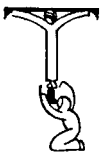


## ST ROSE IN LIMA

### A PERSONAL RECORD

BY

E. SARMIENTO



HERE are three places in Lima intimately associated with St Rose: St Dominic's Church, where she is buried and where she habitually prayed during her lifetime; St Catherine's Convent, built on the site of the house where she died, where are preserved many relics of her life; and the Church of St Rose, the first ever to be dedicated to her, built beside the site of her parents' home and garden, which are still preserved. This church and adjoining garden and buildings contain all the most important places and objects associated with her.

The convent is an enclosed one, and the chapel installed in the room where St Rose died, in which are preserved all the mementoes connected with her, is not open to the public. It is important, however, because it was there that the Spanish Dominican scholar, Fr Luis Alonso Getino, discovered in 1923 the sheets on which the saint had recorded, in a most original form, the mystical graces which she had been granted; this record completely alters our ideas of her character and mentality. I believe they are still unknown to the English reader.

Lima suffers from frequent earth tremors and has had several bad earthquakes, and none of its' old buildings is guaranteed to be quite as it was at the time it was put up. With this reservation, however, the pious visitor may feel in St Dominic's friary church that he is in the very atmosphere breathed during their time on earth by the Dominican saints buried there. The interesting covered portico, like one side of a cloister, which runs along the west end of the church, is an original architectural feature. The massive perch and door on the north side, through which the public usually enters, is a typical piece of colonial work. To the left as one approaches this entrance, another church, with its west door at right angles to the main building, juts out. This is the Vera Cruz, the tertiary chapel, rich in relics, lined with shrines to Dominican saints. Once inside the main church, the lofty roof, the massive pillars, the severe lines of the sanctuary, remind one more of a European church than of the typical church

of Spanish American colonial architecture. There are one or two gilded baroque altars, but the general impression is plainer and later than that of the heyday of colonial art properly so-called, and speaks of modern restoration and renovation. The detail, however, is authentic. The usual seated figure of our Lord wearing the crown of thorns and robed in the purple garment or showing the marks of the scourging, which is, except for the crucifix itself, the commonest focus of South American devotion, is there. A figure of the Holy Child, in a little glass shrine, a painting of the crucifixion, partly overlaid with embossed silver with icon-like effect (this artistic form is, I think, peculiar to Peru) and a great crucifixion with dressed figures of our Lady and St John are among the holy images which may well go right back to St Rose's own day. They are still the centres of attraction for the little knots of people to be seen dotted all over the great church at all times of the day. For the visitor interested in St Rose, there are two important things in this church. The first is the altar of our Lady of the Rosary, on the north side of the sanctuary (the points of the compass are used in an architectural sense only as this church is orientated to the west) at the end of the side aisle into which the visitor steps down after entering by the north door already mentioned. The image is the same before which St Rose prayed, and it was here that she was rooted to the spot on the occasion of her journey across the city to the Augustinian nuns of the Incarnation to take their habit, being enabled to rise from her knees only when she had given up the idea. (The Incarnation still stands, the interior an untouched example of rich gilded carving, possibly contemporary with St Rose.) It is a dressed image of a stiff hieratic kind, with the face and hands of the Mother and Child of polished polychrome wood; it is crowned, and a rosary hangs down one side held by a hand each of our Lady and the Child. The robe in which I saw this image clothed was sewn over with pearls. The altar beneath is of beaten silver. These silver altars, extremely common in South America, are beautiful examples of the silversmith's art, and consist of a thick layer of silver fixed to a wood backing and taking the place of a frontal; there are usually two end pieces as well, and the whole, of course, is permanently in position. Without positively asserting it, one may assume that the altar and its silver ornaments, which are also very handsome, are contemporary with St Rose, if not with the image. The other object of our attention here is the shrine on the south side of the sanctuary, corresponding in position to the rosary altar on the other side, where the relics of St Rose are preserved. The shrine consists of a plain altar, underneath which is the recumbent alabaster statue of the saint

made in Rome by Melchior Cufa (a pupil of Bernini) and sent to Lima by Clement IX on the occasion of the beatification in 1668. Above the altar is a casket of gold and precious woods containing the relics, and above that again is a modern statue of the saint in polychrome composition, depicted as holding the Holy Child in both arms. On each side are similar caskets and statues of Bl. Martin de Porres (on the spectator's left) and (on the right) of Bl. John Massías. Bl. Martin, shown as a very dark and handsome mulatto, holds a real broom with grass bristles such as one used to see used in England for carpets. They hang in dozens in the Lima hardware shops. As one faces this triple shrine, the main door from the church to the cloisters is on the right. Here Bl. Martin attended to callers as the lay brothers do today. The cloisters are a magnificent example of colonial art and are specially famous for their coloured tile courses.

