

HOW A MAN MAY BE CONTEMPLATIVE

The *Stimulus Amoris*, long attributed to St Bonaventure but now known to be a composite work, the main part of which was written by James of Milan, a thirteenth century Franciscan, was extremely popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Walter Hilton made a translation of it, adding many passages of great beauty and interest. The work has not been printed hitherto. We give a chapter in which Hilton's additions are printed in brackets. The text is taken from MS. Vernon.

C.K.

CHAPTER 16. *How a man in all his doing may be contemplative.*



If a man were well touched and made drunk with [Christ's]¹ love he should nought else seek in all things but how he might best and most perfectly please [Christ] his creator. He must do away from him his own will and only strive for to do that that were God's will in all things and deeds, not seeking his bodily ease but worship of Christ, forgetting all himself, and only having mind on him. He that were thus full with fervour of Christ's love, would make no great difference betwixt gree² and gree, which were better than other; nor between state and state or life and life, or person and person, or place and place and such other! as many men make [mikle ado about it]. But what manner wise he might know what were most pleasing to God, [saving the degree that he standeth in]³, with all the might of his soul that would he do. Forwhy? the less that creatures are oned to God and brought into one, the more are they scattered from themselves. And the more that they are oned in God, the more are they oned together between themselves.

But now is it sooth that nothing bringeth a man so soon to one-head⁴ and communing [with God] as for to see and [behold] right nought in all things, but God himself, his worship [and his loving], for whom all things was made. Therefore he that gathereth all things into one and casteth them all in God and forgetteth the overlooking of them all, and only beholdeth in them God, the maker of all, ever thirsting to see him and serve him and worship him in all things, all turned into fire and into love, [soothly he were contemplative]. Yea, a blessed man were he that might in active life, serve our Lord with Martha, yet nevertheless rest, at our Lord's

¹ Lat. *creatoris*.

² grade, degree.

³ according to his state.

⁴ unity.

feet sitting with Mary. For thus do angels perfectly that serve us in earth and yet they see aye God's face in heaven. Right so doth such a man that travaileth, and serveth an [holy] man or a sick or doth any other work to worship of God, and only beholdeth our [Lord Jesus Christ]⁵ in him. [He feedeth his brother and he is fed of God], he stretcheth out his hands [and his limbs] to help his brother, and his heart [delighteth] in God. [For why?] he serveth his brother⁶ not as a man, but as to [our Lord Jesus] in a man, aye thinking thus that our Lord said: 'As oft as ye do to the least of mine ye do it to me'.

And when he seeth a sick man [or a man in misease] he thinketh that he seeth Christ sick. There is nothing foul to him nor vlatsume⁷ nor shameful to do, to such a man, but all sweet and lovely, for I hope soothfastly that he that might and could so lovely and so burningly serve his brother in disease, purely and only beholding Christ in him, he were more virtuous, and more meed should have and more thank of God, than if he served Christ in his own body. For why? the worst man living that is Christian man, if he saw Christ himself in a bed and knew him, he would with all his busy-ness serve him. But soothly for to serve Christ in one of his limbs, with such will and charity, may no man do, but if he have much grace and be full perfect in love.

Therefore strive we as much as we may for to come to this grace. Why shall we henceford ugge with a mesel⁸, or flee from a sick man, when we may goodly serve him, since we may through him so much pay Christ. [Many men look after high feelings and seek after Christ for to find him in withdrawing and in fleeing from all men, as if he might not be found but so, yea soothly may. Therefore man that wouldst be a spouse of Jesus Christ], and wouldst find him that thy soul loveth, I shall tell thee where thy Jesus, thy spouse, lieth and where thou mayst find him. [Not in the midday only, as Holy Writ saith, but in thy sick brother that is crooked and blind or diseased in other bodily sickness⁹.] Go to the infirmary and find Christ there, how he is pained and anguished and overtravailed with disease, help him, ease him and have compassion of him.

Whereto makest thou thee as though thou wouldst kiss Christ's mouth [and as if thou wouldst ravish thyself into heaven out from thyself, by travail of thine own desire.¹⁰] Yea go to a mesel [or to a sick man] and kiss him if thou wilt algates kiss Jesus thy spouse.

5 Lat. *deo*.

7 disgusting.

10 Cf. *Scale II*, ch. 30 for fuller development of this thought.

6 Hilton uses 'brother' for Lat. *proximus* throughout.

8 show horror at a leper.

