

“. . . and even when the hardness of the times obliged Pope Eugenius IV in 1431 to “mitigate the strictness of the Rule. . . .”

More than a century was to pass after that step until to teach afresh the essential merits of the earlier life of the Order a reformer arose in a woman—gifted with one of the most remarkable intellects of her age in Europe—Saint Teresa from Avila, who as a nun in one of the numerous convents in Spain for women living under the vows and according to the life of the Order had already planned and commenced, with supernaturally given vision and courage, the uphill struggle of remodelling those convents of Carmelite nuns to a stricter life with more definite objectives. That milestone—the “Reform”, as it is known in the Order—may be dated from the foundation of the convent of S. Joseph at Avila in Castile, 24.8.1562.

Having begun with the nuns of the Order, S. Teresa was inspired to organize the even more strenuous conquest of the male Religious in their convents: and souls tempered for the task were at hand. The sequel will here best be told in outline by culling from the accounts in the works of Fr. Florencio del Niño Jesus, published in Madrid 1923 under the title *La Orden de Santa Teresa, la Fundacion de la Propaganda Fide y las Misiones Carmelitanas*: the same author's *À Persia*, second volume, published at Pamplona in 1929: and Fr. Berthold-Ignace de S. Anne's *Histoire de l'établissement de la mission de Perse par les PP. Carmes Déchaussés, 1608-12*, Bruxelles, 1885, p. 346.¹

John de Yepes, the future Saint John of the Cross and great mystic of the Catholic Church, was born at Fontiveros in Old Castile in 1542, descended in direct line from the hidalgo Francis Garcia de Yepes, who served under king John II, and the youngest son of Gonzalo de Yepes, a weaver. After the death of his father, the family being in poor circumstances, John went with his mother and settled at Medina del Campo where, after serving apprenticeships in several trades and as an attendant in a hospital for fevers and skin diseases, he took the habit in the local convent of the Carmelites of the relaxed Observance, 24.2.1563. From the first he elected to follow the austerities of the Primitive Rule. Having taken the vows in 1564, he was sent to study at the university of Salamanca 1564-7, when he became a priest. In September of the latter year S. Teresa came to Medina del Campo, and Fr. John confided to her that he desired to become a Carthusian. S. Teresa, however, persuaded him to remain with the Carmelites so as to propagate and carry out among his fellow Religious the reform she had in mind.

With one companion, Fr. Antony of Jesus, on 28.11.1568 he made a start in a corner of Old Castile called Duruelo: he was transferred to Mancera, 11.6.1570; in 1572-7 he was at Alcalà de Heneras. While acting as confessor of the nuns of the Order at Avila, he was seized by those of the brethren who opposed a return to the primitive austerities and Rule, of which everywhere he was being the apostle: carried off and beaten, he was imprisoned for nine months at Toledo.

Thus, almost at once profound disputes arose among the friars on account of the tenacity of the opposition, whose protagonists brought to bear all their influence with the Pope and king Philip II of Spain to stifle and repress those who were working with Fr. John of the Cross. But, before his death in 1591, he and his associates had won through; for by Brief of Pope Gregory XIII (Buoncompagni) two mutually independent Carmelite organisms were constituted, each being assigned its own superiors: and the *Discalced* (for they chose as their distinctive appellation the sign that they go barefoot—except for sandals) in the Chapter held at Alcalà de Heneras, 3.5.1581, obtained for the first time recognition of their separate entity and authority.

Thenceforth, therefore, the undivided Order of the previous centuries—which the French call “les Grands Carmes”—has existed in two branches, the “Calced” Carmelites following the mitigated Rule of 1431, the “Discalced” Carmelites that of the Reform of S. Teresa from Avila and S. John of the Cross. It is another important milestone in the story.

¹ Also from articles in (a) *Etudes Carmelitaines historiques et critiques, 11me année, 1926*, p. 2, and (b) *Osservatore Romano*—“S. Teresa e le sue memorie romane,” 14th October 1935.