

REVIEWS

WE SAW HER. By B. G. Sandhurst. With an Introduction by Fr C. C. Martindale, S.J. (Longmans; 12s. 6d.)

With the exception of an introductory section of forty pages and a brief final chapter of personal reminiscence, *We Saw Her* is made up of the evidence submitted by eye-witnesses and others who were living in or around Lourdes at the time of our Lady's appearance to Bernadette. The evidence was submitted to Père Cros (appointed by the Bishop of Tarbes as a one-man commission of enquiry) and published soon afterwards in his *Histoire de Notre Dame de Lourdes*. This is the first appearance of this evidence in English.

Fr Martindale, in an excellent introduction, points out the importance of this historical evidence even for us; I say *even* for us because normally the testimony of witnesses ceases to be of more than academic interest once a verdict is given—particularly a verdict so well established as is that of the Church on the cultus of our Lady associated with Lourdes. But, Fr Martindale points out, this is the evidence about the events that made Lourdes what it is, events which we are very liable to overlook. Still more important, it will help to revive the memory of Bernadette which time and the other, and later, associations of Lourdes have unfortunately tended to eclipse.

In an early chapter Mr Sandhurst points out the important part played by the reaction of the people of Lourdes in the making of Lourdes as we know it, since it was not the miracles as such but the fact that the Lourdais accepted them that mattered psychologically—the little seed that grew into a great tree. At first Bernadette was dismissed either as a fraud or as the victim of an unsound mind. Slowly at first and then with remarkable rapidity public opinion changed and in the course of time Bernadette was revered as a saint. What is to account for this changed outlook? What part did natural and supernatural forces play in bringing it about?

The answer to this question Mr Sandhurst believes can best be arrived at by way of the answers to three other questions:

1. How long a time elapsed between the apparitions and the Lourdais' change of heart?
2. What was the nature of the act of faith they made and what were the grounds for it?
3. In which direction did the reputation of Bernadette and her family tend to sway the balance?

It is with the evidence which provides us with the answers to these questions that the greater part of Mr Sandhurst's book is concerned. In arranging the verbatim extracts in logical order and linking them up with his own useful comments Mr Sandhurst has provided us with a most valuable addition to the vast literature of Lourdes and its cultus.

THOMAS HARPER

BARBE ACARIE: Wife and Mystic. By Lancelot C. Sheppard. (Burns Oates; 16s.)

Surprisingly little has been written about the fascinating Barbe Acarie. Yet who can portray her as she really was? Henri Brémond, lost in admiration, described her as 'de ces êtres achevés qui désespèrent les peintres'. For this remarkable woman, who lived the so-called *ordinary* life of a devoted wife and mother, was one of the outstanding religious figures of her day. Such men as Cardinal de Bérulle, Fr Coton, S.J., the King's confessor, Marillac the future Chancellor, St Francis de Sales, Ange de Joyeuse, and a host of others, prized her friendship, sought her advice, respected her and deferred to her continually; countless religious undertakings were planned at her house; and she herself, whose influence was so prodigious, was responsible for extensive monastic reforms, and is known to history as the 'true Mother and Foundress' of the Carmelite nuns in France.

Faced with such a life, the more timid of her biographers have hesitated: can a married woman be a great saint and mystic? . . . can an ordinary wife and mother do so much lasting good? And, hesitating, they missed the point, not realising that by their attitude, by falsifying the picture and painting her piously as a 'semi-nun' (contrary to evidence), they were unconsciously denying the sanctity of Christian marriage.

It is with gratitude, therefore, that we turn to Lancelot Sheppard's latest book, and to the masterly French biography by Fr Bruno, O.C.D., to find a true portrait of Barbe Acarie: a living portrait of one who was both 'wife and mystic', and who was to 'reach St Teresa's seventh mansion through the grace of the seventh sacrament'. 'Nowadays, her interest for us in this country', writes Mr Sheppard, 'is derived from the two great works of her life. She was a woman who achieved sanctity in marriage, who as a wife and mother of six children had to contend with difficulties greater than most, and who combined the role of Martha and Mary in a way that makes her life an example for all married women. Her other great work was the introduction of the Carmelite nuns to France.'

Mr Sheppard's fine study of these 'two great works' is written with insight and understanding; and his personal sympathy with Barbe Acarie and her husband, with the day-to-day problems of a home and