During the novena preceding the feast (August 30th), which my stay in Lima fortunately covered, a great wooden construction is rigged up in the nave on the gospel side, just in front of the communion rail, and at an angle to it. Here is placed a temporary altar, and hangings, garlands and strings of lights placed over the framework. The casket of the relics is placed on a shelf above the altar; the outer case is removed so that the inner glass front is exposed, through which are clearly to be seen the skull and bones of the saint, brilliantly illuminated. Standing above is a dressed image of the saint. Masses of roses are placed all over this shrine. Here, for the nine days, many Masses are said daily, one being a High Mass, and devotions are held nightly. I was present at one High Mass of which the musical portions were pumped out of a harmonium by an elderly coloured organist who also fervently and very nicely rendered without delay the choir parts. (In general the South American clergy do not linger over their more elaborate ceremonial, but are becomingly and refreshingly unhurried in their private Masses.)

On the eve of the feast, in the late afternoon, the image from this temporary shrine is carried to the Cathedral. It is a short distance of one block and along one side and a half of the great square of Lima that was laid out by Pizarro. Guilds and confraternities walk in the procession, detachments of the armed forces accompany it, a band plays, a great crowd gathers and the statue, in a velvet habit, goes swaying along the narrow street which the saint herself so often trod. The spectators who gather are very devout. The men raise their hats, many people cross themselves as the image passes, and everybody is quiet and not at all excited.

The return journey is made next day with more splendour and with state honours, after the High Mass in the Cathedral.

The Church of St Rose lies at the end of a short walk, three blocks distant from St Dominic's along the street that skirts the north side of the church and of its tertiary chapel. The whole collection of buildings at St Rose's occupies an irregular corner site. It comprises the church, a monastery, the house of St Rose, the hospital she maintained and the famous garden. The monastery is the town house of some Dominican Fathers, independent of those of St Dominic's, who are entirely devoted to missionary work in the Montaña, that part of Peru that lies on the far side of the Andes from Lima, quite unknown to the majority of Peruvians, where dwell native tribes totally different from the civilised Indians of the plateaux. These Fathers are mainly or entirely Spanish. They are supported to a great extent by the ancient endowments of the chaplaincy and by the offerings made at this shrine. For the present arrangement is quite modern. The sanctuary was first established with endowments under the patronage of a devout layman in 1669 (52 years after the saint's death) as a chaplaincy which the friars of St Dominic's were to serve. This they did till the nineteenth century when the chaplaincy was secularised. The church is rather neglected and the garden has rather a bedraggled air, but the whole thing is of absorbing and touching interest. To enter the church, one must turn left at the corner and go in by its west (and only) door, leaving the house and garden, of which the entry is a little farther along the street one has just turned aside from, till later. It is impossible to enumerate everything that these places contain. In the church nearly every shrine and altar and nearly every holy object is associated with the life of St Rose. Among the statues are the crucifix that spoke to her (its style suggests that it is a good century older than the saint herself and was old when brought to America) and the small statue of the Holy Child known as 'St Rose's little doctor', which she placed in her hospital. There are some relics of great importance: at a side altar on the north wall (this church too is oriented to the west) at the top of the single nave, are two glass cases with blinds. Someone from the sacristy will always raise these and switch on the lights. In one of the cases is a tibia, a lock of hair and a little laurel-wood cross of the saint; in the other, another tibia, a little cross with points all over one side of it, which she used for penitential purposes, and the ring she had made to recall the one in the vision of the mystical marriage. On a corresponding altar on the epistle side of the nave is one half of the 'crown of thorns' St Rose had made for herself by a silver-

smith. The other half is at the convent of nuns. The portion here is folded inside out round a velvet covered stand thus enabling the spectator to see the 'thorns' without handling the relic. This crown was simply a band of silver about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch broad and quite thin. On the inner side are a number of small points sticking out perhaps not quite so much as the point of a drawing pin, but very like it, or like the very fine nails a cobbler uses. I somehow found this less extravagant than the pious accounts and symbolical pictures had made it appear in the past: it struck me as every bit as penitential and out of the ordinary, but extremely practical and quite unobtrusive. A determined character could easily place this band under a head veil or even under the hair and no one would be the wiser. By 'easily' I mean that it would not be bulky.

On the gospel side the church communicates just by the communion rail with the monastery that occupies part of one side of the house and garden site. The axis of the nave is at right angles to what may be called the axis of the garden site, that is the line running through the middle from the entry to the back of the garden and having the saint's house on the left hand of one entering, while the hospital lies on the right. The usual thing, however, is to leave the church and regain the street, turn the corner back into the street that brought us here from St Dominic's, and from it approach the entry to the garden and house, which is on the left. The little stretch of street from home to the Dominican church would be the saint's most familiar walk. It is a busy thoroughfare now, full of large houses built around courtyards, and now turned into tenements. The fronts of the houses are occupied with little shops. In fact, it is a poor city street.

