

REVIEWS

FATIMA: THE FACTS. By J. De Marchi, translated by I. M. Kingsbury. (Mercier; 15s.)

The title is perhaps challenging, as it suggests that so far there may have been confusion about the facts. Nor indeed have they all been published—a document remains to be opened only in 1960; and only a few persons, I think, have read previous documents by Lucia in their entirety. Otherwise I doubt if substantial facts can be added to the well-known story. But Fr De Marchi's book is incomparably the best we know. Having lived near Fatima since 1943 and collected every least detail that he could, he has immensely enriched our knowledge of the background of the events, the social and spiritual 'atmosphere', the character and trustworthiness of the persons concerned. Still, we may doubt if even this is the definitive book on Fatima. Where a preternatural element may exist, the most probing examination of evidence is a *duty* (e.g., before canonisation, or at Lourdes). The more relentless the enquiry, the more clearly should the truth shine out.

Now the history of 'Fatima' falls into two distinct parts—what occurred in 1917 and can be checked by contemporary witnesses: and what was related by Lucia in 1936 and 1937, 'after a silence of twenty years . . . a bombshell!' (p. viii) and further in 1941 and 1942. The difference in the *sort* and contents of the sets of evidence is so vast that we feel they ought to have been kept quite separated, and not interwoven, as is done by the author and (I think) all his predecessors. Each group of documents presents its own problems even to those who firmly believe (as the present writer does) in the authenticity of 'Fatima'. Here, as always, psychological and theological principles must be applied. The *description* of a spiritual experience is given as best the recipient can, in such words and ideas as he has at his disposal; Benedict XIV affirms that an *honest* description of a *genuine* 'gift' may contain a mixture of mistake; and Fr De Marchi agrees that it is 'admitted by serious and conscientious theologians' that Lucia 'has not escaped the usual psychological laws, however unimaginative, mentally healthy, and transparently honest she is' (pp. xi, xii). Thus she interestingly ended by describing the Lady entirely in terms of light: tunic, cloak, hands, face were distinguishable by variations or undulations of light—the flesh was *carnea luz*: the visions near the sun were changes in light—'you could not draw them': see especially Fr McGlynn's work, not used, I think, though referred to, by Fr De Marchi. What she at first called earrings were an intenser light, and so forth. Bishop Ullathorne in his book on La Salette shows how the *expression* of memories is and must be modified (short of a kind of mental paralysis) as the personality develops—thus what the children there called a 'cap' became streaming light; the 'roses' were not roses, nor the 'spangles', spangles. Such an evolution differs from mistakes of memory, as when Lucia was confused as

to when or how often our Lady mentioned a 'secret' or promised a miracle: more puzzling may be our Lady's assertion that she would appear 'here', at the Cova, a seventh time, which she did not; afterwards the children said they did not expect her for she had said nothing about it; while Lucia saw the Holy Child carried by St Joseph, Jacinta saw him standing beside St Joseph (I do not know why the Saint is said [p. 123] to be dressed in white: Lucia [p. 133] says 'red', and 'I think our Lord and the Child wore red too'). Lucia *assumed* that the half-figure of 'a man' was our Lord because our Lady said he would come to bless the people, though she did not see him do it; at first she said she saw no roses, stars or designs falling from our Lady's dress; in 1921 she said there were three stars, the size of a watch, waist-high, knee-high and near the hem; now she has decided on one, the lowest. Perhaps most important is her emphatic assertion, four times repeated, that 'I say exactly what our Lady said'—the war would end that day (Oct. 13, 1917); afterwards under pressure she said she couldn't remember precisely how the Lady put it. The problem set by the later documents are too serious for discussion here, though I mention one or two: if indeed the Vision kept alluding to 'my Immaculate Heart', how could the children consistently affirm they did not know who the Lady was? Is the conversion of Russia *promised* on condition it was consecrated to the Immaculate Heart possible? The author (p. 234) argues that it was not, though his *reasons* do not all quite convince me. Least intelligible perhaps is the triple apparition of an Angel in 1916 (and the children's Communion: in spite of this event the two younger ones did not think they *had* made their First Communion) especially if we recall the triple apparition of a 'sheeted form' first assigned to that year and now (hypothetically) put back to 1915 seemingly lest it should coincide with the triple angelic apparition. (There is a lacuna here. Canon Formigao asked: 'What was it you saw about a year ago? . . . Why did you tell me *last month* it was nothing?' But I find no allusion to this previous interrogation.) Possibly even this most careful book softens certain details. The Lady says (p. 41) that a girl Amelia 'is in Purgatory'. Others add 'still'; others, 'till the end of the world'. Lucia insists that this last is the proper form. I add only that we would unfocus the story if we *concentrated* (as most seem to do) on the 'miracle of the sun'. An overwhelming majority saw this phenomenon, but not all in the same way, and we know of some who saw *nothing at all*. I was privileged, in Portugal, to meet Fr De Marchi and discuss one or two points with him, and to be shown her fluent translation by Mrs Kingsbury. Impossible to say how much these helped me. The above is not meant to detract in the least from their invaluable work, but only to suggest that still more remains to be done, and far more fully than I have been able to do in a small book, *The Message of Fatima*.

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