

some have done of late years, and try to maintain that the saint intended nothing so ferociously 'negative' or destructive. He does insist on this burning, cutting, crushing, smashing of natural ties and affections in such a way that many a defender of the good things of human nature would not understand. This destructive policy, however, is absolutely necessary at the beginning in order to slay these beasts which lurk under the smallest shrub or tuft of grass. A man must make a wilderness for himself in this absolute way.

And yet it is only one side of the picture. A mere wilderness can only remain a grey and desolate plain under such devastating treatment unless the light of the sun rises over it and shines into its nooks and crevices, lighting up and enlivening every inch of the scene. The remedies for concupiscence and pride, for anger and greed, are not only destructive purges. They must have also the nutritive food which builds up spiritual strength and it is upon these latter positive remedies that the *Ancren Riwle* insists in contrast perhaps with the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. These remedies are dealt with in the final section of the fourth part.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

BY

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ODAY when the world is shattering into splinters like glass to the blast of a bomb, it seems difficult to assume or profess that Christ has been the Light of the World. So many have never heard of him, so many have been snatched from his loving care—so it seems—by the wilful action of militant anti-Christian people, so many self-styled followers of Jesus seem to be following their own desires and not at all treading the path to Calvary, beyond whose brow is illumination and light.

No one will deny that in his teaching and in his life our Blessed Lord and Master has been a shining Light; he taught a way that shines with holiness and love, which could, if followed, lead to peace and joy. Indeed those who truly followed Christ, and follow him today, have been and are at peace and in joy, with a peace and joy beyond all others, and recognisably so even to those who refuse to follow this same light. Why then has not this led to the world flocking to Jesus even from selfish motives?

Christ has won the victory over sin for us by his sweet and bitter Passion, he has won this light for us. God does truly love us, 'Deus caritas est'. The Incarnation, that ultimate condescension of God,

proves it; the passion and death of God made man, prove it beyond understanding. God loves us. There is the beginning of salvation, that is God's action; it is, one might say, all God can do. And to say 'all' is not to use the word as a limitation in the sense we would use the phrase when for example we say 'that's all poor so-and-so can do'; but by 'all' we mean truly he has done all.

There does remain however that ultimate freedom of men to accept or not to accept. If God in his wonderful liberality, generosity, altruism, decided to create man, then by giving us souls, thinking power, he gives us freedom. And if he gave us freedom, as he did, then he gave us the possibility to refuse his love; it is our glory but also our danger to be free.

God, Christ, is the Light of the world that shone in the world's dark places, and the darkness did not comprehend it. His own, even, did not, do not, receive him, the light; though they all were made by him.

Has then the coming of the light into the world been a failure, has God failed? Has the darkness defeated the light? God forbid. No.

The Church began with a handful and it has grown from twelve shaky Apostles, first to a martyred minority within the Roman world, and which, in spite of the most violent attacks and bloody slaughter, grew and grew until it conquered by meekness its persecutors, the Roman Empire. Then it spread eastwards. At this point we see the strange law of compensation at work; when in the east heresy rotted its root, it was compensated for in numbers by the conversion of the far west, the Anglo-Saxons, and the far north, Scandinavia, and the north-east, Poland. Then, when the Reformation deprived it of some of those gains, it spread its wings over the oceans to win new nations to Christ—the American Indians, the Far East. Next, when Rationalism rotted the roots of the Church in Europe, the white man peopled America, and what was lost in Europe was gained in the farthest west. Today, as the last remnant of the European Church is being blasted and destroyed by war and tyrannical persecution, Africa is entering into the glory of the fight. If we wish to talk in numbers we talk of continual increase.

But what of those who, all these centuries, have never heard of Christ? For the light has never shone in many dark places.

The Church teaches in her wisdom that no man is refused the light, for Christ is the light that illumines every man who comes into the world. We were all made for glory; and God is just. If we were made for glory, he must give us all sufficient means to achieve glory. By sufficient is not meant forcing the human will, but providing the will with the opportunity to accept what is right. Therefore it follows that the good pagan has a chance of seeing the light.

