

EXTRACTS

THE LIGHT OF CONTEMPLATION in the nights of the soul provides Father K. Truhlar, S.J., with an interesting theme in *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* (December). He is anxious to show that the function of this special light is not merely purifying, as many authors seem to suggest, but also to illumine and inflame the soul's faculties and to reveal whatever may be in the soul. Even in the 'dark nights' this contemplative gift continues to exercise these positive activities in the soul, and this explains the various phenomena which sometimes accompany infused contemplation. The study is based entirely on St John of the Cross.

Purification is only a consequence of the superior knowledge and love (of contemplation) and of the disclosure of the souls imperfections, in short a *secondary* function of the light of contemplation. St John of the Cross asks 'why the light of contemplation which is so salutary and good for the soul yet produces in the soul, as it penetrates it, effects so painful?' And he answers: 'The cause is not to be found on the part of contemplation or of the divine infusion, which can only produce sweetness and delight, but in the weakness and imperfection of the soul.'

It is always refreshing to have the positive aspects of the spiritual life and particularly of contemplation set before us, for too often we reduce as much as we can of the life of the Christian, the life of prayer, to a negative formula. The author assures us that even in souls who have imperfections yet to be purified the light of contemplation can bring delight rather than bitterness, revealing sometimes the indwelling presence of the blessed Trinity rather than the presence of the imperfections. And even in the 'dark night' God remains Light and Love. We can find in *The Month* for December a new translation of St John of the Cross's poem of the Living Flame which makes that obscure verse more intelligible and very applicable to Fr Truhlar's thesis:

Oh lamps of fiery blaze
 To whose refulgent fuel
 The deepest caverns of my soul grow bright,
 Late blind with gloom and haze,
 But in the strange renewal
 Giving to the belov'd both heat and light.

The translation is by Roy Campbell.

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SIMPLICITY is the characteristic of this objective and positive approach to the life of the soul, and *La Revue Nouvelle* devotes several articles of its December number to showing how this attribute is brought to us by the birth of Christ. Christmas is the feast of

Christian simplicity. For the birth of Jesus is the birth of the man of truth. 'Jesus is a *true* man. His whole being, his whole life breathes and radiates "limpidity", shining cleanness, purity, clarity, truth and simplicity.' And it is derived from his objective spirit. Turned to God and to neighbour, as Jesus on earth always is, the soul becomes simple because she gathers all the strands of her life and sets them in order towards the One.

We shall ourselves also come to be simple and direct in our lives and our behaviour if we fix our attention on none other than God and our neighbour. But we are riveted to our own ego, and this interferes in everything we do and pollutes its source with complex, interested and egotistic motives which disturb our best actions.

This simple state of mind comes only after a long ascent, during which we must keep our gaze constantly fixed on the End; and it means, secondarily again, detachment from any sort of praise or honour that the world can give. Simplicity derives from truth, living in truth, as another contributor indicates; and living in truth means having nothing to conceal. Open-heartedness comes from this seeking of the Truth, and it begets the open character.

The autumn number of *Rivista di Vita Spirituale* (Rome) adds point to the simplicity of the Christmas feast by presenting a symposium on *holiness* or *sanctity* as the purpose of the Holy Year which otherwise would seem to remain negative in its suggestion of remission of sin and amendment of life. Again it is the objective attitude of true spirituality which provides the healthy way to simplicity and holiness. The *Rivista* begins by quoting the Bull proclaiming the Holy Year.

The great Jubilee which will be celebrated next year in the gentle city of Rome is designed in particular to call all christian men not only to expiate their sins and to amend their lives, but also to tend towards virtue and towards sanctity.

The Holy Year with its ceremonies and crowds may seem anything but simple, but it proclaims in its very title the holiness to which all must aspire. Padre Gabriele di S. Maria Magdalene shows that this sanctity which is of necessity open to all Christians has been too exclusively allied to the idea of heroism—heroic virtue—because the 'ordinary man' does not seem to come upon occasions for true heroism. To make room for the ordinary man Fr Gabriel expands a definition of sanctity drawn up by Pope Benedict XV at a canonisation in 1916.

Sanctity consists strictly speaking only in conformity to the divine will shown in a continuous and exact fulfilment of the duties of one's proper state of life.

This might seem at first sight to omit the essential element of the union of love, but the author expounds the definition primarily in terms of the duty to love God with one's whole heart, one's whole soul and with all one's powers. Almost inevitably on such a topic we are given an article by the same author on St Teresa of Lisieux, but this is a scientific research into the original MSS. and photographs of the saint which are often said to have been 'touched up' by pious editresses. The tendency has always been to make the holiness of faithful love seem soft and sentimental, which it never is and which was decidedly lacking in the life of the Saint of Lisieux. The author went to Lisieux and examined all the MSS. and photographs and shows with examples that nothing of importance was changed by any sister after the Saint's death.

