

Life of the Spirit

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CONTEMPLATIVES AT HOME

BY

THE EDITOR



CONSIDERABLE interest has been shown almost from the foundation of this review for the problems and practice of those who lead by necessity or by choice a contemplative life in the world. A certain amount of discussion has taken place in its pages regarding the possibility of finding some way of life which could be followed in a more organised manner. So far the results of the discussion have been in the main negative.

To begin with it was hoped that the new 'Secular Institutes' which are in themselves designed for the direct lay apostolate, might provide a framework for some similar institute for contemplatives. This however seems to have proved to be a false scent. It is difficult enough to organise for an active life a group of people not living under a rule which indicates what is to be done from hour to hour. But for a group whose external lives are similar almost exclusively in what they are not rather than in what they are with the sole exception that they all seek closer and more solitary union with our Lord. The question of organisation becomes almost impossible. For most of those who are able to devote sufficient 'spare time' in solitude on their knees before God are otherwise tied to family obligations or necessities of work or even to the obligations of their own health which make it impossible for them to conform to any external rule of life which would embrace a large number of people. Many of them would in fact have been contemplative religious had the situation of their lives been different. The reason why such people are not religious is precisely because for one reason or another the life of external rule has proved impossible.

It would therefore seem more profitable to abandon the discussion of this side of the life, at least for the time being, and to concentrate on the more positive aspects of the manner in which one can grow in contemplation while remaining an isolated individual in the midst of the rush of modern existence. There are many things of importance in such a life which need to be discussed beginning with the nature of the dedication which so many feel drawn to make, the

dedication by vow. It is possible to consecrate the whole of a life lived thus in the world by a simple and private vow of chastity, and thus give point to the mortifications which must go hand in hand with prayer. In this light penances should come under review as well as the whole question of balance, since the solitary life so easily becomes out of 'true', out of plumb-line uprightness and it is difficult to know how far regular hours of prayer are to be adhered to in the face of demands of charity to one's neighbour. The relation between action and contemplation of course needs to be more and more clearly described. There are questions too of *lectio divina*, particularly with respect to the Scriptures, and the necessity and possibility of spiritual direction. Above all the nature of divine Union should be considered in its great variety of applications.

It is hoped that these and similar questions will be 'covered' in the course of time in the pages of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. It has been suggested too that a retreat for people who feel called to strive in a special way for Union with God while living in the world would be helpful for the many individuals who find themselves without much support from their surroundings. With a view to exploring this suggestion the Cenacle Convent at Grayshott has kindly offered to set aside one of its retreats this autumn for this purpose. The suggestion as expressed by one correspondent to the Editor of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT is that an annual retreat should be arranged for persons interested in the solitary and contemplative life. 'Not with any idea of "getting together" but of getting some guidance as to special problems and to have the support of the prayers of all.' The date suggested is November 18 to 22. Any who are interested in the proposal should write to the Reverend Mother, Convent of the Cenacle, Grayshott, Hindhead, Surrey.

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