

that?' 'Fill the waterpots . . .', 'now draw . . .' All that is seen is divine power: 'Jesus began his miracles and made known the glory that was his'. The human foundations were ignored for the moment. The sign and the gift of faith alone are given. Later and gradually during his public life our Lord revealed himself. Wisdom unfolded itself gradually as it unfolds in the history of the Church. As Jesus's own life unfolded he became seemingly more gentle and more human as well as more undoubtedly divine. So in the Church's history in these later days we have the consoling devotion to our Lord's Sacred Heart and we have the manifold apparitions of our Lady.

In the Gospel as our Lord's own gentleness and humanity are seen more clearly our Lady retires. In fact she does not speak again. Cana has revealed her mediating between God and man, distributing the riches of Eternal Wisdom. She is seen as the Mother of Grace. Cana is the summit of the visible historical revelation of Mary's personality, for on that day she openly gave her Son to the world. She is the throne of that wisdom given to the world, Wisdom given to 'little ones' first, to shepherds, to servants and then to all the world. From now on Mary has to learn 'what is in man'. She has to learn the wisdom of sorrow and suffering, of the cross, of crucifixion, of martyrdom, of living death.

A MEDIEVAL BOOK FOR TODAY

BY

KATHERINE CHOLMELEY



URING the 14th century, several books on the interior life were written in England. The most useful of these is, perhaps, the *Scale of Perfection*, composed by Water Hilton, a Canon of the Augustinian Priory of Thurgarton in Nottinghamshire.

It is as fresh in manner as though it had been written yesterday. We feel, while reading it, as though we were learning from some wise spiritual director of our own time. The style is easy, the sentences simple in construction. There is little that we may regard as archaic; the book is as applicable to any century as is the *Imitation*. The guidance along the road of the spiritual life is just that which we would hear today from an experienced confessor, or the skilled conductor of a Retreat. It is eminently practical. Charity and humility are the two virtues on which men should build the structure of the contemplative life. The chief study and

reading should be that of Holy Writ. Far better than any secular study, is the study of the Scriptures that the soul may learn to see Jesus therein. The customary prayer should be that of the psalms, and the Office of the Church, for these are inspired by the Holy Spirit: in using them, we are safe, and using the best language.

The section on distractions is so acute as to be startling. 'Thou sayest that . . . when thou wouldest have the mind of thy heart upward to God in thy prayer, thou feelest so mickle many thoughts in vain, of thy own deeds before done, or what thou shalt do, and of other men's deeds, and such many other . . . and the more thou travailest to keep thine heart, the further it is from thee, and harder.' Is not this the very manner of the straying of our thoughts, absorbed in the actual past, and the possible future, whether or no we wrestle with them as we should? Walter Hilton impresses on the anchoress, for whom the book was written, that she should at the beginning set her attention and will on God 'as whole and clean' as she could *shortly* in her mind. What wisdom is contained in that word 'shortly': it shields the soul from scruple, and also from undue occupation with the prelude to prayer, for she must set to work on the actual praying. If there is failure, the soul must not be too angry with herself, or impatient with God, for not giving her consolation. The distractions should be an occasion for realising one's own feebleness. The soul must turn humbly to God, trusting he will make her feeble prayer good and profitable.

'There is many a soul', he concludes, 'which may never find rest of heart in prayer, but all her lifetime is striving with her thoughts, and is tarried and troubled with them; yet, if she keep her in meekness and charity, she shall have full mickle meed in heaven, for her good travail.'

This is extraordinarily consoling to those who struggle to pray well, yet always appear to fail. Hilton's method is often strikingly similar to that of St Francis de Sales. Trust in God, and a humble waiting on his will. .

He does not, of course, encourage laziness. On the contrary, the purpose of the book is to draw the soul away from outward things, and from preoccupation with this world, to contemplation. When a contemplative man chants the psalms or any other vocal prayer he says only in his heart the words that are formed by his mouth: no other. The body, then, becomes naught but an instrument on which 'the soul bloweth sweet notes of ghostly lauding to Jhesus'.

The book was written in the first place for a recluse, who is addressed as 'Ghostly Sister'; but it is applicable to anyone who

feels drawn to contemplation, whether religious, or in the world. Walter Hilton, like Richard Rolle, says remarkably little about bodily penances. He urges commonsense in the matter of food. We must not, of course, be greedy, or take undue pleasure in eating, but yet, each should eat what he feels necessary in order to be able to pray. He urges interior mortification: charity, meekness, forgiveness, detachment: things not easy to fallen human nature. It is noteworthy, in passing, to see that he points out to the anchoress that a married woman, in the world, may be far higher in the spiritual life than she. She is not to think herself better than others, better than the laity, because she is 'enclosed in a house'.

He emphasises that the spiritual life, in much, must consist of struggle: the soul has to be reformed to the image of Jesus. Jesus desires the soul, and he implants in the soul the desire for himself: this is the heart of the spiritual life. The soul must find him within herself, but turning to that quest, she comes first on the dark image of sin. That image must be broken down and replaced by his. The dark image, which Hilton figures under the shape of the human body, is made up of the Seven Deadly Sins, pride being the head and sloth the feet. Anger is typified by the arms, for it is with our arms that we strike. Envy, says Hilton, is the breast, for envy dwells in the heart, a devilish sin, not of the flesh but far worse. He warns us that the dark image will never be wholly done away: it remains as a peril and an enemy, for all our lifetime.

