

EDITORIAL

THE general theme of the present number of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT is the healing of the soul. The soul has its natural life, originated by God's creative act in conception and birth. It also has its higher or supernatural life, communicated by the Holy Spirit, who permeates it with the redeeming power of Christ. This life begins in baptism, when we are re-born into Christ, and is supported, nourished and healed when necessary by sacramental union with Christ in his Mystical Body the Church.

These two lives are distinct entities; natural life can exist, and even in a sense flourish, without supernatural life, but, apart from a natural life to inhere in, there can be no supernatural life. Yet these two lives must not be thought of as running parallel within the human person, each, as it were, in its own separate channel; so that at one moment we can concern ourselves with worldly things, making use of our natural life, and at another be occupied with spiritual things relying on the supernatural only. Where the state of grace exists the two lives are fused together into a single life, the supernatural raising and transforming the natural into a higher state, enabling the soul to see with new eyes and will with new power, the eyes and power of Christ. This is the beginning in us of the glory of eternal life.

Sin is the only direct enemy of this dual life; it can destroy the supernatural element in the duality or can afflict it with grievous sickness. The sacrament of penance is designed by God for healing this sickness and restoring supernatural health. It does this by contrition and the purpose of amendment on the penitent's part and absolution on that of the confessor. But there is a secondary purpose in going to confession; it is that we may receive advice from our spiritual physician. This is not of course a necessary part of every confession, but it is, from a practical point of view, a necessary element in the ordering of the spiritual life as a whole. Just as in illness we not only take the medicine the doctor prescribes, or submit to the operation he advises, we accept also his directions as to how to organize our daily routine so that medicine or operation may be fully effective for our welfare. So we cannot normally make real progress in the spiritual life without expert

guidance as to how to live it from day to day. Counsel as well as absolution is a very important element in going to confession.

But though the life of grace has only one direct enemy—sin, it can be indirectly hindered, diminished and even on occasion rendered entirely ineffective by another obstacle, the disease or mal-adjustment to its environment of the natural life. The supernatural life of grace needs, as we have seen, this natural life to work upon; it builds upon it, transforms and perfects it. If then the soul's natural life, the *psyche*, is distorted or maladjusted in any way, grace may be hindered, or even wholly obstructed, in its healing work. The foundation of that work, the rationality and freedom of the soul, is partially or entirely destroyed, leaving a defective or non-existent human ground work for grace to act upon.

Here we pass wholly or in part from the spiritual sphere in which the priest's work lies, and enter upon the sphere of therapeutic operation which properly belongs to psychology and the psychiatrist. Yet since man is a unity, made up, as a person, of body and soul, the two spheres are very closely connected and interpenetrate each other; but they are not identical. Priest and psychiatrist must work together, each keeping to his own sphere. The priest must know the limits of his field of operation, and for that, in addition to his moral and ascetical theology he needs a working knowledge of psychology. The psychiatrist too must beware of trespassing upon the priests' province and must be acutely conscious of the relationship between nature and grace, and cognisant at least of the ways by which the priest will lead men to Christ and safeguard and cherish their growth in him.

The articles which follow cover all this ground. The last of them, an assessment of the life of St Ignatius of Loyola, illustrates the fact that a saint may possess characteristics the tendency to which is innate, yet at the same time encouraged by environment. As with St Paul, to whom this assessment compares him, characteristics powerfully present in St Ignatius before conversion, were not an obstacle to, but a fulfilment of, the new life that conversion opened up. It was not necessary that these characteristics should be transmuted into something else; grace and the new vision it gave transformed them only by changing their direction. The relentless persecutor became the untiring apostle of the Gentiles, the good soldier became the soldier *par excellence* of Christ.

A saint can become a saint, under grace, *because* of innate tendencies, reinforced by natural environment. But equally well a saint may become a saint *despite* innate and acquired characteristics. Is not this the explanation of St Thérèse of Lisieux, about whom there has been so much controversy of late? The circumstances of her early upbringing were such that she may well have been born with a tendency to, and at an early age she clearly acquired, an inordinate craving for human affection, which uncurbed might well have proved an insuperable obstacle not to sanctity only but to the love and service of God in any degree whatever. The one thing that is clear beyond doubt to both sides in this controversy is that she *was* a saint. It seems however that without knowing anything of psychology or having to consult psychiatrists, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and in particular the gift of Fortitude, through the discipline of her Carmelite life, taught her the 'little way', and so enabled her to transmute this inordinate craving for human affection into an all-embracing love of God.



THE SACRAMENTS: III—PENANCE

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WE have seen in earlier articles how the Church takes natural, human things, such as water and oil, and supernaturalizes them by the power of God. In the technical language of sacramental theology the natural sign is called the matter, the words which raise it up and determine it to bring about that which it signifies, the form. But it would be quite wrong to imagine an implied contrast between material and immaterial in the normal sense of the words. In the sacrament of penance the natural element is human sorrow for sin, a turning from evil to good: it is transformed into that supernatural love of God which is charity, through words of absolution spoken by a priest who has been given the necessary faculties by the bishop. The matter here is not a visible element, like oil and water, bread and wine, but in the same way it is something itself significant of what the sacramental words actually make it do.

In the first place there must be a real change of heart in the