

SPRING IN THE AIR

THE April to which I look forward is a thing of more marvels than the April the colts snuff up on the March winds, with such promises of life ahead that in sheer joy they suddenly send the mud splashing behind them in the paddock, rearing and chasing in the ecstasy of that beckoning festival.

The Easter to which I, as a Christian, look forward, comes after long Lent of February and March with their penance of pruning knife and scourging rain and skies grey-white as wood-ash in that long fast of bare black trees and beaten turf. But all through the forty days, Easter has been in the air; sometimes we have received the promise afar off, even before the immaculate conception of the first snowdrop in its humility. Certainly in March, when the sun is so veiled and weak that only the larks find it, when only jessamine and winter wallflowers give alms of gold, you may know the stir of sap under the dead bracken as you go to early Mass. England begins her preparations in good time, because she has always kept Easter with great liturgical splendour in her orchards and gardens, in field and farmhouse. She brings out the trinity cups of woodspurge and crocuses like gold, frankincense and myrrh, and St. Joseph's violets, one by one. Then her gold and silver willow, white violets and wild daffodils, anemones under the old pear-tree, bracken fronds like a bishop's pastoral staff, her yellow chickens and ducklings. In rain or sun, we hear the numes of bird-song, unconsciously obedient to the *Motu proprio*.

April of earth, Easter of liturgy. But we look for a greater April, when all things shall be restored in Christ.

Blackfriars

And just as one may feel spring in the air long before it has arrived, so Christians may recognise a stirring of strength, a warmth of desire from the blowing of the South Wind, the Holy Ghost; a fragrance going forth from hidden saints and a power from Our Lady's mediation.

To-day, if one considers the signs of the times, they remind one not of April, but of March: of the Antiphon at Lauds for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday: 'Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things . . . shall be accomplished.'

The Vicar of Christ has pointed his finger at the Prince of this world who has sworn to dethrone God in Russia, and our Cardinal-Archbishop has reminded us that the Church is fully aware of the intention of that spirit to do the same in every country of the world.

Polite English non-Catholics look now with something like satisfaction towards the tranquil white figure over there in Italy, who but yesterday made the gesture of refusal towards things temporal, keeping only the barest minimum of dimensional Rome, and who to-day has spoken with authority to Russia, not as the political scribes. England has found the political scribes disappointing, and there is a renewed interest in the attitude of Christ's Vicar. They tacitly, at least, agree with him that this Anti-God Campaign is too much of a good thing. In a moment of irritated wakefulness, the movement to repeal the Blasphemy Bill was noticed and quashed. Newspapers even reported the matter to the extent of a column (—a side column; the first ones were occupied with a mannequin's breach of promise case). That reminds one of Palm Sunday.

The Holy Father has made the hearts of his own children burn within them at those authentic accents, which satisfy the concern of our reason about tem-

poral affairs and inspire our faith regarding eternal issues. Christ's Vicar has spoken, and the Voice is Christ's. What other Lord would have called his servants to arm themselves with the weapons of prayer? Who but He who said: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,' would have inaugurated a defence against the Cheka which should set out under the protection of St. Joseph? The silent carpenter of Nazareth village, the labouring aristocrat, is once more to protect Christ against Herod. And for a Generalissimo whose genius will provide our tactics against the howling madness of those Soviet wolves, we are given—not St. Michael nor St. George, but St. Teresa of the Child Jesus. A little child shall lead them.

The scent of 'that far-off divine event'—Christ's victory—blows from the Garden behind the Cross. That is the spring which is in the air. Meanwhile: '*Expecta Dominum, et viriliter age.*' Christ said: 'I have overcome the world' when Gethesemane and Calvary were yet to come, for He spoke of eternity while he was yet under the law of time. And so, though we rejoice in the possession, by faith, of the very substance of that Spring, our business now is to 'do manfully.'

We have to set out on the crusade: we have to go up to Jerusalem with Him, if only because we dare do nothing else, lest we be left behind, without Him.

We English Catholics are a queer crowd; the would-be-goods and the wish-they-needn't-be-goods, the respectable and the disreputable, hotheads and slow of heart, mystics and sinners, fools and saints. So were those others on the first Palm Sunday. Like them, we have one thing in common—we love Him. Some of us think ruefully how much easier it would be if we didn't, for love is a disturbing, tiresome thing in ordinary life. Others, on the contrary, do not

Blackfriars

dislike the element of storm and battle which the presence of the Prince of Peace creates. And some, like John, ask only to be near Him and share His thoughts. *Nobis quoque peccatoribus . . . partem aliquam et societatem digneris, cum tuis sanctis apostolis et martyribus.* 'Let us go and die with Him.' And the mystics, like Mary, are each, as it were, only a consciousness that watches Him fulfil the Will of the Father.

