

THOMAS MERTON, SOCIAL CRITIC OF THE TIMES
by Sister Saint Elizabeth of the Cross, C.N.D.

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the
University of Ottawa, as partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy.



Waterbury, Connecticut, 1951.

UMI Number: DC53635

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform DC53635
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Reverend Mother Saint Gerald, Assistant Superior General, Reverend Mother Saint Elizabeth of the Rosary, Provincial Superior and to Sister Saint Miriam of the Temple Ph.D., I wish to express my deep gratitude for encouragement and stimulation in the preparation of this thesis.

To my Mentor, Professor George Buxton, I am deeply indebted for painstaking correction and advice. I should also like to express my sincere thanks to Reverend Gaston Carriere, O.M.I., for theological criticism; to Reverend Raymond Shevenell, O.M.I., for directives in bibliography and structure; to Sister Mary Therese, S.D.S., for her generous contribution of material, as well as her sympathetic encouragement; to Mr. Edward Rice of New York, for obtaining for me original manuscripts and pictures; to Miss Naomi Burton for much information and help; to Father Ford for first directives and contacts; to the librarians of Columbia University for courteous and gracious help in research; to Sister Saint Charles Marie; Sister Saint Eugene Marie; Sister Saint Mary Denis; Sister Saint Beatrice; and Sister Saint Thomas of Cori, all of my own community, for their invaluable help in the typing of the manuscript; to Sister Saint Francis of the Redeemer; Sister Saint Mary Genevieve; and Sister Saint Philippa, also of the

Congregation de Notre Dame, for help in obtaining material; to Esterina Giallrello, Laurette Asselin and Joan Ruffini, students of Waterbury Catholic High School, who also helped in the typing of the original manuscript; to Fordham University Library for the protracted loan of valuable reference books; to Father Irenaeus, O.F.M., Librarian at St. Bonaventure's University, for valuable help received through inter-library loan; Yale University Library for the use of rare medieval books in Philosophy; Silas Bronson Library, Waterbury, for gracious service in many fields; Sr. St. Laurence Martyr, Librarian, Waterbury Catholic High School, for much help, kindness and encouragement; Miss Mary A. Wegener, Associate Director of the Bureau of Placements at Columbia University, for valuable information not otherwise available; Mr. Frank Abbott Dell'Isola of New York, for permitting me to compare my bibliography with his; Mr. Robert Giroux of Harcourt Brace, for the use of original manuscript; and to my sister, Mrs. Wm. Beach, who performed the exacting and arduous task of typing the final copy of this thesis.

FOREWORD

Raissa Maritain, writing of her adventures in grace, speaks of her first acquaintance with the Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas. During a year of seclusion and withdrawal from all social and secular contacts, she bathed her soul in the "freedom of spirit, purity of faith, integrity of the intellect" drawn from the Prince of Schoolmen. Reliving the "happy emotion of that first contact" as she wrote her book, the author was "carried away as if by a joy of paradise" by the "great light --- flowing into (her) heart and mind".¹

The intellectual adventure involved in the preparation of this thesis has likewise been a rich and satisfying experience. The hours spent meditating the spiritual truths so lucidly objectified by Thomas Merton have been in some sense a peering over a half-door into the promised glory of a world of beauty and strength. The mystical sublimity of Merton's metaphysical poetry, the poetry of prayer and contemplation, has brought a sense of intimacy with this world of spiritual promise that could only come from prolonged contact with the serenity of a contemplative.

The writing of this dissertation has also provided

1. Raissa Maritain, Adventures in Grace, New York, Longmans Green, 1945, p. 17.

the opportunity for acquaintance with a whole galaxy of brilliant minds. Not only has the growing acquaintance with the white lucidity of Saint Thomas opened up a new and wonderful mental vista: the clear-cut precision of the thesis on contemplative and active vocations, the treatises on sin and on original sin, the exposition of the diamond-cut facets of faith — these, of necessity, lift the student to an atmosphere so rarefied that his pulses beat with the intensity of his mental endeavour.

