

AUGUST HOLY DAYS

THE EDITOR

AUGUST brings to many people a period of rest and relaxation, a time for an instinctive worship of the elements—the sun and the sea, the rocks and the rivers, worshipped consciously of old by their forefathers. It is not usually a time for striving very earnestly for Christian perfection save perhaps for the religious who choose this month for their annual retreats. People often feel that in the holiday season they can legitimately let go their efforts towards virtue or to overcome their particular habitual faults. They feel, perhaps, if they ever think about it, that they are—always legitimately of course—leaving our Lord and his ideals a little on one side, a holiday from religion as well as from work.

This false sense of the purpose and need of a holiday may even develop a false conscience. For it is in fact an erroneous conception of the rest from work that is usually provided at this season. Rest is in fact an essential part of Christian perfection. Indeed it is the summit of perfection, to be seen not only in the obligatory rest of Sundays and holy days, but also in the 'rest in peace' for which every Christian prays. The summer holidays are holy days indeed. As we have suggested they provide an all too short occasion for re-integrating some of the natural elements in religion which have so largely been suppressed in our conscious worship of God in church. During the work-a-day months we forget that our churches where we pray at least on Sundays have been, or should have been, 'orientated' that the altar of sacrifice should look towards the rising sun, that the stoop at the door was often a living spring of water, that the altar itself is a lump of rock, a kind of mountain on which we worship, that the whole place of our Christian observance is set in 'God's acre' of land, where the acres of cornfields and vineyards are consecrated to the feeding of soul and body.

There is a danger of these elemental things becoming 'merely natural' if we allow the feeling for them to be divorced from our prayer and our striving for perfection. If the idea of perfection is one of labour rather than of love these brief holidays will not be

Christian holy days; they will have little in common with the Epiphany, the Ascension, Corpus Christi, SS. Peter and Paul when the worker has to fit in an early Mass before going off to his job. It would perhaps be more fruitful if the two weeks or so of relaxation in August were to be regarded as holy days of obligation. Not that the Christian should feel compelled to rise early for Mass or devote the greater part of the day to prayer and good works. But he should be brought to feel that his rest is part of his worship of God and that it gives him an opportunity to sit at ease with God as well as with his family and his fellow men; that it also provides him with the opportunity to expand the place of his regular worship to the whole universe and to bring the whole universe back to the foot of the altar where he prays during the rest of the year, the river and the sea to the stoop and font, the sun to the Paschal fire and the East Window, the hills and crags to the sanctuary, the golden fields and green to the acre of God.

It may seem then a little unseasonal to be offering for summer reading an issue of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* largely devoted to religious life and perfection. It has sometimes been said that this journal is designed for the benefit of the monk and the nun rather than for the layman. And this issue may at first glance confirm that opinion. Yet the Editor has not altered the original purpose of the review which was first to provide reading matter concerned with Christian life for the layman who is perforce not so well provided for in this matter as the religious with their regular conferences and retreats. Naturally the religious are also included in the scheme of the review, and for the very reason that they are attempting a special way towards Christian perfection which sets in relief the essential features of Christian living, 'the one thing necessary'. The layman should not ape the religious life, covering himself with scapulars, a breviary tucked under his arm, and pestering his spiritual director with questions about rubrics and with demands for vows and rules of all sorts. But he can derive great profit from an understanding of the ideals of the state of perfection. He can transpose the spirit—not the practices—of the cloister to his own position and circumstances. He can above all learn of the value and purpose of the contemplative life, the meaning of the scene of Magdalen sitting at the feet of our Lord, the height of perfection in repose, the true nature of the

rest which he so longs for but which he so seldom knows how to employ when it comes his way.

For these reasons we make no excuse for giving over many pages of the August issue to matters concerned with the religious life. It may give the layman as well as the religious an opportunity while sunning himself on the beach or picnicking on the hills to turn his mind for a while to the quest of perfection in which he is engaged as much at that moment as when standing at his workbench or his school rostrum. During these holy days he can breathe freely and so set the pulse of his prayer beating normally, he can re-create his understanding and desire for perfection in the midst of his annual period of recreation. August has come in the northern hemisphere to be the Sabbath of the year, hence it is fitting that it should be made holy.