What, then, are we to do in this hour? So far, we only know that we are to follow St. Joseph and St. Teresa of the Child Jesus out against the Prince of this world. But what position has the enemy taken up? We find that he is attacking three strongholds of human dignity: man's liberty to worship his Maker, the sanctity of the family, and the rights of the individual. These are the holy places we have to defend. This is the Jerusalem towards which we go up, for Jerusalem the city was but a parable of the eternal temple, the eternal home, and the soul of man.

With what weapons are we to defend these holy places? Christians have never had but two weapons: prayer and practical charity. The laity are well instructed in the ways of prayer, and there are many contemplatives living without exterior badge or habit in the world. There is a school of prayer to suit every character and temperament. Associations of devotion, intercession and reparation have their centres up and down the country, and their literature is easily obtained. The only question we have to ask ourselves is: *to come to the crux of the matter—how much time can you dedicate to prayer?* One hour in the week before the Blessed Sacrament? Or one hour a day? It must be as heroic a donation as possible without infringing other *duties*. And morning and night, ten minutes of hard work on one's knees, uniting our intentions to those of Our Lord, offering brief ejacula-

tions of intercession, reparation and general toning up of the will to the original pitch of dedication. Also there are precious moments to be snatched in the train and on 'bus tops. *Viriliter age*. Prayer is the only activity in which there is no waste of energy.

With regard to *work*, it is generally known now that the Catholic Bureau of Social Service (born of the Public Service Committee of the C.W.L.) was opened last October by the Cardinal Archbishop himself, who expressed his surprise at the amount of work that had been done since the unofficial opening in the previous April. Since then, its work as a recruiting-office and clearing-house for voluntary social workers has grown steadily and remarkably. Workers have been supplied to various Catholic societies—Our Lady's Catechists, Catholic Care Committee Workers' Association, Catholic Guides, etc., etc., and to national societies, such as the Invalid Children's Aid Association. Girls leaving school have been advised to train for professional social work, such as Hospital Almonry, Industrial Welfare, etc. Men offering their services are passed on to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, whence they go out to organize Boys' Clubs, or Scout Troops, or to help at a Settlement.

The fact that *the highest possible standard of efficiency* is required in work offered to Our Lord is fully appreciated. It is realised, also, that for the sake of economy of energy, the right person must be found for every post, whether the work is professional or voluntary. Vocation must be considered in the choice of work in the world, as carefully as in entering a Religious Order. There is work for everyone. We need more thinkers, more writers, more artists, more nurses and doctors, more public servants, more psychologists, more catechists, guiders, organisers and secretaries, whose lives are as dedicated as those of Religious. But you cannot make the nun without the

Blackfriars

novitiate, and vocational work in the world demands the same patient drudgery and apprenticeship, with the same glory of dedication transfiguring it.

Do we realise that to 'restore all things in Christ,' we have to face herculean tasks such as: to make England think; to take immediate or far-reaching measures to find work that will provide a livelihood for every able-bodied man and woman; to protect and educate those who are not, or not yet, capable of responsibility, both children and the mentally or physically deficient; to stabilize the family as the unit of civilization; to cleanse and open and ease cancerous grievances among those who cannot help themselves; to build up the character of obscure persons; and to make it impossible for the lowest slave of luxury or laziness to be ignorant, through any fault of ours, of their dignity and responsibility as men and women?

WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTION YOU CAN MAKE? WHAT CAN YOU DO? NO ONE ELSE CAN DO IT? IT WILL GO UNDONE UNLESS YOU COME FORWARD. That which *your* initiative, energy, talent, *your* time, *your* money and influence, could defend, safeguard, build up, will otherwise be left at the mercy of the destructive forces. God does not make two people for the same purpose.

Up to the present, we have left the work to a few 'prominent Catholics,' 'unfailing helpers.' But they cannot do more than their own work, for the reason that they were not made without limitations. There are only twenty-four hours in their day, and they are mortal. They cannot be at their best if they are always overworked. And the Church needs *every individual at his best.*

Prayers are going up to Our Lady, begging her to quicken us with the voice at which John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb, and reminding her that once, in Cana, her Divine Son worked a miracle at

Spring in the Air

her request, though His hour was not yet come. A thousand hearts are calling her back to England her dowry, with invocations old and new. We know that it is she who is foreordained to crush the head of the serpent. It has been said that the only ones who were steadfast when 'all forsook Him and fled' were those who stayed close to Mary. We seem to have learnt that lesson. It is she, clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet, who reminds us of the eternal April to come. Perhaps it is because we are invoking her that there is spring in the air. It is good to be in England now her April's near.

CECILY HALLACK, T.O.S.F.,
*Organising Secretary, Catholic
Bureau of Social Service.*

Write to the Bureau, 70 Victoria Street, S.W.1, or to the Secretary, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 66 Victoria Street, S.W.1, and mark your letter: 'BLACKFRIARS Contingent.'