The group of French philosophers whose thought has so greatly influenced and stimulated Merton's thinking, have their message too for the student of his work — a message that is challenging, purging, maturing. The profundity of Maritain, the healthy and sane medievalism of Claudel and Gilson, the sweet reason of the writing of Raissa Maritain, all these have the effect of cleansing the spirit of a too-facile acceptance of the mundane and the second-rate which lies at the root of our modern futility. In the same tradition of permanence is the influence of the old literary classics, particularly the Divine Comedy of Dante. The powerful symbolism of the Purgatorio, the deep mystical interpretation of the universe are so far-reaching in their effects on a receptive mind that these can hardly be evaluated in a summary.

Among the poets who influenced Merton, Gerard Manly Hopkins, the metaphysical forerunner of all the moderns, is

a challenging problem to the student of rhythm, as well as to the reader of mystical poetry. Not less intriguing and compelling is Merton's well-loved Blake.

Lastly, and not least interesting, was the inevitable introduction, through Merton's work and thought, to the new school of contemporary Catholic writers and critics, from Sister Mary Therese, the well-known poet and anthologist, to Father Harold Gardiner, the discriminating and fearless literary editor of America. Gervase Toelle, the brilliant young Carmelite poet, Sister Joslyn and Sister Julie, critics of fine perception, have all contributed analyses and interpretations to our current periodicals. And supplementing these is the personal contribution of Merton's many delightful friends, all of whom are dedicated to some phase of the emancipation of mind and soul. From the successful and busy executive of Harcourt Brace, Mr. Robert Giroux, to the scholarly and priestly Father Ford, Father Merton's friends have been not only an invaluable help, but also a rich spiritual experience.

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	INTRODUCTION	ix
	(a) The Objective.	
	(b) Classification of Terms.	
	(c) General Outline.	
I	THE THESIS POSTULATED BY THOMAS MERTON	1
	Materialistic outlook, the cause of the ills of modern life.	
	The full Christian life, the antidote to those ills.	
	Merton's qualifications for the role of critic.	
II	THOMAS MERTON: POET AND PROSE WRITER	11
	The thesis maintained in each of Merton's published books.	
III	SINS OF THE MODERN THINKER	37
	(a) In his education.	
	(b) In his philosophy.	
IV	SINS OF THE MODERN ARTIST	71
	(a) In his visual arts.	
	(b) In his music.	
	(c) In his drama.	
	(d) In his poetry.	
V	SINS OF THE MODERN MAN	102
	(a) Ruled by the flesh.	
	(b) Beset by fear and hate.	
	(c) Tortured by war.	
VI	SINS OF MODERN SOCIETY	115
	(a) Reflected in modern woman.	
	(b) Typified by life in	
	(i) France,	
	(ii) England,	
	(iii) United States of America.	
VII	SINS OF MODERN RELIGION	160
	(a) Among the civilized pagans.	
	(b) Among tepid Christians.	
	(c) The antidote in the Liturgy and contemplation.	

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
VIII RESPONSIBILITY OF MODERN MAN: THE CLIMB..... Merton's claim and his example.	173
CONCLUSION	212
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to show Thomas Merton's analysis of modern life, his criticism, and the remedy he offers for its ills. Merton has studied the failure of modern man to reach any peace or joy or satisfaction in spite of his great materialistic achievement. He traces all the aching bitterness and frustration that is eating at the hearts of his contemporaries to their materialistic outlook. He shows his readers where the dry-rot enters their souls; but he does not stop there. He offers the religious truth, which he has found in the Catholic Church, to suffering humanity as the antidote to its ills; the healing love of Christ, in the full Christian life.

Discussing each of Merton's published works, this thesis shows that whatever Merton has written has had this underlying theme. He has written four books of poetry, one autobiography, two biographies, one treatise on the development of the Cistercian spirit, and one book on prayer. Whatever the subject, the persistent counterpoint of Merton's asceticism infuses an intensity of meaning and purpose that makes of each work a consistent part of a unified whole. Whatever the medium, there is reiterated the message of man's insufficiency and God's all-sufficiency.