The church of St Rose dates from 1670. The house and garden go back essentially to her own day. The Flores family lived here before as well as after the period of seven years when they were at the silver mines up the mountain. After the saint's death and the mother's entry into religion, the neighbours got together to pay the rent and so prevent any new tenant from coming in, and here they met to say their prayers. In 1669 it was turned into a public oratory. The actual fabric of the buildings however is a restoration made after the earthquake of 1746, the hospital is more recent still. As one enters the main gate there is a little open space on each of two sides of which is a low building, to right and to left; in front of the entry is another gate leading to the garden

The building to the left is a house. It consists of two large apartments, now scarcely divided, and a little room adjoining them with an independent door. In the main apartments is an altar on the

spot where St Rose was born, and one is shown the window beside which she sat doing her needlework. The walls are covered with sentimental modern paintings depicting scenes from the life of the saint. There is a series of small painted bas-reliefs of carved Huamanga stone, a soft opaque stone, creamy white in colour, like a coarse alabaster; they too depict scenes from the life of St Rose, and are lively and quaint rather than beautiful. They are probably eighteenth century work. The little room is the most interesting. This was St Rose's cell, and it is here that the most important mementoes are to be seen. On the walls hang several objects of interest: the letter she wrote to Doña María de Uzátegui thanking her for the cup of chocolate, the nail to which she tied herself by the hair to keep awake during prayer, the best portrait, today regarded as the most authentic, and obviously painted as she lay in state after her death; it is much more attractive than the simpering young ladies of the majority of pictures and statues. Here are also the remains of two crosses, enclosed in cases made to fit their shape and size; they have been much reduced in the past by relic-hunters (it is still possible to obtain minute portions from the Fathers at the monastery); the saint used them for making the Way of the Cross. Among other things in the cell is a fresco on one wall showing the saint asleep. It is a rather effeminate and over-idealised piece of work, but the artist has made one point in the saint's life more comprehensible. The bed is shown as consisting of short untrimmed logs laid across a frame on low legs, and the famous pieces of crockery are simply filling in the gaps between the logs. As in the case of the silver crown, this does nothing to reduce the penitential aspect, or in this case very little, but does help to make the mechanics of the contrivance more understandable.

The garden, of course, is modern in its arrangement of flower-beds and trees, but there are two things in it that go back to the saint's lifetime: the well (with a modern well-head) and the little adobe hut that St Rose, with her brother's help, built to be a hermitage. Its measurements are four feet by five by six. It has a low door only about two and a half feet high together with a tiny square window on one of the four-foot-wide ends. Inside and out the little hut has been faced with marble and glass, the former up to a height of about two feet from the ground, the rest with the glass. The original roof was a thatch of leaves, but it now has a flat glass cover, and over the whole is a wooden canopy that protects it from the weather.

There remains the (real) west side of the area, opposite to that on which are ranged the house, the east end of the church and the

monastic building. Along part of this other side is a cloister or arcade. Painted on the wall under it are the various pious rhymes composed by St Rose and still preserved. The other part of this side of the plot is occupied by a low building, opposite the house, on the site of the saint's hospital. Here today are a couple of rooms containing mementoes of a venerable eighteenth century chaplain of the sanctuary, and here too is the centre of various pious undertakings. I saw the making up of hundreds of parcels of goods for the poor by young people who distribute them among the needy of Lima.

I visited this sanctuary several times. On ordinary days there were always a few quiet visitors in the church and in the garden. On the feast day, however, the whole place was crowded with visitors in constant movement. In the street outside, little stalls of eatables were set up. Inside the garden were tables with all sorts of pious souvenirs, and there was a large bookstall outside the church door. It is clear that the Limenians still preserve the memory of their saint. There have been several plans for constructing a great basilica here. In 1876, one was even begun that was apparently to cover the whole garden and house, but after standing half built for many years, it was pulled down in 1914. A new one was then planned and some of the foundations laid, but the idea was given up in 1919, and the whole property put into its present condition. The Fathers who now hold the chaplaincy of the foundation are rightly determined that any future plan for a new great church shall leave untouched the house and garden sanctified by St Rose.

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## A LITANY OF SILENCE

BY

ST EPHREM

**P**OSSESS silence, brother, as a strong wall.

For silence will enable thee to subdue the uprisings of passion, for thou fightest from a height while they lie beneath thy feet. Therefore, possess silence, in the fear of God, and no weapons of the enemy shall harm thee.

For silence joined to the fear of God is a fiery chariot which bears its possessor up to heaven. This doth urge upon thee the prophet Elias who, loving silence together with the fear of God, was taken up into heaven.