

EXTRACTS

THE HARVEST FESTIVAL. *Orate Fratres* (August) publishes as an article an address given by Mrs Berger at Grailville on the feast of the Assumption, 1949. In it the speaker made the significant point that not only is the Assumption the feast for womankind but it is also the feast of the harvest:

This day, as you know, is the principal and oldest feast of the Virgin. It is the first harvest feast of the year and correctly so, for Mary was a first fruit to be gathered into the Father's barn. Whatever good men have done, whatever harvest God has reaped, is due in some measure to Mary: for through Mary we have 'partaken of the fruit of life': through Mary 'true life flowed out to all'. So when the harvest was ripe Mary became first in time and eternity.

The Church makes all things clear and, just as the pulse of living rounds the seasons, Assumption Day opens the harvest season and first fruits are sanctified. What are the first harvests of our farms and gardens? There are the grains, small fruits and vegetables, it is true; but on 'the day of the great Lady' we little ladies harvested something especially feminine. We went to our gardens, picked our herbs and flowers, brought them to church and asked for them a special blessing.

Assumption Day was woman's day. There were many more masculine harvest feasts coming later. From September to December men feasted the male saints of heaven to ensure good production. St Stephen makes the wine clear and sweet and heady, St Bartholomew sees that the lambs are fat and woolly, St Michael protects the pigs until they are as broad as barrels, St Martin watches over the cows, St Leopold the geese and St Andrew the sheep. But again we women began it all with the feast of the Assumption and the Church humoured us by giving a special blessing for our herbs and fruits and flowers. . . .

It was only natural that we should love these things and ask that they be sanctified. This was the harvest of beauty and health—two things which make life more womanly. Women, as everyone knows, are easily affected by beauty. The loveliness of colour thrills us, so we brought our flowers both bright and greyed. We enjoy the beauty of odour as well and have attracted many an unsuspecting soul with the perfume of fragrant blossoms and herbs. God gave us these beautiful things to use rightly and honestly, and when we brought them for blessing on Assumption Day we were showing our love and good sense to acknowledge their Source and to sanctify their use.

Herbs, fruits and flowers—these are the offerings of the Assumption for healing, for health and for beauty. And the speaker went on to remind her hearers of our Lady's special connection with flowers

and with their names in the English language. It is perhaps significant that our Lady is still constantly associated with flowers, even in the strange experiences of Fatima.

THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM. The *Osservatore Romano* has been preparing the Christian mind for the definition by a series of articles on the Assumption. The first two discussed the nature and purpose of an infallible decree and the relation between Catholic theology and the Assumption. They were concerned rather with the repercussions of the definition itself than with the meaning of the doctrine. But they were followed by a more essential exposition of the dogma which is the revelation in the concrete of the Spirit and the Life which our Lord came to make manifest.

We may see in the Assumption the definitive victory of the spirit. This spiritualisation of the human body, this participation of the body in the new vigour of the eternally triumphant soul, such is one of the most radiant certainties of the faith and one of the noblest aspirations of Christian humanism . . . and by Mary this is even now a heavenly reality. . . . The Assumption is the triumph of life and of life eternal for which we hope and by which we are able to live here below. . . . The Assumption of Mary ought to be today an invitation to raise our eyes on high, there to retrieve the faith, to believe in the freedom that Christ has obtained for us, the freedom from death in the eternal triumph of life. (9th September.)

And then an Italian, Piero Chiminelli, had the happy idea of collecting all the English-speaking poets who have written of the Assumption, and they make a surprisingly fine array. First come the non-Catholic poets beginning with the metaphysical poets Joseph Beaumont and Henry Vaughan, followed by the Anglican Bishop Ken and coming to an end with Rossetti. The Catholics stretch from Crashaw to Francis Thompson. It is not, however, surprising that this 'victory of Christian humanism' should find its protagonists among the best 'Anglo-Saxon poets'. And not only the Anglo-Saxons, for the *Osservatore* followed this article with one on Dante's witness which is to be found appropriately at the end of the *Paradiso* in the 25th Canto, where the poet speaks of the two alone who have risen, Jesus and Mary:

Con le due stole nel beato chiostro
Son le due luci sole che saliro.