The message is carried to modern man in all the

major phases of life. Merton writes of the modern thinker, repudiating the materialistic trend of his education which must necessarily produce the type of literary output and form the decadent philosophy of the modern world.

Merton, himself an artist, son of artist parents, describes the sins of the modern artist,¹ who has lost touch with truth and reality. He satirizes the music that blares forth its cacophonous expression of the world's neurosis, and the low-grade movies that have driven the artistic drama almost out of modern man's experience. Merton, the poet, has made a specific study of the philosophy of poetry in the tradition of Maritain and Bremond.

The picture of harassed modern man gradually emerges from his pages. We see him ruled by his passions immersed in sins of the flesh. Merton shows the dreadful results of such a life, a hell of fear and hate. He shows this same individual fear and hate grown into the mass hysteria of war that tortures the humanity that cannot find in modern

1. The word "sin" is used in a literary sense, not as a violation of a religious or moral principle, but as a violation of some standard of taste or propriety.

2. The word "social" is used in this context as defined in the O.E.D.: "pertaining to society as a natural or ordinary condition of human life".

These definitions are from New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Oxford, Clarendon, 1888-1933, Vol. 9, p. 65 & 74.

materialistic philosophy any abiding peace. Merton offers his century the peace of Christ in the love of Christ.

Merton excoriates the sins of modern society. He is especially bitter in his repudiation of the modern woman, who falls so short of her womanly destiny. He shows the sins of society to be universal, the same corruption, the same cause, found in three great centres of civilization, France, England and the United States of America.

Finally the corroding influence of materialistic philosophy is traced even into modern religion. Merton draws a devastating picture of the civilized pagan and ruthlessly exposes the extent of his failure. He shows us too the sad spectacle of the tepid Christian to whom the great deposit of the faith offers an antidote to all woes and who callously rejects all but the bare essentials, while he lives a life scarcely more spiritual than that of the effete pagan with whom he fraternizes.

With rare insight and spiritual acumen, Merton shows the rich treasure of grace brought to man through the liturgy. He exposes with clarity and lucidity, the function of the liturgy to vivify and unify the life of souls in a Christian order. Contemplation, Merton maintains, is the normal function for any man, whether his special vocation leads him to the cloister or to the business world where he earns the livelihood necessary for his dependents. This, he says, is

to be man's life throughout eternity, so it is fitting that he should condition himself to it now, in preparation for eternity.

Throughout all his writings Merton points up the responsibility of the individual man for the state of the society of which he is an integral part. This brooding sense of responsibility and association in guilt seems to be a haunting undertone to all he writes. In his autobiography Merton shows the life of the ultra-modern sophisticate, actuated by his materialistic philosophy, but saved by the grace of conversion to a life of Faith. This thesis follows his climb as he gradually forsakes the manners and marts of modern men for the haunts of peace and prayer in the Cistercian vocation. It shows him finally, a writer of wide compassion for his fellow men, speaking to them, not in abstractions, but as a brother, of the things that most closely concern him and them, the only thing that actually matters, God.¹

This thesis will show Thomas Merton, in his writings, as "a true Christian humanist" imbued with the love of God and his neighbour, a philosopher, priest, poet, artist, critic; a great and humble man.²

1. Sr. Mary Therese, "Review of Seeds of Contemplation, Renascence, Vol. 1, II, (Spring 1949) p. 68.

2. Ibid., p. 69.

CHAPTER I

THE THESIS POSTULATED BY THOMAS MERTON

On the last day of January, 1915, under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of a great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders of Spain, I came into the world.¹

Thomas Merton, writing from a Trappist Monastery, thus begins the story of his life which he entitles Seven Storey Mountain. From the silence of his seclusion comes, paradoxically, the most sound evaluation of contemporary civilization, the most vocal criticism of modern times. Having tasted of all the joys and disillusionments of modernity, this young super-sophisticate has apparently become:

... the age's best evangel to the sensitive folk who seek escape from things current in the cult of the ultra modern.²

In his monastery, this writer (now Father Mary Louis) writes free verse and best-sellers. Yet these books and poems are completely in character with what we expect of a Cistercian monk.

