

## LIFE IN AND OUT OF THE CHURCH

THE EDITOR

EDITORS as a rule appreciate comments on the articles they offer to the public—particularly if the comment is adverse. A fan mail of praise is all very well, but it leaves the Editor where he was, except for some airy elation. Adverse criticism gives him something to think about and helps him to sharpen his policy so that he can cut his way through more quickly towards his objective.

Below we publish a 'Point of View' regarding the article on 'Children at Mass' in the March issue; this contains much valuable criticism which helps to define the policy of *THE LIFE*. The writer has evidently been brought up in the post-reformation school of the Spirit in England, in which the spiritual life is set apart quietly from the ordinary run of the day. 'In church', the writer quotes Alban Butler, 'there should be silence of voice, silence of body.' Outside there is action and noise; within the sacred precincts all that must be left behind, the doors bolted against the mad rush of the world. The life of the Spirit only finds itself in that quiet; it disappears and is forgotten outside those doors.

During the past ten years of its existence *THE LIFE* has been trying to unite once again the life of the Spirit with the full life of the Christian which has to flourish morning, noon and night, inside and outside church, in the cloister and in the factory. The life of the Spirit is *the* human life, because its source is in the divine life of the Trinity and from that spring it flows out into every point of reality in a man's existence. The primacy of the Spirit must be insisted on in and out of season, but not at the expense of the rest of man's existence. On the contrary, if the Spirit receives its prime position it will ennoble, indeed make divine, the whole of a man. The 'movements' in the Church during this century have in fact been working on these lines. Catholic Action has been organized so as to clear the channels for the flowing of the Spirit into every walk of life. The liturgical movement, too, has prepared the way for the flowing back of the ordinary life of man into the Church. The House of God was constructed primarily for

singing, dancing and eating—the sacred song of psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles; the sacred dance of the ministry round the altar, the people in their procession to and from the altar; and above all the sacred Banquet of the Eucharist. The instincts of men rejoicing together were not seen, at first, as being ‘prone to evil’, but as being instilled by God for his honour and glory. They were to be nurtured and trained so that the harmonies, actions and feasting in the Church should set the standard for the rest of man’s life. There were, of course, fasts and sackcloth, too, but they were established in order that the Church’s feasts should be of greater purity, greater joy and greater praise.

When the ‘spiritual life’ is seen only as a life of penance and prayer, of solitude and silence, it is seen as a particular form, only, of adult life. Innocent children are not fitted for silent prayer, solitude and physical penance. The result is that the seekers after this rarefied spiritual life have to try to force children into an adult category. Their gurgles and cries, their eating and playing in church are an affront to the adult ‘way’. Of course, this is more characteristic of puritanized England than of the Catholic continent, where there is often as much clamour in church as there must have been in the Temple at the height of its glory.

We are not decrying silence and the stillness of the interior cell where the soul dwells with Christ. This is of course essential to the life of the Spirit. But that is only a part of life and our Lord came to sanctify the whole man, to purify and elevate all his instincts and passions as well as his mind and heart. Children have to be taught to pray and praise God as children, not as angelic spirits; just as the sinner has to be taught to approach God in a different way from the saint. The life of the Spirit is the life of the child, the life of the converted sinner, the life of the cloistered nun, the life of the Christian in every strata of society.