

CONTEMPLATION NOW

READERS of BLACKFRIARS may have two just causes for complaint in being presented with an issue devoted to Contemplation: firstly that the subject belongs rather to the sphere of the *Life of the Spirit* and secondly that the subject has already been broached in BLACKFRIARS this year. The first complaint would have some justification had the Editor been able to maintain a consistent policy in the *Life of the Spirit*. But the restriction in space and the many claimants to that space have often made the *Life of the Spirit* an overflow to BLACKFRIARS. It is hoped to overcome this danger by launching the spiritual supplement as a separate review, depriving readers of what has been for nearly two years a free gift every month, but providing for an enlarged, a systematic and an orderly review of the character of *La Vie Spirituelle*. The second objection contains in fact the occasion of the appearance of this number. For when we were able, in May, to call attention to the work of the French Dominicans during the occupation, with an account of their publications, the *Rencontres*, we insisted on the importance of the first subject chosen for this specialist treatment—Contemplation: and we took the opportunity to publish the introductory essay of that volume. That was only an introduction. The subject is in fact so important and so universal that many issues could be dedicated to the working out of the principle of contemplative life in various aspects of modern life. The present issue itself is inadequate for the demands of the subject, but it is intended to show the general bearing of this spiritual activity of the soul on the life of humanity today.

The word itself may be ill chosen. Contemplation suggests the mystic lives of a few hermits and remote religious. And this remoteness is furthered by the sense of strange experiences in prayer which attend the practice of shutting oneself up alone with God. But there is no fitting substitute for the word. The activity and the passivity covered by 'contemplation' is not sufficiently described in terms of the love of God. That is the main power employed in a life of contemplation, but, as is shown elsewhere in this number, our term involves the attitude of mind as well as of will, the attitude of soul to all reality. We have need therefore to rehabilitate the word and to show that far from being the remote and exclusive entertainment of a few 'chosen souls' it is the vocation of each one of us, that it is indeed the essential vocation of us all. It would be absurd to affirm that the essential nature of a clerk was to make marks with a pen on paper, but it is equally shortsighted to regard

a Christian life as complete when it is concerned simply with the moral virtues, with being just and merciful, temperate and patient. These Christian virtues pursued in the world are only the ink marks of the clerk's pen. The meaning and purpose of those marks give the essential character of the clerk's work, and the meaning and purpose of Christian life in this world can only be seen in the perfect contemplation of the *Beatific Vision* of the next. All Christian works, be they in the realm of politics, education, social service, culture or religion, should all be leading to the heights of contemplation, and at the same time infused with the wisdom gained by keeping the end in view.

The post-Reformation period has introduced a great confusion into the relation between action and contemplation. We have been brought to believe that the distinction between the two is not only clear but clear-cut. And the catch phrases of modern psychology support the division. If you are an extrovert you are of an active temperament; if an introvert you do not seek your life in outward works but in some type of contemplation. These two have been separated, so that the majority of people who regard themselves as of an active temperament and called to an active life in the world banish contemplation from their thoughts as being irrelevant and the concern only of the chosen few.

This dichotomy has become accentuated with the growth of what has been called 'Americanism', of efficiency, utilitarianism, the testing of human products by the sole standard of whether they work. Thus contemplation is at a discount, allowed to the few who happen to be recreated or entertained by such an introspective occupation. The few practitioners like Gerald Heard or Aldous Huxley, who do use it as a technique for human happiness, only serve to convince the generality that it is the pastime of the one or two who are made that way.

It is therefore necessary to insist often that the activity of a 'useful' life, to be of any value, must lead to the 'uselessness' of contemplation, and that only with the help of this 'useless' activity of the soul can there be hope of any order or peace in the world. For the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have always taught that the Christian life of activity is a preparation for the fuller Christian life of contemplation, and that far from being separate the one must always dovetail into the other. This should be evident when the nature of Christian activity is considered. Christian activity is virtuous activity. The busy housewife or the harassed salesman in so far as they are acting as Christians, will be employing the virtues of patience, long-suffering, justice and so on. The woman who

has much shopping to do exercises, or should exercise, the virtue of justice very frequently; the man who has to write many columns for the Press to earn his daily bread exercises, or should exercise, many virtues connected with Truth, virtues too of self-control and love of neighbour. The active life is simply a life that is characterised by the moral virtues—justice, temperance, religion—rather than the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. But life is not a static thing: it means growth, and a growth in moral virtues necessarily means growth in the one theological virtue which is the form of all the virtues—charity. The more just and merciful, the more patient and truthful, a man is in his daily occupations, the more the love of God is taking possession of his heart. And this essentially contemplative virtue will eventually predominate, will come to characterise his life so that he will be in fact living the contemplative life in the midst of his occupations. The true Martha must be growing gradually into Mary.

