

Stevenson's own letter. But there the resemblance ends, for the impulse aroused by Stevenson's envy was as generous as Hyde's was mean. Stevenson confidentially predicts the raising of Damien to the altars of the Church and accuses Hyde of volunteering to be the devil's advocate. It would not be too fanciful to see Stevenson imagining himself as promoter of the Cause.

Hyde today has one action to his credit. He did not sue Stevenson for libel. He contented himself with dismissing the novelist as 'a Bohemian crank, a negligible person, whose opinion is of no value to anyone'. Stevenson himself suggests that 'if the world at all remember you, on the day when Damien shall be named Saint, it will be in virtue of one work: your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage'.

The puzzle behind this whole romantic story lies in what happened to Stevenson while he sat behind locked doors composing the letter. He suffered a sort of conversion during those few days. It applied not only to his attitude towards Damien, which had changed incredibly, but towards his attitude to the world. Stevenson was never the same man again afterwards; the incident conditioned all his future writing; it was probably responsible for the more serious tone of his future work; it may account partly for the greatness of his final, unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston*. No human being can ever sort out this sort of puzzle, but it is interesting to think about, this meeting between novelist and saint.

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## SOME BOOKS ABOUT LOURDES

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THE centenary of the apparitions at Lourdes has inevitably inspired a new literature which ranges from critical editions of the written sources to popular ballads. The variety of emphasis and the levels of taste revealed in these books reflect the universality of Lourdes itself—its capacity to engage the serious attention of the scholar as well as the uncritical affection of the simple believer.

Most important of the centenary publications is *Lourdes: Dossier des Documents Authentiques*, edited by Abbé Laurentin (Lethielleux). Four volumes are projected, of which two have already appeared (Vol. I: *Au temps des seize premières apparitions*; 1,200 francs; Vol. II: *Dix-Septième Apparition, Epidémie des Visionnaires, Gnosés et Faux Miracles, La Bataille Administrative, Fermeture de la Grotte*: 1,500 francs). It is a

matter for gratitude that a theologian such as M. Laurentin should undertake the necessary task of inspecting the sources of Lourdes. As he explains in his introduction, the apparitions at Lourdes are not a major subject for theological study, but they have an important place in the life of the Church, 'if only because of the number of people they affect, and because of the fruits they produce as well as the dangers they present'. For that reason 'God's designs in this matter should be exactly established and stripped of exaggerations'.

The need, therefore, was to establish the authenticity of the record on which the story of Lourdes depends. M. Laurentin describes his task as comparable to a detective story, and indeed many of the relevant documents are in fact police reports made at the time of the apparitions. In the course of a century a mass of documents had accumulated in archives of all sorts (and, as M. Laurentin remarks drily, 'France is a country where everything is kept'). Many had in fact been lost or forgotten, and in particular the two crucial collections of administrative documents (containing the enquiries of the police commissioner Jacomet and of the imperial procurator Dutour respectively) had not been seen for many years. In addition there was a vast amount of material in the archives of the Grotto at Lourdes and at the convent at Nevers, quite apart from the multitude of printed books.

M. Laurentin's method is to give a day-to-day account of the apparitions as recorded by this army of witnesses. His detective work has produced (at least in the two volumes already published) a masterpiece of accurate reconstruction; and he gives as well a penetrating guide to the interpretation of evidence that has too often been ignored (when it seemed 'inconvenient') or plainly misunderstood. Thus in the second volume his frank assessment of the astonishing crop of false visionaries (forty or more people claimed to have had visions at the Grotto within a few weeks of Bernadette's last public vision on April 7) is an excellent example of his method and of its importance. Lourdes at once attracted the neurotic and the occult, and M. Laurentin's treatment of this strange episode in the history of Lourdes establishes the whole difficulty of apparitions and the assessment of their truth.

M. Laurentin's volumes are a definitive record of the evidence and reveal a knowledge and critical discernment that have rarely before been applied to the original events of Lourdes. But he himself pays tribute to the earlier work of the Jesuit Père Cros, who in 1878 gathered together all the material he could find as preparatory documentation for a canonical enquiry into the events of Lourdes. His work was never published in full in his lifetime (and he lived till 1913), but it now appears, edited by Père P. Olphe-Galliard, S.J. (Lethielleux, 1575 francs), and provides a convenient summary of the evidence of the

earliest witnesses. Père Cros did not have access to the vast documentary resources that M. Laurentin has used, but he had a true scholar's understanding of the need for accuracy, though it seems he was a difficult man and felt (naturally enough) a sharp sense of grievance that for the last thirty-three years of his life he tried in vain to publish what he had written in 1878. Both the Cros book and M. Laurentin's volumes are well illustrated, and the latter contain some fascinating facsimile reproductions of the official reports on the events of Lourdes.

For a more general public, Pierre Claudel's *Mystère de Lourdes* (Arthaud, 2200 francs) provides an excellent summary of the whole story: the apparitions, the life of Bernadette, the subsequent history of the pilgrimage and an account of the most notable miracles. Seventy-four new photographs give actuality to this intelligent commentary on the deeper meaning of Lourdes. M. Claudel finds in the new Cité du Pauvre at Lourdes (which provides for poor pilgrims) an expression of the spirit of Bernadette, and it is certainly true that Lourdes has been greatly enriched by this realization of the holy poverty that belongs to Bernadette and the essential Lourdes. *The Victory of Lourdes*, by General Jean Charbonneau (Éditions du Quatre Fils Aymon), is a bluff and readable popular account of Lourdes, which, as Cardinal Gerlier says in his foreword, provides for those who have neither time nor inclination to read all the documents. The same public will like *The Challenge of Bernadette* (Burns and Oates, 10s. 6d.) in which Hugh Ross Williamson gives a bright and brisk interpretation of Lourdes in terms of the person of Bernadette. Finally, *The Rose of Lourdes* (M. H. Gill, 4s.) is a ballad by Frederick Duckett, and anyone who has survived the Lourdes hymn will also survive such lines as

'Medical men of many a school  
Rigidly test by every rule,  
Christian, atheist—none is barred,  
Enough to hold professional card'.