THE TREE OF LIFE. *The American Ecclesiastical Review* (August) contains some well-documented pages on the *Transitus Mariae*, reviewing the many legends and their worth. A fifth-century Syrian *Transitus* has an interesting reference to the tree of life:

And when the body of Mary had been brought into the clouds,

our Lord said to the Apostles that they should draw near to the clouds. And when they drew near to the clouds they were singing with the voice of angels. And our Lord told the clouds to go to the gate of Paradise. And when they had entered Paradise the body of Mary went to the tree of life; and they brought her soul and made it enter her body.

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AT DEATH IT IS FINISHED. Some years ago a friend submitted the following consideration on the Thirteenth Station of the Cross to Father Steuart:

Thirteenth Station: Perhaps much sooner than I think I shall no longer have the opportunity of living a crucified life (for it is only in *this* life that the flesh can be crucified). At death we are, as it were, taken down from the cross, and the opportunity of 'being nailed to the Cross with Christ' will then be over. How I shall regret it at death if in this life I missed that opportunity which is only given once and which will never return.

Fr Steuart commented: 'A very practical thought, and one which helps to get rid of that fear of death which haunts some people; because if one accustoms oneself to see this 'nailing to the Cross' with Christ as the *reality*, so to put it, of all that one endures in life, one will be led so to value all that one has to suffer and all the occasions that come one's way, that they will be to us a willingly accepted purification of all the evil in us. At death, then, we shall be able to say with truth, 'It is finished', hoping that in truth 'I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do', i.e., 'to live Christ', as St Paul says, 'and him crucified'.

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RULES OF LIFE are of daily invention, but two readers have sent to the Editor rules of considerable interest from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The first, submitted by C.K., comes from a MS. in St John's College, Oxford (No. 173), and is of the fifteenth century:

Be it known to good Christian people that desire to come to everlasting life, diligently to keep these five points, and without doubt they shall never die evil death.

First when a man riseth in the morning he shall thank God his Maker, and remember that God hath made him of great love after his own image and likeness after his soul. And say one Pater noster and one Ave upon his knees before his bed. And then he shall make a covenant and purpose with God to keep his commandments truly the same day to day. And this shall be his first oblation of the which all saints in heaven shall joy.

The second, when he goeth to church he shall hear devoutly mass and remember some part of the passion of our Saviour, and

specially to the worship of his five wounds, he shall say five Pater nosters and Aves; not running over hastily, but (with) so great devotion, as if he to each of the Pater nosters should kiss one of his blessed wounds and print his mouth thereupon. And doing this he heareth mass truly and receiveth ghostly with the priest that sayeth mass, the holy sacrament into his heart. And he shall fare the better all the same day, by cause God will make a dwelling place in his soul.

The third, when he goeth to meat, he shall not fall upon meat as heathen people or beasts, that knoweth not God. But shall thank God of his benefits or gifts and say devoutly his grace or one Pater noster and one Ave. And in any wise he must give alms at his table to him that asketh it in the name of God. And if he be of power, once in the week he shall call a poor man to his table. And then he receiveth our lord Jesus himself, and therefore God will put him at his heavenly board in everlasting life.

The fourth is when he goeth to his work or business, (he) shall diligently keep and purpose to do all his work and business to the worship of God, truly and rightfully after his commandment. And think that he standeth in the presence of God, as he doth, and therefore shall he do nothing or speak, against the reverence of God. This man that doeth so prayeth alway, and he liveth a heavenly life in earth, and the saints in heaven be glad of him and abide with desire after his coming.¹

The fifth, when at even (he) will go to bed, shall search himself how he hath spende the day past. And if he find any sin done by him, he shall repent of it, and be sorry and purpose to amend, and take penance for it. And then going to bed he shall say three Aves upon his knees, praying our Lady that she will keep him from his ghostly enemy and from all evil, and then he shall rest the better and be the cleanlier and rise devouter to the worship of God.

Live as thou would die.

(MS. St John Baptist College, 173, fol. 33v.)

The sixteenth-century rule is that of an English martyr and our attention has been drawn to it by Lord Iddesleigh.

THE RULE OF LIFE OF BLESSED ADRIAN FORTESCUE

Knight of Honour and Devotion

of the Military Order of St John of Jerusalem,

Brother of the Third Order of St Dominic (Oxford Chapter)

Martyred 1539.

