

THE SEAT OF GOLD

BY

GABRIELLE SIMPSON



CONTEMPLATIVE life produces an all-embracing love of God and our neighbour. We see this in a study of the Carmelite Rule and in a reading of the great Carmelite mystics. 'To love', says Saint John of the Cross, 'is to labour to divest ourselves and to detach ourselves from all that is not God'. (*Ascent*, 2). We are to be detached from ourselves, from self-love, thus only shall we come to love God, and to love our neighbour for his sake. A Carmelite writer tells us, 'Saint John is the Doctor of the Cross because he is the Doctor of Love'.¹ It is a cross radiating love, a tremendous love of God, and of man and of all the beauty that God has created. The same writer continues: 'Throughout his works John of the Cross has sung of the depths of beauty, the demands, the sufferings, the triumphs of love'. Saint John the poet, his mind seeing the whole of creation in the light of love and beauty so 'that it seems to the soul as though all the balsams, all the herbs and flowers of the world were mingled together to produce that fragrance. . . . Here the soul sees how all creatures, higher and lower, live, continue and energise in God . . .' (*Living Flame*, S. 4). To him, love and beauty are one in God. 'Sometimes the soul will discern in itself the mountain flowers, the fullness, grandeur, and beauty of God, intermingled with the lilies-of-the-valley, rest, refreshment and defence; and again among them, the fragrant roses of the strange islands—the strange knowledge of God; and further the perfume of the water-lilies of the roaring torrents—the majesty of God filling the whole soul. And amid all this, it enjoys the exquisite fragrance of the jasmine and the whisper of the amorous gales, the fruition of what is granted to the soul in the state of union, and in the same way all the other virtues and graces, the calm knowledge, silent music, murmuring solitude, and the sweet supper of love; and the joy of all that is such as to make the soul say in truth, "Our bed is of flowers, by dens of lions encompassed"'. (*Spiritual Canticle*, S. 24.)

Thus the soul in a state of perfection is likened to a den of lions, a safe retreat, guarded by strong lions, where Christ dwells united to the virtuous soul.

¹ *Saint John of the Cross, Doctor of Divine Love and Contemplation*, by Fr Gabriel, O.D.C.

Our bed is of flowers
 By dens of lions encompassed.
 Hung with purple
 Made in peace
 And crowned with a thousand shields of gold.

In Scripture, purple means charity and kings are clad in robes of purple. Charity perfects all other virtues. Only in charity can the soul delight in the bed and the flowers thereof. As it has been expressed in the sacred Canticle, 'King Solomon hath made himself a litter of the wood of the Libanus: the pillars he hath made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple; the midst he hath paved with charity'. (*Cant.* 3, 9-10).

We see, then, Saint John was the Doctor of the Cross, therefore the Doctor of Love. He possessed God and in God possessed the whole universe. 'All things are mine and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me'. (*Prayer of the Enamoured Soul*). Through the Cross he entered into the life of love, filling all life and perfecting it.

Is this way of the Cross too hard and too high a way for us in the world of today? A world grown cold in charity, materialistic, decadent and unbelieving. A world dominated by fear and almost without hope. Let us examine the standard required of the Christian. The first commandment is that I love God—'And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no commandment greater than these'. (*Mark* 12, 31). I am to love my neighbour as myself, doing as much for him as I would for myself—for Christ's sake who said, 'I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in. Naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me'. (*Matthew* 25, 35-6). Have I done all these things in a world so much in need? The answer is that we have failed to do so, and the condemnation is a strong one indeed: 'Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels'. (id. 41). Because we have failed, darkness is over the earth, war, destruction, hunger. Millions are homeless and fearful—'Then he shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me'. (id. 45). It is we who are responsible for the world's suffering—the wounded, the prisoner, the displaced person, the ill-used beast, the shoddy and the ugly. Only when we have learned the secret of the saints, shall we love, in the words of a writer of our own time, ' . . . with a breadth and depth which no merely human love can compass', and there will be no creature 'for which we would not

gladly bear, as Christ did, a redeeming cross'.² Order and peace rest not with governments, democracies, dictatorships, right or left movements, but to the degree in which we have come to understand love: Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law.

REMEDIES FOR SIN

BY

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ACHARIAS, in the most 'Christian' passage of his prophecy, describing the Orient who is to come to cleanse sins, says, 'Behold the stone that I have laid before Jesus¹: upon one stone there are seven eyes: behold I will grave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will take away the iniquity of that land in one day'. (3, 9). The prophet is describing the rock of Christ and his saving graces, and he puts before us the principal Remedy for sin in a way which we may find echoed in the *Ancren Riwele*. After analysing the deadly sins and having realised their proximity to the very core of our being, we may be easily carried away into a negative war against vice, wholly human in its inspiration and, in consequence, Stoic in its effects. We must strive to overcome the evil tendencies of nature, certainly, and we must use to intensity the ascetic practices of mortification, specially designed for the overcoming of the flesh. These are particularly to be looked for in the first way of purgation, which is *par excellence* the ascetic way. But such activities are primarily penalties for past sins, and as such are medicine rather than the health which the medicine is supposed to produce. St Thomas in a beautiful chapter of the *Contra Gentiles* (4, 158) begins by showing how necessary penalty, pains and suffering are for the overcoming of sin, but concludes by showing how all the need for penalties can be swept away by the positive love of God. The vehemence of the love of God can to a greater or less degree exclude the necessity for satisfaction; and moreover he rounds this off with the truth that since the love of friendship binds men together in unity, one man can satisfy for another, which in fact explains the power of Christ's satisfaction.

Evidently towards the end of the purgative way this positive remedy for the lurking subtleties of sin should increasingly pre-dominate. And having traced these evils back to the source, namely

² *Eve and The Gryphon*, by Fr Gerald Vann, O.P.

¹ The high priest clothed in sordid garments in his vision.