We have to find Jesus in the house of our soul, as the woman in the parable sought for the coin which she had lost. He is there in the house, but hidden: we have to seek diligently to find him. We must light our lantern, that is God's Word: Holy Scripture, and also reason, and then search till we find. The light will first show up all the dust, the filth, and the motes in the house: all the faults and sins of the soul. They must be swept away with the besom of the dread of God, and so may Jesus be found.

In the latter part of the second book of the *Scale* Walter Hilton deals with the finding. It is the reward of struggle. At first it will be painful and difficult to draw the mind from being fixed on creatures, and the heart from attachment to them: to train thought and love to be fixed on God. The soul must pass through a night of longing when its constant prayer must be: 'I am nought; I desire nought but Jhesu'. We associate the phrase 'the dark night of the soul' with St John of the Cross; but Walter Hilton had written of it more than a century before. Between one day and another, he reminds us, must come the night. The first day we know is that of this world; but if we turn from it to seek the other,

we must lose its light: before it is possible to attain the light of contemplation, the soul must pass through the night. It becomes a quiet night, a restful night, but nevertheless, a dark night. Jesus is there, but he cannot be seen. Our prayer must be the prayer of utter faith, and loyal persistent longing. Created things must draw us and hold us no longer, to them our eyes must be closed.

Our natural feeling, at the suggestion of turning away from creatures, is apt to be one of fear, a sense that we are turning towards nothingness, to blankness. We, being creatures of flesh, may dread the thought of turning towards Spirit. We feel the need for images, and so God himself has helped us by taking our flesh. St John, leaning on the bosom of Jesus, may have lain with eyes shut like a child, and have listened only to the beating of the heart of his Master. With his eyes closed to outer things he might learn from the love within that heart. We must not fear to turn from creatures, and shut away our thoughts from them. Our Lord himself, as Hilton shows, will come to our aid.

The soul which has striven manfully to cast out the dark image of sin, comes to a state where grace makes it quiet and peaceable. If anyone is unjust, if anyone is unkind, it takes the hurt with gentleness. This is the result of love: of the Holy Spirit working 'wisely and softly' in the soul. The actions of men become of little account, for the soul desires only the sight of Jesus: it comes to set no value on itself. 'The reverent sight and lovely beholding of Jhesu' so possess it that it cares not for praise or blame, for honour nor for scorn. It does not want to be concerned with the opinion of its fellow men, but only to think of Jesus.

Only the Holy Ghost, 'love unformed' can bestow on the soul love towards God. We cannot love God by our own power. We must struggle and strive against sin, but the love of Jesus is a gift.

'Ask then of God', says Walter Hilton, 'nothing but this gift of love, that is, the Holy Ghost. . . . There is no gift of God that is both giver and gift, but this gift of love.' Then will the soul be quiet and humble, and perceive that she does nothing of herself: there is no good thought or deed that she can call her own. It is Jesus who does every good deed and every good thought through her.

He will show himself to the contemplative soul, when and how he pleases. She must keep herself still, waiting on his pleasure. He gives gentle stirrings of love that come and go.

The great love, the fixed attachment to Jesus, is so strong that it slays all the deadly sins. The soul no longer desires the excitements and interests of this world: 'it is pain to the soul of a lover to speak or hear anything that might hinder the freedom of his

heart to think on Jhesus'. The soul desires Jesus only, and is tranquil. Then will he speak to her, not, of course, in an audible voice, but by riveting the attention, and opening the understanding, so that she sees him as a master, father, or 'lovely spouse'.

MAKING TIME FOR GOD

BY

H. C. GRAEF



HOW I should like to deepen my spiritual life by more prayer and reading; but I simply haven't the time—this complaint can often be heard from many who earnestly desire a more intimate relationship with God and feel that what prevents them from achieving it is mainly lack of that minimum of leisure which is indispensable for an intense life of prayer.

Yet, if we look at the Saints we shall discover the paradoxical phenomenon that the more they prayed the more time they seemed to have for their apostolic work. Whether we take St Dominic or St Teresa, St Bernard or St Catherine of Siena, we are confronted with the fact that they accomplished in a very short time tasks sufficient for several ordinary long human lives, and in addition gave what seems to us a disproportionate amount of time to prayer. It looks, indeed, as if our Lord's promise that to those who seek first the Kingdom of God all else will be added includes also time. If we give time to him he will give it back to us with interest. This may sound somewhat mysterious, but the importance of the time factor in the spiritual life will become clearer if it is first considered from the purely natural point of view.

Though the proverb says that time is money most people are much more careful about how they spend their money than about spending their time. Yet the Saints regard time as a gift from God, granted them in order to work out their salvation in it. There is a poignant urgency in many of the New Testament sayings on time, for example in those words of our Lord, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work' (Jn. 9 :4), and of St Paul, 'See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly . . . redeeming the time' (Eph. 5: 15 f.).

In this matter, as in so many others, the children of the world are often wiser than the children of light. What is the secret of those businessmen, writers, doctors, politicians, who seem to cram into the twenty-four hours of their day three times as much as other