Merton's biography, Seven Storey Mountain, is a frank exposure of the life of a young man who searched for

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, New York, Brace, 1948, p. 3.

2. Will Lissner, "Toast of the Avant-Garde", Catholic World, vol. 169 (Feb. '48) p. 425.

frank exposure of the life of a young man who searched for the meaning of our temporal existence with such persistent zest that he found it, at the age of twenty-eight, in the "sweet content of Eternal Life", to which the contemplative way aspires.¹ With his vision clarified by the ascetic simplicity of the life he now lives, Thomas Merton scrutinizes the life he has left behind. With precision and deep religious conviction he postulates the thesis that the ills of modern life are all traceable to the materialistic philosophy which colours the outlook of the citizen of the modern world. Merton is admirably prepared for such a study for his short years have been filled with a most varied experience.

Thomas Merton's human experiences are neither simple nor ordinary. He was the son of intellectual people, grandson of a strangely emancipated pair. From his very birth he was surrounded by sophisticated thought. His highly individualistic mother strove to raise her children on the precepts of the gospel of Freud. Parents and grandparents endeavoured to direct their sons into lofty, cultural channels. One great gift they gave them was the inspiration and training to strain upwards, away from mediocrity and facile satisfaction, to a fleeting, unknown, but higher good.

Merton's father, an artist, something of a

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain. p. 372

philosopher, and one-time British ambassador, journeyed far in search of inspiration. He, perhaps, began that search that his son has continued even to the gates of Gethsemani.¹

Merton, the son, travelling with his father, thus came to know France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, England, Scotland and America. A life so filled with experience was well suited to the *métier* of writing. From his father, a musician and an artist, he inherited the intuitive perceptions that make the true poet; from his mother, perhaps, the touch of mysticism that sent him delving into the deeper core of human things. Merton says in this respect:

I inherited from my father his way of looking at things and some of his integrity, and from my mother some of her dissatisfaction with the mess the world is in, and some of her versatility.²

The varied education that Merton received in French Lycées, English Public Schools, at Cambridge University and finally at Columbia, made of him a true Citizen of the World. He left a record of secular success seldom attained by the most ambitious. Records at Columbia University preserve recommendations that revealed exceptional ability. Fearlessly breaking all professorial traditions of reticence, his teachers proclaimed Merton a "brilliant student", an

1. The Trappist monastery where Thomas Merton is now a professed monk.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 4.

"interesting thinker", a "rewarding pupil", a "writer of talent", a "thinker of promise and depth", an "English scholar of extraordinary ability".¹

James Laughlin says of Merton:

In 1937 he was at Columbia taking all the prizes in English and editing everything in sight.² One of these prizes was the Marion Van Rensselaer prize in Poetry, won in 1937, for a poem called "The Fable of War".³

Left an orphan in youth, Merton lived with his rather eccentric grandparents while attending Columbia. Both of these died before he completed his studies: "Pop", his grandfather, in 1936, and "Bonnemaman", his grandmother, in 1937, and left him adrift with no anchoring relatives except his brother, John Paul, a student at Cornell. Thomas took his Master's degree at Columbia and began to study for a Doctorate.