9 allusion to Cant. 1:7.

[Kiss him first foul that thou mayst kiss him fair after. Kiss him first in his sick limbs that thou meyst kiss him afterwards in himself.]

Whereto sayest thou that thou longest in love of thy spouse Jesu. and seest each day thy brother before thine eyes travailed and pined with many diseases and thou art reckless and regardest it not, neither feelest thou tenderness of love nor compassion of him.

[Whether it be sooth that thou lovest Christ in himself that feelest no love to thine even-Christian? It seemeth nay! Lo brother! thus may we Christ serve and have contemplation of him in active works.] And never the less, if we may not do this service to all, nor visit them all bodily, [for perchance we are letted for reasonable causes,] at the least it is good that we have compassion in our heart, generally to all, and specially to them that we know.

[I say not that a man that standeth in degree of life contemplative, as do men of Religion, and such other, should run out at each stirring and seek Christ in the world among poor men and sick men and serve him there, but I say that other men should do so. They also, shall among themselves each of them to other, have such love and tender compassion in heart and fulfil it in deed, when disease falleth. And also to all other men they shall have a full will in heart for to do the same, and that is enough. Also I reprove not great yearnings and lovely longings that some men have to God, that give themselves only to (at)tend to him in contemplation and to nothing else, for that is good.] But my meaning is for to tell how a man may with active life have contemplation of Jesus Christ. And that is by this way, as I have said, the which is a short way and a good [the sikerest]. And that tis that a man gather himself all to himself, [from the cleaving to all outward things,] and enter into his own thought and there yield him and relent him all into God, that he nothing see, nor feel, nor regard but God [as if here were nothing else but God and he.] And that he were so [turned¹¹] and transformed into God [through such a deep printing of thought in him] that on each quick¹² side he turned him he should not feel nor understand but [Jesus Christ]¹³. And what manner work he did to man [specially, or generally before men], he should fully feel and ween that he did it to God.

The keeping of this form maketh a man contemplative and active and [it ravisheth a man to God from love of the world]. And nevertheless if it befall that a man fail from this and [be distracted through his own frailty], anon that he strengthen him to turn again thereto and that he do thus as oft as he faileth, till he have

¹¹ Lat. has *deificatus*.

¹² cf. the phrase 'every which way'.

¹³ Lat. *Deum*.

it in custom. And if he may get it thus, [then that he aye meek himself down and thank God], for it is of his gracious gift and not of man's travail. [Lo! this form is properly that a man thinketh himself ever in God's presence.] Nevertheless if all this seem hard and impossible to thee, [as it is to any man that hath been long blind in sin], nevertheless set it in thy meaning that thou wouldest not seek nor do but that which were worship to God, profitable to thee and to thine even-christian, shameful, painful [and travail-some] to thine own flesh; that us grant Jesus Christ. Amen.



ST THOMAS ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

JESUS answered and said to him: If any one love me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him: and we will come to him and will make our abode with him. (John 14, 23.)

These words of our Lord, beginning: 'If any one love me' explain why our Lord was to reveal himself to his disciples but not to the world. He shows first of all how the disciples were already well-disposed to receive a manifestation.

There are two dispositions in man which are a suitable preparation for a manifestation from God. The first is charity, the second is obedience. The words: 'If any one love me' apply to the first. If man wishes to see God, these three conditions are necessary.

1. He must approach God. 'And they that approach to his feet shall receive of his doctrine.' (Deut. 33, 3.)

2. He must lift up his eyes heavenwards, intent upon seeing him: 'Lift up your eyes on high and see who hath created these things' (Is. 40, 26.)

3. He must be at peace and still, for the things of the spirit cannot be perceived unless we withdraw from things of earth. 'O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.'¹ (Ps. 33, 9.)

Now charity fulfils these conditions for it unites the soul of man to God. 'He that abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him.' (I John 4, 16.) Charity raises him to an intuitive perception of God. 'For where thy treasure is there is thy heart also.' (Matt. 6, 21.) Hence a saying goes: 'Where thy love is, there is thine eye also'. Charity also inspires us to withdraw from worldly affairs. 'If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him.' (I John 2, 15.) Whereas on the other hand, if any man loves God perfectly, the love of the world is not in him.

From charity proceeds obedience, thus our Lord continues '... he

¹ Cf. Ps. 45:2, 'Be still and see that I am God'.