

QUICKENED BY THE SPIRIT

THE EDITOR

WE need the Holy Spirit to enliven our thoughts and our deeds in every sphere of Christian life—otherwise we remain constrained by our own human mode of thinking and doing. That was true when our Lord came to send his Spirit into the mechanical and dead mass of organised religion in his own day. And it will always be true in so far as the external organisation of religion tends to be restricted by the people who run it to their own human conceptions and idiosyncrasies. The danger of human plans in organising the Church and her worship of God is often present in our appreciation of what needs to be done to encourage true Christian living today. But usually we are content to accept the system in which we find ourselves and hope that it will somehow carry us along towards our goal without our having to do very much about it. We should like to feel certain that so long as we keep to our Sunday observance, learn how to follow the Mass and approach the sacraments fairly often we shall be making a good show of living like Christ. But of course there is no machine that can bring us life, and it is always the Spirit that quickeneth, springing up from within and making it possible for us to master the external organisation of law and rubric. Then these also provide an opening for the same Spirit of Christ.

More often we are aware of the dangers of the Spirit, that is to say the dangers of those who claim to be following the direction of the Holy Ghost, even when they are not pretending that the inner life leads them away from the external life of the Church. The good Christian who looks for this quickening life from within is necessarily bound to think of his attitude towards the third Person of the Blessed Trinity in terms of passivity. If the Spirit is to blow where he listeth and move the Christian according to the divine movements of grace rather than the human initiative of deliberated reasoning and action, he must accept rather than

act. He must be open and ready to receive this superior force which is not his own human power and which is incalculable in its comings and goings as well as in its direction. The Christian must be passive under the hand of God. And it is this that causes disquiet to many people. It seems to suggest an inactivity and quietism that leaves plenty of scope for the lower and irrational elements in the human make-up to range about and cause illusion and disorganisation. The man who seeks to be passive often allows his passions to run free, and thus induces experiences that come from below rather than from above. It is the usual phenomenon of false mysticism.

Yet passivity is certainly demanded if a man is to allow the Holy Spirit to work within him. To begin with there is the passive element in asceticism which was discussed in last month's *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* under the aspect of the desert. Many think of mortification as choosing special methods of quelling 'the flesh' by fasts and vigils, hair shirts, or giving up sugar or sweets. But this is not the principal way of mortification, which is rather to follow Christ who was driven by the Spirit into the desert and finally to the summit of Calvary in this way of acceptance. The other means are only taken on to help the Christian to accept the will of God in the hardships that are permitted as the way of purification, detaching the man from his surroundings—not that he is to reject them, but that he may eventually come back to them with the wholeness of the love of God. This acceptance of God's will then is passive to the Spirit who drives man continually into the desert to distinguish in order to unite.

Again, in the matter of prayer, the Spirit does not begin to work freely according to his mode until the Christian has been compelled by his state of mind to abandon the methods and exercises of prayer which had been his first support. Discursive prayer still follows the human mode, is active and achieved by the habitual efforts of the one who attempts to pray. But eventually these methods break down and the Christian is left blank and helpless no matter what he tries. Then, the Christian having accepted the fact that he cannot pray, the Spirit begins to make intercession for

him, crying *Abba*, Father. The Spirit leads the Christian into a new world of simple prayer which has diverse names and degrees such as 'Simple Regard' or 'the Prayer of Quiet', but which is characterised by this one fact—that it is passive rather than active. It does not come by observation but is pushed upon the man who turns his face to the light of the love of God.

This passivity is spoken of in terms of infused contemplation. It follows the working of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the very conception of these gifts implies that the Christian depends upon what he is given rather than what he can find or earn for himself. 'Suffering divine things' was the way the earlier writers tried to express this effect of the freedom of the Spirit within the life of man. The Christian becomes a patient, nursed gently by the Spirit of Christ. His mind ranging over the Bible is suddenly caught by the 'inner light' of some familiar text. The will doing its best to obey the commands of God is suddenly captivated by the Father and the Christian becomes a true son impelled by the piety that led Christ to Calvary.