At Columbia Merton came to know Dr. Mark Van Doren who was to be such a potent influence in his life. Writing of Dr. Van Doren's class in Shakespeare, Merton says:

All that year we were, in fact, talking about the deepest springs of human desire and hope and fear; we were considering all the realities ... Mark's balanced

1. From files in Appointments and Placements Office, Thomas Merton; Alumni House, Columbia University.

2. Will Lissner, "Toast of the Avant-Garde", Catholic World, vol. 69, (Feb. '48) p. 425.

3. Ibid.

and sensitive and clear way of seeing things, at once simple and yet capable of subtlety, being fundamentally scholastic ... presented these things in ways that made them live within us and with a life that was healthy and permanent and productive.¹

The "we" of the quotation includes a group of Jewish boys, Bob Lax, Bob Seymour and Sy Freedgood, who, with Ed Rice, a Catholic, gathered frequently for long intellectual discussions. These gatherings later came to include Father Ford of Corpus Christi Church, then Chaplain of Columbia.

Merton writes that, by September 1938, when he was ready to begin the actual writing of his thesis, the groundwork of his conversion was more or less complete. "And how easily and sweetly it had all been done", he writes,

with all the external graces that had been arranged along my path by the kind Providence of God! It had taken little more than a year and a half, counting from the time I read Gilson's The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, to bring me up from an atheist ... to one who accepted all the full range and possibilities of religious experiences right up to the highest degree of glory.²

In that year and a half his conversations with the Chaplain and with his Jewish friends who were all drawn towards Catholicism, his acquaintance with Scholastic Philosophy, with Gilson's Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, Maritain's Art and Scholasticism and the Imitation of Christ, helped

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 180.

2. Ibid., p. 204.

the intellectual preparation for his acceptance of the grace of God and the gift of faith.

The year 1939, according to Will Lissner, was one of decision for the young writer. He writes of Merton's conversion:

Steeped in Catholic tradition, with interests ranging from the Gothic to the abstract; from John Skelton, Royal Tutor to Henry VIII, to W. H. Auden, he was converted to the Catholic Faith at that time.¹

While taking instructions from Father Moore of Corpus Christi, Merton followed a course in Scholastic Philosophy and studied St. Thomas and Duns Scotus with Dan Walsh. Merton writes of this friend that his "course and his friendship were most valuable in preparing me for the step I was about to take".²

On the sixteenth of November 1938, Feast of St. Gertrude, Thomas Merton was baptized by Father Moore of Corpus Christi Church. Merton says that as he stood on the threshold of the baptistry, Father Moore asked the traditional questions:

"Quid petis ab ecclesia Dei?"

The neophyte answered, "Fidem".

Then, "Fides quid tibi praestat?"

1. Will Lissner, "Toast to the Avant-Garde", Catholic World, vol. 69 (Feb. '48) p. 425.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 221.

"Vitam aeternam".

Then Merton remarks that the young priest began to pray in Latin from the Rituale and "I, who was asking for eternal life, stood and watched him".¹

It was to Dr. Dan Walsh that the new convert confided his desire to become a priest. From him Merton first heard of the life of the Trappists and was advised to make a retreat there. Lacking confidence in his own spiritual maturity, Merton felt that the Franciscan life was more within the range of his achievement. His entrance with the Franciscans was arranged for August of the following year. Two weeks before his entrance, however, he was advised by Father Edmund of St. Bonaventure's that he was not ready for the Franciscan novitiate and he withdrew his application.

The next year, Thomas Merton taught at St. Bonaventure's College, New York. During that time he began to live a life of asceticism as a layman of the Third Order of St. Francis. He had already been through the Exercises of St. Ignatius. Now on Dr. Dan Walsh's advice he made a retreat at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky.

While teaching at the summer school at St. Bonaventure's in 1941, he heard a lecture given by the Baroness de Hueck. As a result of the impression made upon him by this

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 222.

lay apostle, he worked with the members of Friendship House at Harlem for some weeks.

After another retreat at the Trappist Monastery in Providence, he finally went to Gethsemani to become a Trappist.

What Merton lived and experienced in the lecture halls of Columbia, in the night-clubs of New York, in the editorial offices, in the student Communist group, in Harlem in the beloved conversational fests, and finally in the beautiful little church of Corpus Christi just beyond the campus, fused into a molten, driving force that brought him, still young, to its logical culmination.

