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The Catholic Standard and Times, Philadelphia

St. Therese's Life Examined In Objective German Study

The Hidden Face by Ida F. Goerres. Pantheon, 427 pp. \$4.95.

By Sister Mary William

This is not the first penetrating book about sanctity written by Ida Frederike Goerres. Appearing under her maiden name, Coudenhove, were such treasures as "The Nature of Sanctity," "Burden of Belief," and "Mary Ward," all excellently conceived and meticulously written.

"This Hidden Face," a study of the life of St. Therese of Lisieux, first appeared in Germany in 1944.

The present text has been reworked since the manuscripts of Therese's own writings, especially her letters have become available. It has been translated into English from the German by Richard and Clara Winston.

This book is a very satisfying experience. It is the study which the author claims it to be, dispassionate where so many biographers have become hysterical, logical where others have become lyrical, and earnestly investigating and inquiring where others have swallowed whole reams of pious nonsense, without question.

The last section "The Riddle of Glory" is most thoughtfully and intelligently conceived. This section and the book, ends with the sentence, "We see in her girlish face the hidden face of the Church, the Face of the Hidden Church, which in the chaos of time flowers, eternally young and beautiful, to greet the returning Lord." (414).

Lifted Veils

In essence this sentence sums up the whole book. Many veils are lifted from the Therese the people know. Her home life scrutinized carefully could only produce the child unhappy at school, almost friendless during f girlhood, but the pampered youngest, the Little Queen." . .

Veils are lifted, too, from the inner life of Carmel, Mother Agnes (Pauline), Mother Agnes de Gonzague, Celine, each of them stands revealed as a unique person faulty but faithful, earnest -but at times mistaken.

Ida Goerres is not the only person to have felt repulsed by the common tales of St. Therese, the sweet pictures, the sentimental statues so sickening in their banality.

Unretouched Photo

One day Ida Goerres saw an unretouched photo of Therese. And there was the beginning of this book. On page 15 she records:

“From that August morning on I was determined to pursue the riddle of her look and smile—so different from the honeyed Insipidity of the usual representations of her. Who was Therese of the Child Jesus in reality? The present book has sprung from this question.

In "The Hidden Face" you will find the usual biographical information, but this is a study more than it is a biography. In it Therese's life and character are examined objectively (more objectively than any other book I have read, has done) and in the end Frau Goerres has offered an interpretation.

We may not completely agree with this interpretation, but we must be grateful to Frau Goerres for stripping from Therese the "veil of insipid bad taste" (21), for separating for us the essence of Therese from the contemporary ideal of holiness, and finally for reminding us that no soul can be completely understood by any of us.

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