

POINTS OF VIEW

TO THE EDITOR, THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

Dear Sir,

Thank you—or somebody—for sending me *The Life*. This number was marvellously good, on 'The Bible and the Spirit'. But one thing irritates me a little. So many writers, especially Dominicans, deplore the cleavage between ordinary men and women and normal things like earth, water, fire and air (the wind on the heath, brother). Some even go so far as to suggest that without roots in these fundamental things man can scarcely appreciate the sacraments. Now, as you know, I am not one to minimize these things. *Au contraire*, perhaps. But at least I have tried to do something about it, though in a very small way. And, apart from Taena, nobody does very much about the matter. In fact, articles like Talbot's, on Agriculture and Wholeness, in an old BLACKFRIARS, and my own little bleats in the Scottish *Catholic Herald* and what not, are like stones falling into a deep pool. Blop. If things are really as some writers say they are, then our urban masses are going to lose the Faith and that's all about it.

Myself, I can't think it is so bad as all that. Most ordinary people's minds operate on a different level from these highbrows, and the lack of emotional content in the symbol, e.g. the wafer, does not affect them at all.

But, loving the symbol for itself as I do, I would like to see some more practical suggestions towards bringing these great fundamental things closer to our masses in their daily lives. Short retreats won't do it: nor Back-to-the-Land movements. Something between. Will no rich man give you a country house plus about 100 acres, near enough to a big town to afford a market for vegetables and fruit—the best cash crops? I am convinced it could be made to pay in a very short time, and would offer an escape and asylum for the human wreckage of our towns, mental, physical and moral. Grailville are doing something like it in America. All over the country there are serious priests who are at their wits' end to help such cases among their people, and they would welcome such a venture and, possibly, support it.

We are so good at diagnosis nowadays, and have so little treatment to offer. T. L. Westow in your May number, for

instance. I liked his article very much. But, on sober reflection, what is it but another 'bind'? No solution is offered. Caryll Houselander wrote that long book on *Guilt*. I read it, and being an active rather than a contemplative, I analysed her concluding chapter. It offers no help, except to the odd person who has been thinking along the same lines and therefore could do without it anyway.

Perhaps this letter is only another bind. That would be too bad, for *The Life* always does me good, and I look forward to seeing it.

G. A. BADENOCH, M.D.

PERFECTION

DEAR SIR,

All this talk about perfection worries me. I am quite sure that most of that rather sinister artificiality that is too often evident in devout persons arises from the bad habit of seeking perfection. It has been my privilege to help, or to try and help, monks and religious of all Orders and in many different countries, and it has been my experience that many nervous crises, and many of the tragedies that happen from time to time in monasteries and religious houses are due to this misguided desire for perfection which is too often a cloak for a subtle kind of self-seeking and lack of generosity. Perfection is as various as human nature and it comes to those who seek God with their whole hearts. It is an effect of union with God. I once read an article by a monk (I am not sure it was not in *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*) in which he spoke of the monastery as a school of perfection. This may be true of some post-reformation monasteries, but Saint Benedict's idea was that it should be a 'school of the service of God' and he does not require of his novices that they should seek perfection but that they should seek God. In a wonderful phrase he says of the monk who has been ordained a priest that he should not be puffed up by the honour conferred upon him but that he should 'magis ac magis in Deum proficiat'. No one comes to the Father save through the Son and the monk finds God through the common life of his monastery which is for him the life of Christ. This requires an enormous generosity, but then the price of the treasure hidden in the field has always been all that we have got. Ultimately it comes to discretion which is surely nothing else than a very clear distinction between means and ends.

BRUNO S. JAMES