but the faithful interpretation of its soul. And here one may fancy that one sees the earliest indication in her of the heroism to which her canonization has now testified—heroism, at least in the philosophical sense of being conspicuously beyond the ordinary.

Again, heroism is most nobly exhibited in constancy, and the constancy of this poor little half-starved, ailing, defenceless child, standing up to the alternate threats and cajolery, the menaces and flattery of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and to the stupid if well-meaning efforts of pious sensationalists to get her to elaborate her simple narrative of what she had seen into something more consonant with their conception of what she *ought* to have seen, profoundly stirs one’s admiration. She would not concede a point to such insinuations, nor on the other hand would she go back upon any of her original statements, and she clearly preferred to say nothing at all about her experiences

and in fact never did so except under question. Nor, for all her poverty and the hardness of the life which she had to endure, would she ever accept the smallest gift of money or anything else, and her determination in this matter influenced her family to follow her inflexible example.

One is bewildered by the spectacle on the one hand of the commotion occasioned by the recent events, and on the other by the perfect balance and calmness of her who was the centre of it all. The townspeople, the clergy, the police, the legislature, the army itself were set in motion, all because Bernadette Soubirous, aged fourteen, had said, and stood by it, that she had seen 'a white girl, not bigger than myself' in a cave on the rocky bank of the Gave: and that later, when at the command of the Curé she had asked the Apparition to say who she was, the answer had been, 'I am the Immaculate Conception'—words adapted to the comprehension of the child, who, no doubt, had heard without very much understanding of the Definition of December 8th, 1854.

Then she was sent to school, where she learnt next to nothing, not because she did not want to but because she simply could not. One remembers that the Curé d'Ars was ordained priest though the extent of his knowledge of theology was little more than that he loved God. In 1859 she was sent by the doctors to take the waters at Cauterets, and then returned to Lourdes, to the Convent of the Sisters of Nevers, as a sort of boarder under observation, until in 1866 the petition which two years earlier she had made to be received into their Community was granted, and she left her home for ever on July 29th. On April 16th, 1879, she died, being then three months over thirty-five years of age.

It will be seen that Bernadette's life, apart from the Apparitions which occupied such a small fraction of it, presents none of the features which custom has led us to expect in the lives of the saints. Yet, in fact, the one essential element of all sanctity reveals itself, on examination, in every detail of it. For heroism is not dependent upon, or specified by, the magnitude of the occasions in which it manifests itself, and, studied closely, her life assumes no less than

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veritably heroic proportions. There can have been little flaw, and little that was merely ordinary, in the character of one who without any gifts of nature or of training was able by sheer heroic truth and simplicity to escape the multiple snares and pitfalls that beset her. The most famous shrine in the Christian world, an outstanding witness to the supernatural in an age of materialism, is founded upon her simple word. Nobody saw the Apparitions but she: upon no other authority than hers (now guaranteed by the Church) is grounded the faith of those uncountable thousands who year after year flock to the grotto of Massabielle: and it is because of this that they believe, and thereafter experience, that in visiting Lourdes they enlist on their behalf, in a very special way, her powerful advocacy whom Christ her Son commissioned from the throne of the Cross to be to all His brethren the mother that she had been to Him.

Her sanctity was the sanctity of a child: but one remembers that Christ has said that only children are fit for the kingdom of heaven . . . 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of *God* as a little child, shall not enter into it.' All those tremendous things which we associate with canonized holiness she 'received as a child.' As we view them on the miniature stage of her life they look to us to be trifles, but they were great big real things to her: and rightly seen, in their true perspective, great big real things they should seem to us too. To be holy does not—cannot—mean to be extraordinary. Since Christ made His own (the choice of God) the ordinary life of a man and for thirty years of His life shewed Himself to be the Beloved Son of **His** Father by no greater thing than fidelity to the duties of ordinary life, there is no excuse left **us** for lamenting our lack of opportunity. The canonization of Bernadette is like one of those occasional experiences which call us (uncomfortably, maybe) out of the unreal imaginings of our daydreams into the sharp reality of the waking day: we understand, then, that to serve God truly does not mean to try to be someone else than ourselves, nor even to be ourselves but in other circumstances than those that we have, but to

aim at being the best that we can be, as and where we are. One thinks of Bernadette, three hundred miles from her home and from all that life had held for her up till then (for she was younger than her age when at fourteen she saw Our Lady) yet peaceably content to finish the amazing story in the relatively trivial round of Convent life where nothing ministered to the recollection of her brief hour of splendour, and where in addition she had as Superior one who confessed afterwards' that whenever she had occasion to address her she found herself almost unconsciously speaking with 'a certain asperity' as to *une paysanne grossière et sans instruction* who had no right to be on such intimate terms with the supernatural.

