



Books for The Young

THE BIBLE FOR CHILDREN — Text by Harnish Swanston. Pictures by Emile Probst. Burns & Oates: London 1968

This is a series of ten volumes, each one having about twenty five pages. The first five volumes deal with events in the Old Testament: God making the World, Abraham, Moses, David, the Prophets. The rest are about Christ, His life, His work, His death, the activities of the early Church. The stories sometimes end rather abruptly. This is made up for by the vivid illustrations which will attract the attention of children in the seven to ten age group. And certainly they will benefit from the simple but well-written text which usually has a sentence or two either pointing out a lesson or relating events to Christ.

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- I. St. Joan the Girl Soldier
by Louis de Wohl, Vision Books, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1957.
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- II. St. Elizabeth's Three Crowns
by Blanche Jennings Thompson, Vision Books, N.Y. 1958
- III. St. Therese of Lisieux
by Helen Walker Homan, Vision Books, 1967

I. When civilization goes wrong, God sends a saint to right it. St. Joan of Arc is one such saint sent by God for the tremendous job of saving France from the impious. Even during her time she was a controversy. Her very person was a controversy; her very mission was a controversy. Little do we know how much she suffered internally because of the turmoils that plagued her: the unbelief of the French, the weakness of the Dauphin, the indifference of the English. In the end, we know she was burned at stake.

St. Joan the Girl Soldier is a historical novel written in prose that transcends the bounds of poetry. It is history chronicled with a touch of the poetic, for only a writer with such a vision as de Wohl can reveal a young girl's sufferings to which she was subjected. Only a writer, too, of the stature of de Wohl can capture, through dialogue, the towering strength of a young girl against the company of hard-boiled soldiers, of a young girl's impatience toward indifference to her cause, of a young girl's fragility and fortitude in her fight against the English. These are captured in the book, *St. Joan the Girl Soldier*.

The precis that we know of her life is simply, that years before America was even discovered, France was in turmoil, in war with the British, and that France was in constant fear of being annihilated by the enemy. The root of this weakening was the ebbing morality of the French army, an army eaten by termites of confusion and forgetfulness of God. For many years France suffered this apathy as province by province the British fought and conquered, until in far out Domremy, a girl, 15 years old, was having her Voices talk to her of her role in saving France. St. Michael and St. Catherine — they were among her Voices.

This was Joan D'Arc, daughter of a lowly farmer and a pious mother. She was beautiful, courageous, brave. She was France's saviour, the maiden soldier. She did save France after a number of derisions frustrated her attempts and yet she was always peaceful, for she fought furiously only when there was evil. In 1931, 13 years after her canonization, she was praised by the English Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster as "The saint who fought so valiantly against her country, recalling that she never hated her enemies but wished them good."

This book, far from being written primarily for young readers, goes beyond its author's purpose in that it springs at the very door of history and unveils the beauty of one of God's saints. This book is history but it is history written with a touch of poetry and for those who want to go beyond a more precis, this is the book to read.

II. Much of what is said about Elizabeth of Hungary is legend woven into fact. *Elizabeth's Thrice Crown*, a historical novel by Blanche Jennings Thompson, is set in the Middle Ages—a period in history peppered with romance, adventure and—poverty. We all know Elizabeth as the queen of Hungary who gave her wealth to the poor, but few of us know that she was really a Landgravine (governess) of one province in Hungary, that she was widowed at 19, that she became a Lay Sister of the Order of the Poor Clares and that she came from a family of saints (St. Hedwig, St. Louis of Toulouse, St. Elizabeth of Portugal), and that certainly, she was the greatest saint in a family of saints.

The many legends about Elizabeth come vividly alive in Miss Thompson's pen. We feel deeply purged when brought face to face with her tragedy of early widowhood, for instance. This was only one of her crosses. But Elizabeth was a living saint and God's saints are always brave. The Catholic Church honors St. Elizabeth of Hungary on November 11 in the calendar of saints. We do honor to her and to ourselves when in chancing upon this book, we unweave the legend from the fact.

III. The Hand of God truly works in many strange ways. He send saints to fight and saints to rule, saints to preach and saints to pray. St. Therese of Lisieux is one such saint sent to pray during her lifetime, for the Faith. She is now, along with St. Francis Xavier, the patroness of the Propagation of the Faith.

Helen Walker Homan takes the life of Theresa's childhood to girlhood and pictures it for young readers. This she writes in simple, unadulterated strokes. The only regret is that, in this book, there should have been more succinctness in description and presentation of the character of Therese, the happy saint child. It is not enough that we read about her as a fragile little girl with little brown curls, who talked to her statue of the Infant Jesus of Prague. But all these objections may be overshadowed when we realize that as the author herself says, it is a book primarily for young readers. As such, it becomes a novel, lightly written for the young to understand, more clearly and more easily without the rigmarole of dressed up phraseology. The style of the book would then be fitting to the utmost simplicity of St. Therese.