The following 'Rule of Life' was found written in the Blessed Martyr's own handwriting in his *Book of Hours*.

Above all things love God with thy heart.

Desire His honour more than the health of thine own soul.

¹ await for his coming.

Take heed with all diligence to purge and cleanse thy mind with oft confession, and raise thy desire or lust from earthly things.

Be you houseled (i.e., receive Holy Communion) with entire devotion.

Repute not thyself better than any other persons, be they never so great sinners, but rather judge and esteem yourself most simplest.

Judge the best.

Use much silence, but when thou hast necessary cause to speak.

Delight not in familiarity of persons unknown to thee.

Be solitary, as much as is convenient for thine estate.

Banish from thee all grudging and detraction, and especially from thy tongue.

And pray often.

Also enforce thee to set thy house at quietness.

Resort to God every hour.

Avance not thy words or deeds by any pride.

Be not too much familiar with thy servants, but (show) to them a sad (serious) and prudent countenance with gentleness.

Show before all people good example of virtues.

Use to rebuke charitably the light and wanton people.

Comfort all persons in well-doing.

Love cleanliness in thy house and in especial to young persons.

Show thyself a sore enemy to vice, and sharply reproving all vile and reprobricious words and deeds that be not honest.

Be not partial for favour, lucre, nor malice, but according to truth, equity, justice and reason.

Be pitiful unto poor folk and help them to thy power, for there you shall greatly please God.

Give fair language to all persons and especial(y) to the poor and needy.

Also be sesy (*sic*) and diligent in giving of alms.

In prosperity be meek of heart and in adversity patient.

And pray continually to God that you may do that that is His pleasure.

Also apply diligently the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, whatsoever thou have therein to do.

Pray for perseverance.

Continue in dread and ever have God afore thine eyes.

Renew every day thy good purpose.

What thou hast to do, do it diligently.

Stab(lish) thyself alway in well-doing.

If by chance you fall into sin, despair not, and if you keep these precepts, the Holy Ghost will strengthen thee in all other things necessary, and this doing you shall (be) with Christ in Heaven, to whom be given laud, praise and honour everlasting.

ADRIAN FORTESCUE.

SECULAR INSTITUTES. The most difficult problem regarding these Institutes lies in the binding force of the members' promises, for they are not in the strict sense religious vows. It is often asked how the members can be held together permanently as a body if they do not take vows. The Sacred Congregation of Religious, in May, 1948, made some relevant decisions on this matter:

1. The obligations contracted by the members, strictly so called, of Secular Institutes, with the aim of embracing the complete, juridical state of perfection, cannot be considered in their nature or from any point of view as being light since they must correspond with the end and nature of these Institutes.
2. On the contrary, the engagements upon which this state of perfection rests are considered to oblige in conscience in such fashion that the duties springing from them should be considered as of their nature grave.
3. In particular cases the obligation can only be regarded as not being grave when its matter be judged so by the constitutions or by the common teaching relative to other parallel or similar engagements. . . .
4. The nature of the engagements undertaken in each Institute and their exact bearing—for example whether they oblige not only in justice and loyalty but also from the point of view of 'religion'—should be drawn from the Constitutions which will have determined the matter very clearly as regards the formulae of consecration and incorporation in which they are expressed.
5. Even when the obligation is formally based on the virtue of religion, since it is a matter of vows and engagements which without being entirely private yet as a general rule and in a strict and specific sense cannot be called public and do not entail a public consecration of the subject, their violation cannot assume the malice of sacrilege.

Commentarium pro Religiosis, iii-vi, 1949.

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POVERTY continues happily to hold the attention of many writers. Fr Creusen, S.J., attempts in *Revue des Communautés Religieuses* (September) to make it easier for the fervent religious who finds herself *professing* poverty while the rest of the world has to practise it. And William Gauchat contributes a long article to the *American Catholic Worker* (September) on the 'Definition of Poverty'.

Voluntary poverty, being the means that removes the obstacles which stand in the way of spiritual perfection, which is love, is primarily the most potent means of preserving justice without which love is impossible.

And this is not restricted to religious; it is for every follower of Christ.