In the process of her beatification the *Promotor Fidei* took exception to certain sharp sallies and other gestures of impatience which seemed to him to denote a lack of that perfect self-control which should be the mark of heroic perfection. One feels that he must have been no more than half-hearted in his objections, deferring perhaps unconsciously to the popular prepossession that the saint is a being not so much above as altogether outside normal humanity. But it is before all else important to look upon Bernadette as an intensely human person. From first to last she was just herself. She knew that she was ignorant, inexperienced, altogether undeserving of the high favours which had been granted to her, and she never by word or deed displayed the smallest satisfaction in the 'celebrity that was forced upon her. Indeed, the evidences of veneration which she could not fail to perceive, quite obviously revolted her. One regrets that among the chief offenders in this regard were the clergy. It is incredible what they made her suffer by their importunities, pestering and pursuing her with questions and demands and compliments in the worst possible bad taste. So, too, in the Convent, where often, when she was summoned to the parlour for yet another interrogation by curious visitors, she would come to a standstill outside the door in an agony of repulsion for the coming ordeal, not seldom bursting into tears before she could bring herself to turn the handle. It all seemed so

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stupid to her, such a mistake: 'Oh, why can't they leave me in peace!' she would cry. But she was always modest, courteous, patient with her visitors, showing obstinacy, gentle but unconquerable, only when they tried to force from her confirmation of one or other of the accretions to her story which popular imagination had been busy in supplying, or when they tried to press some gift, were it the very simplest, upon her.

She could be *maline* though at times, and could return a pointed repartee to a foolish or tactless question . . . as, too, could the Cure d'Ars. But it was remarked that she never did this when she thought that it might hurt or scandalize. Much curiosity has been aroused by her statement that Our Lady had entrusted her with three secrets which she was never under any circumstances to reveal to anyone. She made it clear, over and over again, that these had nothing to do with the Church or with France or any other nation, nor with any question of civil or ecclesiastical politics. It seems to be quite certain that they were neither prophecies nor revelations, but concerned herself alone, laying down, perhaps, the conditions upon which her sanctification was to be guaranteed. One who has very closely studied the history of Bernadette gives as his conclusion that these secrets were probably to some such effect as that she should never imagine that the privilege which she had had of converse with Our Lady was due to her own merits: that she should never consent to profit in any material way by what had happened: and that she should never do anything to attract notice to herself in connection with the renown that Lourdes was presently to acquire.

These, at any rate, seem to have been the principles upon which she ordered her conduct. She would not, though she was left free to do so, attend the consecration of the Basilica of Lourdes in 1876, except upon the impracticable condition that she might see without being seen, and all her life at Nevers was a testimony to the low esteem that quite unaffectedly she preserved of herself — *Priez pour moi, pauvre pécheresse!* were her last words.

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To the end she was what she had been at the beginning, Bernadette, the poor child of Lourdes, doing always with her might what her hand found to do, little enough though that was. And now, by the infallible verdict of the Church, she is ranked as in her own right among the Shining Ones of the Company of Christ.

R. H. J. STEUART, S.J.

ART AND LEISURE

WHEN I go to the pictures my object is usually to avoid thought rather than to induce it; but on most occasions it is difficult to escape one reflection at any rate: that there is an inevitable connection between money and art, just as there is between money and religion; and that the connection does not always work out fortunately.

In its dealings with art, the Money Power is just as greedy and unintelligent as with everything else. When a really good picture comes out of Hollywood, as it sometimes does, one feels that the producer has managed to do it, in spite of, not because of, his financial managers. They say that Mr. Montagu Norman has a pretty taste in antiques or old masters or whatever it is, and rumours of striking and original sculpture on the Bank's new buildings have reached even my Philistine ears. That may be so. Nevertheless, in its relation to culture in general the banking system is more stupid and boorish than the ox that sets his uncaring hoof on the first cluster of primroses. If there are too many cinemas and not enough schools, if living musicians starve and tinned music assails the tortured ear, if villages of bungalows are built on the skyline of the downs, if new slums are being built under pretence of slum clearing, if the English countryside is laid waste by ruthless industrialism — where is the ultimate blame if not on the credit-system which 'finds the money' for such developments and insists on 'getting it back'?

Yet strange to say, there are artists who look forward without enthusiasm to the reform of finance. Take, for in-