Thomas Merton is one of those strangely geared men whose high-powered dynamism causes them to live vividly and intensely, even deeply, tragically and ecstatically, so that they experience whole life-times within the span of a few years.

With Merton's entrance into a Trappist monastery begins a new story, the sequel, indeed, and logical sequence of the earlier one, but now on a plane so lofty, so beautiful that it seems like sacrilege to touch it with experimental fingers. The story of Frater Mary Louis's life as a contemplative of Gethsemani should be left for the historian of mystics. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Duns Scotus, Abelard, Aelred, St. Bernard, these are his familiars. He

speaks their language and breathes with them the rarified air of the mountain tops that "rends the lungs that breathe it".¹

And now from his new vantage point which lies "Beyond the ways of the far ships, farther than the ways of fliers"² he sees his old life with a new clear vision. With eyes "As clear as the September night", he can view and interpret the modern world he has left and prescribe for it the antidote for all its ills. In each of its phases, Frater Louis offers the full Christian life as the answer for each specific problem. His exposition of that life, which reaches its perfection in contemplation, is expressed in a manner at once so convincing and so gripping that the impact of this age-old message is as moving and disquieting as it was when it stirred Monte Cassino fourteen hundred years ago. From his seclusion he writes:

I went into the desert to receive
The keys of my deliverance
From image and from concept and from desire.
I learned not wrath but love
Waiting in darkness for the secret strays
Who, like an inward fire,
Would try me in the crucible of
His unconquerable Law
His heart, more searching than the breath of the Simoon
Separates love from hunger

1. Clemence Dane, Will Shakespeare, New York, The Macmillan Co. 1927, Act. IV, p. 118.

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, New Directions, Norfolk, Conn., 1947, p. 88.

CHAPTER II

THOMAS MERTON, POET AND PROSE WRITER

For Thomas Merton as for Paul Claudel "Faith and Poetry are to be joined together". "Without Faith", writes the French mystic, "poetry is meagre and insufficient". When Thomas Merton attuned himself to God as Claudel in The City, says the poet must, his poetry becomes significant.¹

Merton speaks of writing as the "one activity" that was born in him and was in his very blood. He had written all his life. He had taken prizes for his poems and essays in all his schools and colleges. During his Columbia and St. Bonaventure days he had written novels, two of which, the Labyrinth and Journal of My Escape from the Nazis, had made the round of the publishers and, as Merton remarks, had been fortunately rejected. He had written poems too, for the modernistic reviews; obscure, difficult poetry without discipline and with a ragged unpatterned rhythm. Merton admits that, although he had tried, he never really succeeded in writing poetry until he became a Catholic.²

In November 1938, immediately after his Baptism, Merton acquired a sudden facility for rough, raw, skeltonic

1. Pierre Angers, S.J., "The Aesthetics of Paul Claudel", Spirit, XIV (May 1947) p. 50-55.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 235.

verses, one of which took the poetry prize of the year. The rhythm and tones of these poems echoed Andrew Marvel, to whom he felt an affinity of temper.

When Thomas Merton became the poet of the contemplative life, having gone through all the "harrowing" that worked the terrain of his soul, changing it from the materialistic naturalism of the ultra-modern sophisticate to the humble and liberated monk, then his soul qualified for the true poetic experience.¹

The sympathetic knowledge of the poetic experience receives a supernatural impetus from that compassion that is born of contemplation. This inevitably brings him closer to "the heart of all that is".²

In his essay included in Figures for an Apocalypse, Merton points out the kinship between the aesthetic experience and the mystical one, and draws the conclusion:

Christ is our inspiration, and Christ is at the centre of the contemplative life. Therefore it would seem fairly evident that the one thing that will most contribute to the perfection of Catholic literature in general and poetry in particular will be for our writers and poets to start leading lives of active contemplation. In other words, to lead the full Christian life in so far as they can in their state.³

1. Cf. Isabel Harriss Parr, "The Proving Ground of Poetry", Spirit, vol. 8, (Sept. 1941) p. 126.

2. J. S. Middleton, "The Poet's Prayer", Spirit, vol. 11, (July 1944) p. 84.

3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 389.