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THE LAYBROTHER AND LAYSISTER are sometimes said to be an outmoded vocation. Certainly in a great number of religious orders the modern dearth of vocations to this life which is in many ways inevitably heroic and destined very immediately to holiness has constituted a very real crisis. It is not surprising then that the editors of *La Vie Spirituelle*, always so alive to the needs of modern religion, should devote a whole number of the *Supplément* (15th November) to this matter. As usual it is the result of an 'enquête' and a 'questionnaire' so that the facts and views come from nearly a hundred different religious superiors throughout France. The crisis does not seem to be at all acute in the great contemplative abbeys and priories, where they seem to have a third, a half and, with the Carthusians, even equal numbers of lay brothers to choir monks. Is there any significance in the fact that while the Dominicans of the Lyons province have one lay brother to every six choir brethren the Paris province has only one to fifteen? Certainly the greatest shortage is found among the missionaries.

Père Bonduelle, O.P., who has had experience in training lay-brothers, gives a vivid description of the problems of the common life between fathers and brothers and in particular the question of communal prayer, since the brothers are usually by rule excluded from the choral recitation of the divine office. He goes a long way towards establishing the true solution of those difficulties by defining the lay brother as 'A contemplative religious, not a priest, who consecrates himself to manual work in a deep, common life with the priests, his brothers in religion'. Contemplative life and common life, these are the two principal foundations of the brother's vocation; so that it is to be expected that he finds his position more clearly marked in a strictly contemplative order. In the more active,

missionary orders he is more likely to become separated from the life of the fathers who are preoccupied each with his own particular activity, and the brother's life of prayer becomes too much of an adjunct just as the fathers find their Office a burden rather than a support. Canonically the brother as a rule is never allowed any responsibility in the major affairs of the Order and unless the life is a very common life, a shared life, between fathers and brothers this is apt to become a source of grievance, particularly in view of the modern social ideas which are part of the air he breathes.

Père Henry, O.P., contributes to the discussion an interesting historical sketch of the development of the lay brotherhood. And there are some extremely interesting notes on a Mexican attempt at a return to St Benedict's original plan in which few monks were ordained priest and the majority would have been classed today as laybrothers except that they were devoted to the choir as well as to their manual occupations. These Mexicans began like St Bernard in an isolated thicket; but there is another modern experiment described here which followed the same Rule but was founded in the midst of the dechristianised masses of France. The vocation to the lay brotherhood is evidently still full of promise and of great importance for the future. It is to be hoped that these most practical and topical editors will next devote themselves to the lay-sisters whose problems are rather different and whose future too will be different.

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ON THE STUDY WEEK-ENDS held this year at Grayshott near Hindhead, and appearing among the notices in *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, we have received the following:

More and more it is realised that when Catholic girls leave school or when young converts enter the Church, they must have opportunities provided to continue their religious education and keep their faith fresh and alive. Otherwise they very soon find themselves befogged in the pagan atmosphere in which they so often live. With this end in view Grayshott continues to organise special Study Week-ends. During the week-ends Catholic girls and women not only have the benefit of excellent lectures, but also of making contact with one another. A special feature is also the 'question box' which is provided for those who wish to have some problem discussed and explained.

The habit of study week-ends seems happily to be increasing up and down the country. They often bear more fruit than the straightforward retreat which as a rule appeals only to those already firmly established in the Church.

DOMINICAN LIFE, DOMINICAN WORK is an attractively illustrated bro-

chure introducing the life and work of the sisters of the Third Order Conventual in England. It is to be had from any Dominican convent and shows how varied and yet united the life can be.

FETES ET SAISONS (December) takes St Francis of Assisi for its theme, a subject admirably suited to the genius of its editors. St Francis appeals to so many in England, and here they will be shown the saint very much in place in Assisi and yet the saint of the day for all countries.

THE MASS—MY LIFE, the Y.C.W. pamphlet written to instruct the young workers in the central doctrine of the Mass and to be used in the religious enquiries in their meetings has been reprinted (1s., from 62 Abbey Road, S.W.9) and it is certainly worth procuring by teachers and instructors of all kinds as well as for students and workers.

EVANGELISER, which is one of the only reviews devotedly exclusively to the modern apostolate, is concerned in its November issue with the contact between priests and laity in the parish—a most vital problem in forming the foundation of the apostolate in the parish.

CULTURE CATHOLIQUE (La Colombe; September) gives 100 pages to a work of summary and synthesis on the origin of French spirituality in the sixteenth century by Louis Cognet.

BOOKS RECEIVED

- Blackfriars*. Gerald Vann, O.P.: The Pain of Christ, 5s.
Burns, Oates and Washbourne. T. F. Lindsay: St Benedict, 10s.6d.; Hubert van Zeller, O.S.B.: Famine of the Spirit, 7s.6d.
Gill (Dublin). M. Oliver, O.Cist.R.: Fair as the Moon, 12s.6d.; Roland Burke Savage, S.J.: Catherine McAuley, 15s.
Mercier. Henri Petitot, O.P.: Saint Bernadette, 8s.6d.
Rockliffe. Rosa Hobbouse: Mary Hughes, 6s.
Editions du Seuil. François de St Marie, O.C.D.: La Règle du Carmel et son esprit, n.p.

LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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