

CORRESPONDENCE

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS

SIR,—With reference to Fr. J. Morris' interesting letter in the July BLACKFRIARS, may I suggest that all good art may be matter for contemplation, whether "useful" or more strictly intellectual.

Handiwork (which is really a synonym for art) has, however, long been divorced from utility, and has taken refuge in the so-called "fine arts." These, in consequence, have had so much of the limelight that they have attained to a really painful degree of self-consciousness, which to-day finds relief in the light-hearted frivolity of Dadaism (the gospel of *je m'en fiche*), or else becomes further exaggerated in the introspective intensity of Surrealism.

Your correspondent deprecates the fear of "taking inspiration from non-Catholic artists." I would answer that we have done little else since the Reformation, and that it is high time that we took a pull on the reins. Because the Reformation loosened men's hold upon the sacramental way of thought, we have tended to forget the sacramental nature of art, until at last we have come to believe that art is only a matter of some aesthetic system. This seems to be a serious error. Art is, and always has been, *informed* by the spiritual life of the artist—the art of the Primitives was informed by a firm conviction of the truth of the Catholic religion, that of the eighteenth century by a fondness for Nature, for Antiquity, and for the principles of Protestantism, that of the Cubists (but not necessarily the Surrealists) by a modern revival of Manicheean thought.

A favourite device of the Cubist apologist is to place a photograph of a Cubist picture beside that of a painting of, say, Giotto, and to invite us to believe that, because the two are similarly "organized," they produce an identical expression upon our senses. If we allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by such rubbish as this, we may take our place at once under the banner of "Art for Art's sake."

It is not so much a matter of *whether* a man contemplates a work of art, but rather of *what* he contemplates in that work.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

IVAN BROOKS.