

working-class men and women. I can see now the fine old face of an army pensioner lit up with joy as he said to me after some rite: 'A lovely service, Father, a lovely service!' Recently, after the Candle-Mass rites in a little chapel, a working man was talking about his delight in witnessing them for the first time for days after the event; the simple rite had brought a glow of happiness into his work-days. No priest will ever regret taking pains in carrying out these rites, no matter how limited the resources at his command. Let there be reverence in the sanctuary, and a sustained personal enthusiasm for the Liturgy as a *spiritual reality*, a vital contact with Christ our High Priest, and our people will respond. Mere attention to rubrics and liking for ritual leads to formalism and sheer boredom, but the true appreciation of the meaning of the Liturgy never loses its power to delight and to sanctify. I end by stressing the importance of teaching our people by example, and not only by sermons, the joy of Liturgy's chief purpose—the worshipping of God. The first tribute of the Gentile Wise Men was the giving of adoration, and every day can be a renewal of that mutual epiphany—Christ showing himself with love and tenderness, and we showing in return our humble devotion. The Feast of Adoration was an occasion of 'great joy,' and those who live in that experience never lack the spirit of Christian joy.

THE WAY OF PERFECTION IN THE ENGLISH MYSTICS

BY

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III—THE SCALE

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the English spiritual authors, some explanation is required of the order and design of the treatment. For we do not intend to follow a chronological order and indeed we have included the Ancren Riwle which is outside our period, as also William Langland who scarcely deserves the name of mystic though he was a great poet and the mystic is often, if not always, a poet too.

Our plan is to climb up the scale, the ladder of perfection, from the lowest rungs to the topmost, where, like Jacob's ladder, they disappear into heaven. The theme of this essay has been adopted from Père Garrigou-Lagrange's now celebrated thesis that the highest flights of infused contemplation and mystical union are on

the royal road to holiness open to all. A scheme therefore of the normal growth of the generous soul cooperating to the full with the graces offered her, will begin with the first conversion and end with the heights of union described in different terminology by St John of the Cross, Mother Julian, and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.

This growth, as we have already seen, was first embryonically systematised by the pseudo-Denis with the threefold division of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, or in other words, the beginner, the proficient, and the perfect, which was the more common form of the division in the Middle Ages. St Thomas elaborates the division in terms of the normal physical growth of a man. First comes the infant who is without reason and reacts immediately to its instincts, so in the infancy of the spiritual life the chief concern, the *studium principale*, is the overcoming of concupiscence, the disentangling of one's self from the unreasonable movements of sin—the *recessus a peccato*. At this time charity is to be nourished and fostered, but what is most manifest is the struggle against the evils of sin. Then comes Youth, when reason dawns and the child begins to speak with understanding. Lower instincts become controlled by the higher faculties. And so the soul's chief preoccupation is to progress, to become proficient in good. Charity is strengthened and begins to predominate. Finally with Puberty the youth receives the full use of all his powers and faculties. Thus the soul's chief concern is to possess God and to enjoy him—*ut Deo inhaereat et eo fruatur*. Charity reigns. There are many ways of marking out the same growth, and as with any movement its stages are not fixed and static points on the way, but simply milestones. All the divisions of spiritual growth may, however, be brought under those three headings.¹

It is not surprising that in our own day this simple scheme has become very much more elaborate, far more closely analysed and more detailed measurements given to fill in the distances between the milestones. Already this process was at work in the 14th century. The threefold division crops up in every writer in some form or another. It is almost a major theme of Langland's. But Hilton sets out deliberately to write of the scale itself and is consequently more explicit and detailed than any of the others. Later the Spanish mystics bring further precision, St Teresa with her *Mansions* and St John of the Cross with his *Dark Nights*. All this wealth of analysis and discernment in the growth of the soul has been collected and tabulated by many modern authors, but perhaps by none more successfully and comprehensively than by Père Garrigou-Lagrange. For the sake of clarity we may therefore set out here in comparison the 'Scale' as mapped out by Walter Hilton and the 'Three Ways' of Père Garrigou-Lagrange.

¹Cf. St Thomas II-II, 24 art. 9, *corpus* and answers to objections.

(1) HILTON'S SCALE

Bk. I c. 1. Turning. Conversion.

