

Upper Basilica is relayed through loud-speakers hidden in the leafy trees, and the melody is entrancing. When the Blessed Sacrament arrives at the esplanade, the Blessing of the Sick commences.

Imploring prayers, in one language after another, are sent on a mighty surge to Heaven.

"Lord, that I may see."

"Lord, that I may walk."

"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst cure me."

"Our Lady of the Sick, pray for us."

One could almost see Our Lord walking amongst the sick, and witness them calling after Him, and stretching to touch the hem of His Garment. It was difficult to keep back the tears and easy to pray for one's fellow sufferers. Hope shines in their eyes and in their prayerful attitudes as Our Lord gently blesses them and quietly passes on. Sick pilgrims who are not cured of their physical maladies are nevertheless greatly consoled and made happy. And there is always tomorrow, when Our Lord will come again, and perhaps next time—it could be me? Yes, hope springs eternal at Lourdes and it is seen as a great and mighty force.

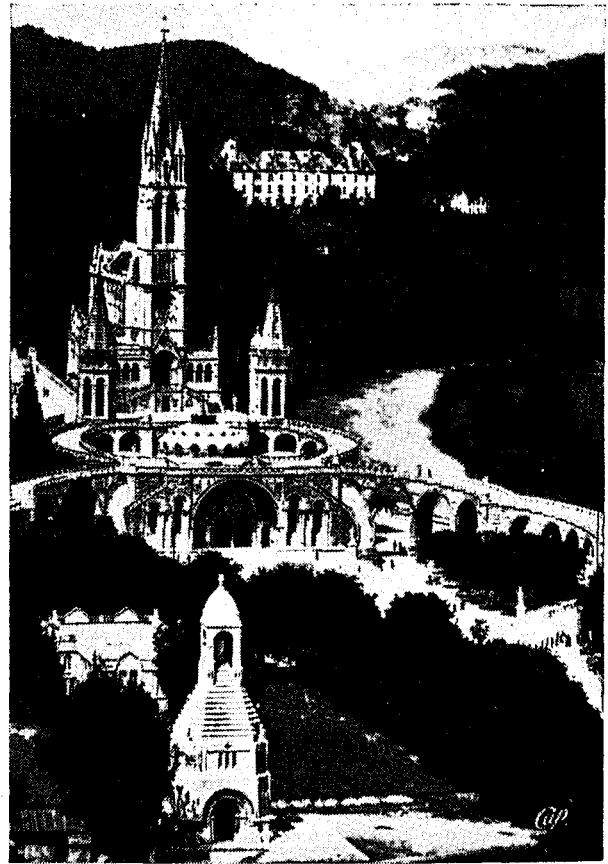
After the terrific excitement of the Blessing, comes a pause for visiting the lovely shrines, saying private prayers, and preparing for the last corporate activity of the day, the Torchlight procession. This takes place at dusk, between 8.30 p.m. and 9 p.m., and all pilgrims of all countries present take part, and can be seen hurrying to the Grotto carrying large candles protected by paper windscreens. These windscreens carry pictures of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette, and words of the Credo in Latin.

Pilgrims line up behind their own national banner, and each country has the honour of leading the procession on one night. It was a source of great pride and pleasure to the English pilgrims one night to see the illuminated banner of Great Britain embellished by a single red Rose of England, head the long procession to occupy the place of honour.

For this procession the Rosary Basilica and the Crowned Statue of Our Lady are illuminated by hundreds of small electric lights. The pilgrims light their torches and the procession winds its way around the grounds; the pilgrims reciting the Rosary. Then, accompanied by the organ, whose music is again relayed, the pilgrims sing the Lourdes Hymn, which echoes across the river, down the valley and into the little town of Lourdes. It is an entrancing sight in the gathering gloom to see the long lines of flickering, moving tapers surround the grounds and to hear the wonderful singing. One hour later, the procession enters the esplanade. The little lights around the churches are switched off and powerful floodlight picks out the Basilicas, on the steps of which stands a solitary figure—the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes. Visiting prelates join him and intone the "Credo." Everyone in the vast crowd joins in that glorious profession of Faith, sung in Latin, the mother tongue of the Church, and used for no other purpose on earth. After singing the canticle "Salve Regina" and the blessing given by the Bishops, the floodlighting is switched off and the pilgrims quietly disperse. Many go to the Grotto to say goodnight to their Dear Mother, and say their own private prayers or go to make a goodnight visit in the Churches before going to bed. Some remain at the Grotto all night.

On Friday, the English pilgrims followed the Stations of the Cross, led by Bishop Beck of Brentwood. It was a hot morning and the ascent was quite steep and the mountain road was rough. Yet some hardy young women took off their shoes and stockings, and for a penance made the stations in their bare feet. At the twelfth Station Mass was celebrated at the open-air altar and after the fourteenth Station we descended, greatly uplifted by such a wonderful spiritual experience.

Saturday evening brought the English Pilgrims yet another very special ceremony. Their Holy Hour was arranged for 11 p.m. in the top Church of the Immaculate Conception, to be followed by Pontifical High Mass at midnight. It was



The Three Churches at the Grotto of Lourdes.

another soul-stirring experience, for they had the upper Basilica to themselves. There was profound peace and quiet, no hustling nor jostling. Mgr. Vernon Johnson led the lovely Holy Hour and the Bishop of Brentwood sang the Mass, assisted by the Pilgrimage Priests. All the Pilgrims had the great joy of going to Holy Communion towards the close of the Mass and before going their various ways to bed.

Sunday, May 22nd, was Pax Christi Sunday, and all over the world the Church was praying for peace amongst the nations. At Lourdes, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, accompanied by all the Bishops in Lourdes, sang the Pontifical High Mass, served by men from all countries present at the Shrine. It was a magnificent sight, colourful, wonderfully ceremonial, dignified and worthy of the great occasion. The Cardinal sang the Mass at the blue-and-gold, out-of-door Altar of St. Bernadette. The day was beautiful. The sky was of a cloudless blue, and the sun shone brightly on the glorious scene at the Altar.

The Cardinal gorgeously robed in gold, the Bishops in their Purple, the choir boys in their caps and gowns of sky blue made a vividly impressive picture. Above the Altar on the rocky mountain peaks, tall trees in their newest green formed a perfect background and a gentle breeze kindly protected the pilgrims from the hot rays of the sun. Birds twittered happily and swallows darted about swiftly overhead.

By 9 a.m., when the Mass was due to begin, the esplanade was tightly packed with thousands of pilgrims, who sang the responses. The music of the Kyrie, the Sanctus and the Benedictus was haunting and beautiful, and the wondrous ceremonial of the Mass never to be forgotten. The procession as the Cardinal and the Bishops left the Altar through that vast, kneeling crowd, made one's heart ache with the weight of so much beauty.

The English pilgrims joined in the afternoon and evening

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