

## WAYS TO INTERIOR SILENCE

BY

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IN a lecture attempting to draw a picture of woman's soul as it should be in accordance with her eternal vocation the following attributes were used: wide, silent, empty of self, warm, clear. The question arose of how these qualities are to be obtained.

It is not a question of a multiplicity of qualities to be separately mastered or laboriously acquired, but rather of a simple condition of the soul, of which these attributes catch different aspects. We cannot achieve this condition by our own will; it must be a work of grace. What we can and must do is to open ourselves to grace. That means denying our own will entirely and surrendering only to the divine will, laying our whole soul, receptive and ready for re-shaping, in God's hands. One arrives at emptiness through silence, and at silence through emptiness. By nature the soul is occupied with many things; so much so that one thing is always crowding on another in a constant state of movement and often of tumult and uproar. When we wake in the morning, the duties and cares of the day at once begin to press on us (if indeed they have not already driven away our night's rest). The nagging questions begin: how is it all to be done in one day? When am I going to do this, that or the other? How can I tackle this or that? We feel inclined to rush out in a panic and throw ourselves into it. Then it is that we must tighten the reins and say: 'Gently now! First of all, none of all this must break in on me now. The first hour of my morning belongs to God. Whatever work for the day he gives me I will set about, and he will give me the power to accomplish it. So I will go in unto the altar of God. It is not myself and my tiny little affairs that matter here, but the great sacrifice of atonement. I am permitted to take part in it, to be washed clean and rejoiced, and to lay myself, with all my actions and sufferings, beside the oblation upon the altar. And when my Lord comes to me then in holy Communion, I can ask him "What do you want of me, Lord?"' (St Teresa). And after this silent converse, whatever I see as my next task I will set myself to'.

After the morning's celebration, when I enter upon my working

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day, there will be a solemn stillness in me, and my soul will be empty of what would have disturbed and burdened it, being full instead of holy joy, courage and strength. It has grown greater and wider, because it has gone out of itself into the divine life. The love that the Lord has enkindled in me burns tranquilly as a steady flame, compelling me to manifest my love and kindle it in others. 'Flammescat igne caritas accendat ardor proximos'. And I clearly see the next stretch of the road before me; I do not see very far, but I know that when I have arrived where the horizon now closes down, a new prospect will open before me.

Now the day's work begins: perhaps four or five hours in the schoolroom. That means keeping our mind on the subject—a different subject for each hour. In this period or that we cannot achieve what we wanted—perhaps in none. There is our own fatigue, there are unexpected interruptions, the children's unsatisfactory behaviour, all sorts of annoying, exasperating, worrying things. Or office-work: dealings with unsympathetic superiors or colleagues, impossible demands, unjust reprimands, human failings and every form of human need. Then it is midday. We come home exhausted and on edge, probably with fresh trials to face. Where now is the soul's morning freshness? The inclination to storm and ferment is there again: irritation, anger, bitterness. And so much to be done before evening! Mustn't we go on at once? No, not until quietness has returned at least for a moment. Everyone must know, or get to know, where and how she can find peace. The best, if possible, is to shed all cares through spending another short period before the tabernacle. For someone who cannot manage that, who perhaps needs some physical repose as well, a short rest in her own room. And if it is not possible to achieve any sort of exterior quiet, if there is nowhere where we can withdraw, if unavoidable duties prohibit an hour's silence, then inwardly, at least, we must for a moment shut ourselves off from everything else and flee to God. He is really there, and can give us what we need in a single moment. Then, even though the rest of the day goes by in great weariness and toilsomeness, it will go by in peace. And when night comes and a backward glance shows that it has been unfinished work, and much that we had planned remains undone, and so much of it makes us deeply ashamed and regretful, then we must take it all, just as it is, lay it in God's hands and leave it to him. Then we can rest in him, really rest and begin the new day in a new life.

This is only a slight sketch of how the day should be arranged so as to make room for God's grace. Each individual will know best how to apply it to the circumstances of her own life. Thus we should

go on to show how Sunday must be a great doorway letting the life of heaven into everyday life, and giving strength for the work of the whole week; and how the great feasts, festal seasons and fasts, lived in the spirit of the Church, help the soul to ripen year by year towards the eternal sabbath rest.

It will be an essential task for each individual to consider how she must arrange her daily and yearly life, in accordance with her own talents and circumstances, to make ready the way for God. The outward divisions of time will have to be different for each and in course of time be adapted to changed circumstances. But the spiritual situation likewise is different with different people. The means of establishing our link with the eternal, keeping it alive or re-infusing life into it—meditation, spiritual reading, taking part in the liturgy or popular devotions—are not all equally fruitful for all persons and at all times. Meditation, for instance, cannot be practised by all nor always in the same way. It is important to find out what is effective at each particular time and to make use of it.

If we meditate upon the road God's mother followed from Candlemas to Good Friday, we shall find roads through her to interior silence.



## THE SILENCE OF THE CLOISTER

BY

A RELIGIOUS

*The Father utters one Word and that Word is his Son. He utters him in everlasting silence and in silence the soul has to hear him.*

—St John of the Cross.



IF we want to find the ultimate explanation and full meaning of anything we must go back to the Beginning, End and Reason of all things—the Blessed Trinity. And this is true of 'the most holy rule of Silence' which is called somewhere 'a beautiful and most useful observance, conducing much to the formation of the religious spirit, to peace of soul and to the love of prayer'.

What do we mean by silence? Several quite different things which we may understand better if we consider the various words which we use as synonyms for silent: quiet, still, tranquil, noiseless, speechless.

The widest and most fundamental form of silence is the mere absence of noise—the sort of silence of the country which some-