Now if we were all machines fitting neatly into some divine organisation, like some great factory in which the power comes from a central unit and drives all the various contraptions within the building, then indeed passivity would be the end of all. There would be nothing else for it but to be driven like a printing press by its electric motor. Sometimes the work of the Spirit is likened to God playing on the soul as a musician fingering the strings of his lyre and bringing forth tunes which the lyre could never form itself even though its strings produced the individual notes. But this simile could easily be pushed too far, since the strings of the lyre in fact make their sounds according to mathematical formula. The lyre is not living, it has no mind and no will. When the Spirit plays on the soul of man he plays on a living being which to live according to its own proper existence must think and act through these interior faculties. We are men, and men have all these inherent powers made by the Creator from the first moment of their being and acting constantly. They may have to die in order to receive the new life; they have to die to themselves, but

the new life is the life of men, of Christian men, of men in the Spirit of Christ.

The Christian then is not pushed from outside. He was pushed when he merely observed the law subserviently. The Spirit enters into the human action itself when he is sufficiently open and accepting in his attitude of mind and heart towards God. The Holy Spirit does not provide the good Christian with new faculties which he can use at will. The monk who settles down to read his Bible in his traditional meditative way cannot simply turn on the gift of understanding to clear up difficult passages. The man of action cannot employ the gift of courage when he thinks that he requires it. The Spirit comes suddenly when least expected, so that every Christian has to remain in a state of expectancy. But a man who is wide awake and ready can hardly be said to be merely passive or inert. So being open-hearted and not tied down to his own personal and human way of seeing things and doing them, the Spirit of Christ may enter into the very centre of his being and move him as a man, that is, to act with and in him, not instead of him. We might seek a nearer analogy in the relation between a keen and efficient master in relation to his pupil. The master is not really effective if he thinks for the pupil and turns him into a sort of gramophone; but if he inspires the pupil to act with the same enthusiasm for knowledge and along the same avenues of investigation, then the pupil will not only have the mind of his master but his own mind will be more active, more intelligent—more his own.

So when the Christian is open to the movements of the Spirit of Christ far from remaining inert he becomes more intensely active. He develops an ever-growing desire. He wants to do more penance and mortification because of his love of Christ dying on the cross. He wants to draw closer and closer to God in the love of friendship. He wants to share with everyone he meets these most wonderful and inexpressible treasures that have been shown to him in the faith of Christ. He wants to read the Scriptures over and over again in order to savour them. All these desires are centred in the love which the Christian has for Jesus Christ and in him for the blessed Trinity, and in him again for the whole

world, a kingdom of heaven which is remote and separated from the normal world of the Christian. The Spirit simply perfects his charity which is thus able to pervade his whole life, his mind, his will, his very action among his fellows, his prayer. For that reason **THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT** will follow the present issue on the Holy Spirit with a double number devoted to the Love of God (in the August-September number of this year).

It may be seen then that the true and full reception of the Holy Spirit avoids the danger of a passive quietism as well as of an esoteric other-worldliness which despises the outward forms of religion. The Spirit drives man more and more into the work of the liturgy and of the mystical body under the authority of the bishops and the Pope. He, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, re-introduces the Christian to the life of law and rubric in such a way that these outward forms cease to be the mechanical actions of an organisation, a machine that mimics life; they become quickened, enlivened by the Spirit of Love.



THE CLOUD ON THE TABERNACLE

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Let me remind you of this. Our fathers were hidden all of them under the cloud, and found a path all of them through the sea; all alike in the cloud and in the sea, were baptised into Moses's fellowship.—I Cor. 10, 1-2.

OF all the events of the Old Testament there is none which is of an importance comparable to the Exodus. It was the mighty Act of God, in the light of which the whole history of Israel was given its meaning. By this act Israel had been delivered from bondage and formed into a people, it had been given a Law and made the subject of a Covenant; it had been guided through the desert and brought into the Promised Land. This was the pattern in which the Prophets saw the history of Israel. They looked back on it as the 'time of her espousals', when Israel had