When we consider we see that what God wants of us all is humility and trust in him. The latter presupposes faith and love. Every man feels his inadequacy, his wretchedness, and his need of God. It is an almost spontaneous movement of the mind to recognise the existence of a Creator. Instinctively man turns to his Creator for help. In this act a man implicitly believes in the coming of Christ. He believes that God will help him if he puts himself into his hands, and though he does not know that Christ has come, had he been told, he would have been in a fit frame of mind to accept this truth.

We are inclined to judge mankind by the few 'élite' of this world who appear so self-satisfied, so cock-sure, so 'self-made'. But these are the exceptions, the dizzy rulers of the world, perched on a pedestal of their own making. The great mass of mankind is poor and humble, not much given to pride; life is too uncertain for them, for wars deprive them of their homes, their husbands, their wives, their children; pestilence and famine and flood, earthquakes and persecutions are still the lot of millions of God's poor. These have a great chance of salvation. The cross is thrust into their hands, they see the fimsiness of human joys and easily long for the saving light.

Besides, even though it is possible to maintain that the Gospel has not been preached everywhere, the light has permeated into most parts of the world sufficiently to lead souls to the gates of heaven. Take China for an example. We imagine that only recently Christ has been known there. But there were Nestorian Christians preaching elements of Christ's message in the seventh century, nor has his name been unknown ever since. It is probable that there were missionaries even before the Nestorians. Then take the American Indians; they had a prophecy, where it came from no one knows, but it hinted at the coming of God upon earth. Whilst the great ancient religion, Mahayanan Buddhism, seems almost to have the entire Catholic Theology except for the actual historical fact of Christ: sin, the need for grace, merit, prayer, penance, union with God, as though the human heart had divined God's loving plan before it had been unfolded.

Among his own, Christ is not abandoned. Great perfection is normally hidden. It is the doing of ordinary things as God's will that is the great sanctifying force. The greatest saint cut no figure at all, was obscure among the obscure—Mary, the Mother of God, immaculate, Queen of Angels, of Saints, of Martyrs. Who is going to dare weigh up the value of men's souls? The tiniest act, so shabby, so insignificant in the world's eyes, if done in union with our Lord God, Christ, is shining with the light of glory. There are millions of men and women—who fail seven times a day no doubt—but who humbly acknowledge it and do some things for the love of God. These are the

saints. Christ came for sinners. The Church is packed with sinners and sinners only need apply. But by God's grace, their spasms of goodnesses are more shining than their weaknesses are dark.

Christ came, not for the just but for the sinners, not for the healthy, but for the sick. 'Come to me all you that labour and are heavily burdened'. This is true; Christians are very wicked, very sick, but they recognise it. That is the essential point; they say so, to God—if not always to their fellow-men, for in that they are sick too. They will not be able to save themselves, they will remain sickly. But they are holy for they are humble, they are sorry, they receive grace and their sickly actions are lit through and through with the light which is Christ. Let him that has eyes to see look and understand.

BENOITE RENCUREL OF LE LAUS

BY

H. M. GILLET



SEPTEMBER 29th of this year marks the third centenary of the birth of a notable mystic, Benoite Rencurel, a Dominican tertiary whose memory is still fresh in the French Alpine valleys where she lived until 1718. Her immense influence in counteracting the local, withering effects of Waldensianism and Jansenism may still be felt by those who visit the sanctuaries which she there founded and which give title to the devotion to Notre-Dame de Laus.

About seven miles from Gap, in the Departement of Hautes Alpes, and across the range of low mountains which lie between the little cathedral city and the Durance Valley, is the charming and picturesque little valley of the Laus, wherein nestles a group of hamlets of which St-Etienne d'Avançon and St-Etienne du Laus are chief.

Benoite Rencurel was born at Avançon on the Feast of St Michael, 1647. Her father was a poor labourer who found it hard to provide for his large family. Accordingly, as soon as she was eleven, Benoite was hired out to watch sheep for a nearby farmer and although he was rough and rather a hard master, she remained in his service for several years.

The best pasturage lay on the slopes of the neighbouring Mount St Maurice, and one day in May, 1664, Benoite led her sheep to graze on the summit. While she was watching the flock from the shade of a ruined chapel, an old man appeared to her and made known to her