- c. 2. { *Active Life*—bodily } fasting, vigils, penance
ghostly } help towards contemplation.
'To all *young beginning men*, come newly out of sin to service.' (Minor Works, p. 4.)
- c. 3. { *Contemplative Life*—'Perfect love and charity felt inwardly by ghostly virtues and by soothfast knowing of God and ghostly things'.
- c. 4. { (a) *Knowing by Reason*. Natural contemplation. Without affection and savour. Theology, Scholars etc.; for Good and Bad alike. A Good Way, if they keep in meekness and charity, fleeing fleshly sins.
- c. 5. { (b) *Affection without light of understanding*. Burning love in Devotion. Through meditation, feeling of fervour about the Passion. Fervent desires and ghostly delight. But '*no open sight*' in understanding, nor of mysteries. Tears, Sweet Burning.
- c. 6. { (1) *Lower Degree*—occasionally given also to Actives. A little tasting of the love of God. Comes fitfully according to will of God.
- c. 7. { (2) *Higher Degree*—only for those in great rest of Body and Soul. Rest of heart and cleanness of conscience. Name of '*Jesu*' and *Liturgy* turned to sweet song.
- c. 8. { (c) *Perfect*. Burning love in contemplation. *Spiritual*. A Tasting in *Darkness*.
{ First *Reformed* by fullness of virtues to the image of Jesus;
{ And *After*, when all is purged—*illuminated* to see by understanding soothfastness—which is God—sweet burning love. Ravishing. Marriage.

The Fullness of this is HEAVEN.

(2) THE THREE WAYS OF TODAY

FIRST CONVERSION.

PURGATIVE WAY: { Feeble, slack or retarded with some falls.
 { Generous, fervent souls.

Passive Purification of the Senses.

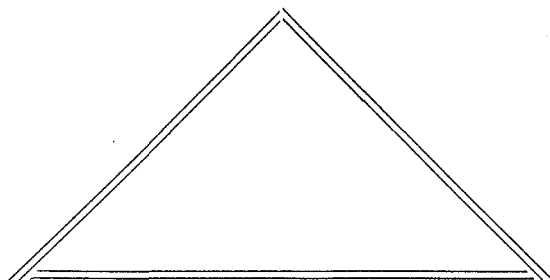
ILLUMINATIVE WAY: { Feeble—Transitory acts of infused Con-
 { Full— { Ordinary— { Active in character,
 { { { e.g. St Vincent de Paul.
 { { { Contemplative in character.
 { Extraordinary: with visions and
 { revelations.

Passive Purification of the Spirit.

UNITIVE WAY: { Feeble—Union often interrupted.
 { Full— { Ordinary— { Apostolic
 { { { Purely Contemplative.
 { Extraordinary, e.g. Visions of the
 { Trinity.

It is this general scheme that we shall follow in this work and in order that readers may grasp this gradually ascending scale of the growth of the soul in its way to holiness we here set out the scheme in the form of a ladder, which should be read beginning from the bottom of the page:

GOD



BEATIFIC VISION

PURELY PASSIVE JUDGMENT

FINAL PURIFICATION DEATH

UNIT: FULL EXTRAORDINARY Visions

UNIT: FULL ORDINARY CONTEMPL. ONLY

UNIT: FULL ORDINARY APOSTOLIC

UNITIVE FEEBLE Often Interrupted

PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF SPIRIT

ILL: FULL EXTRAORDINARY. Visions, etc.

ILL: FULL ORDINARY. CONTEMPLATIVE

ILL: FULL ORDINARY ACTIVE

FEEBLE ILLUMINATIVE Transitory Acts of
 Infused Contemplation

PASSIVE PURGATION OF SENSES

GENEROUS PURGATIVE Fervent

FEEBLE PURGATIVE Slack. Retarded
 Some Falls

FIRST CONVERSION

SINNER

The choice of our English spiritual writers follows this, and not the chronological, order. Thus the first author to be discussed is LANGLAND because he shows the way to a first conversion in the midst of social upheaval and unrest, an excellent model for first conversion in the twentieth century. Thence, leaping back practically two centuries, we take the ANCREN RIWLE, which is hardly more of a mystical document than 'Piers Ploughman'; but this rule lays down a very thorough ascetic doctrine; it shows the early stages of the spiritual life, the love and the virtues characteristic of the Purgative Way. For the higher reaches of the purgative way leading into the Illuminative RICHARD ROLLE's *Amending of Life* provides the best guide. The same author in the *Fire of Love* and his other works describes a state of soul which is very noble but never reaches beyond the Illuminative Way. Here too we may include *Margery Kempe* with all her visions and curious behaviour. For the Unitive Way we are provided with the best literature of the whole period in MOTHER JULIAN's *Revelations* and the CLOUD OF UNKNOWING with its companion volumes. Finally, summarising the whole process and rounding off the list we turn to WALTER HILTON himself. He will help to put all these writers in their allotted places. We cannot be very cut-and-dried in making these allotments. Any forcing into unyielding categories would kill the vitality of their words; but if we follow this scheme it will be seen that the writers do thus fall fairly into these threefold divisions in the manner sketched above. The growth of the spiritual life is the growth of a single individual. Here we have marshalled a small group, each member of which is to take over one section. We trust in the natural power and vitality of their words to master any tendency to artificiality that may arise from this plan.

(To be continued)

ERRATUM: In the previous issue of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, p. 44, in the sentence describing the period of 'The English Mystics': 'Rolle born perhaps ten years before it opened and Mother Julian dying some ten years after its close'.