

**THE APPEARANCES OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT THE
GROTTO OF LOURDES:
PERSONAL
SOUVENIRS OF AN EYEWITNESS**

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EYEWITNESS

BY
J. B. ESTRADE

Late Principal Receiver of "CONTRIBUTIONS INDIRECTES."

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
J. H. LE BRETON GIRDLESTONE, M. A., OXON.

WITH A PREFACE BY
THE VERY REV. MGR. R. HUGH BENSON, M. A.

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THE AUTHOR'S DECLARATION.

If in the course of this work I have sometimes employed the words " saint " or " miracle, " I declare, in order to conform to the decree of Pope Urban VIII, that I have had no intention of presuming to anticipate the decisions of the Holy Church, sole judge in these matters.

PREFACE.

EXTRAORDINARY changes seem passing over the world in which we live. There is hardly an institution that is not questioned, hardly a tradition on which men do not look askance. And this change is affecting every realm of life : in politics, in art, in science, in philosophy, and above all, in religion, old established axioms seem to be doubted and new systems to be dawning. Now of course it is possible to make out a case for either condemnation or acceptance of this new movement. These changes may be said of the one hand to be evidences of a new renaissance, or on the other symptoms of decay ; their activities may be judged as the pulsations and birth-pangs of a new life, or as the seething energies of a corrupting civilisation. One thing, however, is certain, that, although Life involves change, it equally demands continuity. The life of humanity, like the life of a tree, must continually be changing its appearance—or, at the least, continually be passing through recurring cycles of change—yet, on the other hand it must be that, in the deepest sense, it progresses along the lines of its own nature. Men “ cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. ”

In what direction then must we look for the reassurance that continuity is still with us, and that we have not broken with the past in such a sense as to have not interrupted our vitality ? For Christians there can be but one answer : we look for continuity along the deepest line only—the line of the spirit. Monarchy may yield to democracy, and democracy to bureaucracy or despotism, and the springs of life are not necessarily destroyed. Realism may succeed to conventionalism in

art, and realism may react into idealism. Sir Oliver Lodge may follow Darwin; and Bergson may drive out Schopenhauer. All these things do not in the least dismay the Christian, so long as he is persuaded that while all things are shaken they are shaken in order that that which cannot be shaken may remain, that there is One City after all that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. It is the Catholic and the Catholic only, therefore, who in the movements of the "New Thought" and in the disintegrating mists of modernism, may rest absolutely secure that continuity is not lost, that humanity still survives along the lines of its past progress, that there is no end to its development in the future—the Catholic alone who need never be afraid that new discoveries will shake old truths, or that men have hitherto been walking only in blind circles and that progress has yet to begin; since the Catholic alone is completely secure in his knowledge that since not even can the gates of hell prevail against Christ's Church, still less can the opening avenues of this world. He can see the "cords lengthened" without dismay, since he knows that the stake is strong enough to bear it.

Now it is in such places as Lourdes that this confidence—so incomprehensible to the shifting world—rises up once more in the Catholic heart. We go to Lourdes, from the midst of a kaleidoscopic society, where on all sides rise up the cries that "Lo, here is the Christ, or there!" or the proclamation of the yet more recent discovery that there is no Christ at all; from that modern society where one section endlessly pursues pleasure without the industry to earn it, and another industry without the pleasure that should sweeten it; where one modern school of thought tells us that there is nothing but matter and that spirit is a gas generated from the clay of which we are all made; and another that there is nothing but spirit, and that matter is but a bad dream of a mortal mind; where the puritan tells us that art is the enemy of God, and the hedonist that there is no God except art—from all this whirl