The same truth can be put in another way. These moral virtues, which are exercised in the busy-ness of everyday life, are concerned with setting human action in the right order to the last end and to all the interim ends. They establish the right order in man's relations with his neighbours, and a right order in the relations between his own powers. If he treats those around him justly, patiently, temperately—and this he must do if his daily activity is to be Christian—he will be establishing the due order between himself and them. They may choose to deal harshly and unjustly with him, but his Christian virtues should come to the rescue and prevent him from falling out with them, however much they may fall out with him. This means that by practising the social virtues at home, at work, in his public life and with his next-door neighbours, a man will establish a peace that need be ruffled by no tempestuous breezes. Again, if by the practice of ascetic virtues—which are of themselves active rather than contemplative—he learns to control his passions and his whims, he is introducing the same tranquillity within his own human make up. It is part of the active life to do penance, as it is part of the active life to offer sacrifice, for in all this the moral virtues of justice and religion predominate. But in doing penance, in offering sacrifice, in exercising the social virtues, the Christian is saturating himself in a spirit of tranquillity both within and without, so that by degrees he finds himself a contemplative in the midst of activity. When the top is first spun it wobbles with convulsive movements, but shortly it finds its centre and rests in its circular 'contemplative' movement.

Thus, instead of activity distracting and drawing the soul away from God into a state of troublous dissipation, the external works ought to be preparing the way for God to take greater possession of the soul. If the soul becomes occupied by many cares and affairs instead of being occupied by God, there is something wrong with the activity, it is not properly Christian. Martha must be in training for Mary's part.

If therefore we learn to list under the heading of the active Christian life all these moral virtues—offering a just price, paying and receiving just wages, keeping patience, giving liberally, reciting prayers, fasting or taking the discipline and even active meditation, we begin to see firstly how all true Christian living should be leading to contemplation, and secondly how central contemplation is to any society and particularly to our own modern society. Thus the lack of contemplation inevitably leads to unjust and passionate competition among men. If they take their eyes off God in the centre they can see only themselves scattered without order round about. Each individual then begins to compare himself with his neighbour, each state with the surrounding states, and at once the race for individual success, individual aggrandisement begins. This evil of competition and comparison can be seen working out in every branch of life. Birth prevention is practised in order to keep up the social standing of the couple, and world wars or class wars break out from the same spirit of contrast between men and men. Whereas if men had their eyes on the centre, were in training for contemplation, they would view their fellow human beings in another light, they would see their own action first in relation to God. They would have patriotism without pride, self respect and desire to do well without disrespect of others and the desire to get the better of them. Without contemplation it is impossible to do away with competition. All the present movement towards state monopoly which is designed to abolish competition, only serves to set it on a wider basis and make its proud and greedy stirrings more widely dangerous. There is not a single modern plan for peace and reconstruction that takes Christian contemplation for its centre; and for that reason these plans are doomed.

A recently organised movement for world peace exemplifies this lack of perspective through lack of Contemplation. It is called the 'Service-Nation Movement' and plans "to create, by the will of God, as an instrument for the promotion of world peace and justice, a free nation, pervasive and universal, dedicated to the service of humanity, to the function of international mediation, and to the

demonstration of a pattern of nationhood'. It offers membership to one and all by relinquishing their present nationality and becoming 'naturalised citizens of the Service-Nation'. The movement apparently sets out to form another Holy Nation, another tribe of Israel scattered over the face of the earth as a heaven working in the mass. Though it invokes the will of God it remains uncontentplative, active in the wrong sense, man-centred and therefore inevitably competitive. It is designed to serve the nations of the world, but it does so by introducing another type of nation which at the same time tends to be exclusive of other nationalities. The movement in fact sets out to play the part of the Church universal, the Catholic Church, but without the supernatural, superhuman character of the Church. Refusing the contemplative centre of the true Church, it carries the seed of disruption; it is dedicated to the service of humanity instead of being dedicated to the service of God a service which leads to friendship with God, friendship which is charity, which is the source of social well-being and the spring of contemplation. A service-nation will be no substitute for the Catholic Church, and no humane or philanthropic activity can remedy the ills of modern society without Christian Contemplation.

We need today a great resurgence of monasticism, a reappearance of many great abbeys of monks, of convents of enclosed nuns sprinkled over the country, here at home and over the American and European continents in particular. The contemplative lives of those men and women, engaged altogether in the primary things, can alone provide the flavour of supernatural truth which will make the people of today acceptable to the Lord. We need that salt to savour the earth and to give our modern feverish activity that wisdom which alone can make it effective. It is with this view that this issue of *BLACKFRIARS* is dedicated to the re-establishment of the *Contemplative Ideal*.

THE EDITOR.

CONTEMPLATION AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

WE are used to hearing the present age in the Church's history described as the age of catholic action: there is a possibility that we may not sufficiently realize that catholic action essentially demands and implies catholic contemplation. By catholic action we mean the sharing, by the laity, in Christ's redeeming work in and for the world: trying to make known the truth entrusted to the Church, trying to create a Christian order of society, trying to reclaim for men and women those fundamental rights and duties which our Lord came to teach the world and which the world has