Life of the Spirit

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CRITICISM COURTED

BY

THE EDITOR

FIFTY issues of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT have now appeared and it would seem to be a convenient point at which to pause and take stock of the position of the review. It is quite evident from the four years' experience of editing LIFE OF THE SPIRIT that it has definitely—to use the hackneyed phrase—filled a need. The regular flow of letters of gratitude and congratulation, and the fact that the review has nearly trebled its circulation since the first issue of July 1946 are sufficient evidence of this fact. The need however is so vast a one, as there is no other review published in England specifically on the lines of *La Vie Spirituelle* (which has provided a matrix for similar reviews in Spain, Italy, Germany, U.S.A., Ireland and in several other countries), that there has also been evidence of dissatisfaction in certain quarters as to the manner in which we have set about filling this gap in the ranks of religious periodicals. It is inevitable that the various types of interested readers should not find all that they had hoped for in these pages to suit their condition.

It might be argued that the need is too great to be met with one review. There are the men and women living the normal Christian life under difficult conditions in the world today: for them LIFE OF THE SPIRIT was principally designed as they seldom have the opportunity of making retreats or of receiving any consistent and continuous direction in spiritual matters. The men and women, too, who have dedicated their lives by the vows of religion seem to require a review which will develop the theology of the vows and of the state of perfection in all its aspects in order to deepen the appreciation of the religious life and to help reveal its applications to the modern scene. There are finally the priests whose life is perhaps the most difficult and the most responsible of any

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section of the community today and who are evidently anxious t find some regular nourishment for the spiritual life such as is pr vided in France by *L'Ami du Clergé*.

It would perhaps be a mistake nevertheless to specialise too muc in this one field. The world suffers today from over specialis branches of human endeavour so that the scientist has no knowled of the problems of the littérateur, and the economist, the politicia the sociologist, each of them ploughs his own furrow with great and greater concentration on the one line ahead of him without glance to either side. It is surely a mistake to lead people to thi that the Christian life of prayer and virtue is different for the lait the religious and the priest. These three live the common life the Body of Christ. To segregate them one from the other and try to provide them with entirely different views of our Lord's li on earth weakens the power of the Church and helps to contin the many misunderstandings and hostilities which arise betwe laity, religious and clergy. The layman, for example, should n be led to think that Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are th exclusive concern of the religious; he should be encouraged read about the vows in order to understand other aspects of th Gospel counsels which our Lord offered to every one of his di ciples. Every Christian should be helped to realise more and mo that the perfection of charity is the one command which Christ ga to all mankind and that aim and ideal are shared equally though all sorts of different ways by every human individual. All are calle to be saints and therefore all are called to perfection. This mea prayer and contemplation, the perfection of the moral and acti virtues.

Towards this general ideal then LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has s its course. It aims to provide reading in English for the laity, th religious and the priesthood on the main spiritual doctrines religion of Jesus Christ. This involves considerable attention to th Scriptures themselves and to the tradition of the Church in th Fathers and the great theologians from which sources this spiritu doctrine derives. Attention must be given, too, to those who ha achieved the perfection of charity both in modern times an throughout the history of the Church in order to obtain a practic view of what it means for a layman, a religious or a priest to follo Christ. And all this attention has to be given in an English whi is sufficiently vigorous and indigenous to make it readable to al so that it is necessary to avoid too many Gallicisms both in wor and in thought forms—for hitherto the English-speaking Catho

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has depended perhaps too much on the French outlook on the spiritual life.

The editors have hoped therefore to provide for the laity, for religious and for priests articles and essays on the Scriptures and on the Fathers, translations of the spiritual writings of these great teachers of the Church, original texts of the later medieval English writers who knew how to express tersely and vigorously the fundamental truths of the Christian life. They have set out to discuss the early teaching on prayer and the virtues, the classical works of the English medieval spiritual writers, the modern problems of the life of prayer in an industrialised age. They have sought out, too, sermons of the great masters like Tauler, Commentaries on the Scriptures by the incomparable Aquinas, and many different examples of the saintly life both in and out of the cloister—lives of saints both active and contemplative, mystical and matter-of-fact. In addition to all this it was necessary to keep readers in touch with the books and periodicals which were appearing in various parts of the world with any references to the particular work in hand. For this purpose there have been the regular sections of book reviews and of 'extracts'.

The programme is thus very wide indeed and the first fifty numbers of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT have hardly even suggested all that is to be hoped for from the review. It is for this reason that criticisms have been inevitable, and for this reason that we are now approaching our readers to encourage them to make their criticism to those whose concern it is to provide what is required in LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. There is so much to be done and many readers may be growing impatient. And now we would ask them to vent their impatience on the editors themselves. What is needed is useful criticism from those who are entitled to give it, namely the readers themselves. It should therefore be constructive rather than purely negative. It should also be short rather than long.

Thus we are asking you, the reader, to send us—*on a post card* if possible—any suggestions for the improvement of the usefulness of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT which may seem to you to be necessary or helpful. Please address these post cards any time during the next three months to

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