Merton brought all the instincts of a writer into the monastery with him and he soon found that the silence and peace were most conducive to composing poetry. He mentions that the time between four and five-thirty, after the Night Office, is a "wonderful time to write verse".¹ Then the mind is "saturated in peace" and "the richness of the liturgy", and "whole blocks of imagery seem to crystallize" naturally.²

Bob Lax, after his own Baptism, came to Gethsemani to see Merton. When he returned to New York he took with him a sheaf of poems; half of these had been written in the Novitiate, the other half at St. Bonaventure's. Lax took them to Dr. Mark Van Doren who sent them to James Laughlin at New Directions. At the end of the year 1944, they were printed in a little volume entitled Thirty Poems.

Thus began the prolific output that continues to flow. In 1946 a new volume of poems was published containing the original thirty poems with religious verse written by Frater Mary Louis, Cistercian, and entitled A Man in a Divided Sea. 1947 brought out another slim volume of verse, Figures for An Apocalypse, which contained an essay, Poetry and The Contemplative Life. In the spring of 1950 New

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 389.

2. Ibid., p. 389.

Directions published Tears of the Blind Lions.

These poetic works have three theses. They trace the inner story of the poet's spiritual growth; they voice his social criticism of contemporary civilization and they offer a remedial of its woes. It is not surprising that this contemplative poet should consider contemplation as the ultimate catholicon, and so he has become the "Poet of the Contemplative Life".

That Merton writes poetry of unusual calibre is evidenced by the attention he has drawn from the critics. Such acknowledged literary authorities as Harold C. Gardiner, James H. Thielen, Hubert Hart, Gervase Toelle, O.P., Will Lissner, Eric Bruno, O.F.M., Francis X. Connolly, S.J., George C. McCauliff, and the "First Woman of Letters in America", Sister Mary Therese, Lentfoer, S.D.S., have reviewed Merton's books and written critical articles upon his work in the leading intellectual and religious periodicals of the day. Such discriminating reviews as Renascence, Spirit, Cross and Crown, The Month, as well as the more popular Catholic World, Commonweal and America, have carried articles of enthusiastic criticism of his work.

George A. McCauliff speaks for all of them in a poem to Thomas Merton, "The Poet Turned Monk". This poem summarizes Father Louis's threefold message and touches upon his famous problem of contemplative and poetic vocation.

What man is this who speaks to us
 With thunderous tongue of Dominations
 And in soft sibilants of sweet charity
 While in the vineyard of his verse
 He prunes the wanton runners
 And with strong fingers delves
 In our earth
 To loosen all the roots of being
 And set a wild song here
 Amid the blossoms of his vine.

Here in our beighbouring vineyards
 We have heard his song
 Sweeping among the dying leaves
 Of all our vines, by little foxes gnawed
 While we stumble in our crooked rows
 Seeking to break the stubborn glebe
 With dulled plow of poetry.

Sing yet a little to us poet
 Before the dark night's cloister
 Encompass your vineyard
 And darker light of your Gethsemani
 Sends poetry upon its mournful way
 The while, oh monk, you linger
 Face to face with God.¹

There has been a steady maturing of the new poet's art, an increasing sureness and deftness of tones, of handling of his medium. Thirty Poems was acclaimed mostly for the promise they contained. Paul Morton, reviewing Thirty Poems, finds Thomas Merton's sharp imagery a delight. But the odd Huysmans-like patterns, the too-wide conceits and the strongly individualized lines gave a feeling of painful striving to express the inexpressible.²

1. George A. McCauliff, "The Poet Turned Monk", Spirit, vol. 12 (July 1945) p. 45.

2. Paul Morton, "Review of Thirty Poems", Spirit, vol. 2. (Mar. 1945) p. 25

Yet the same reviewer adds that though the "rhyme-reader" may be disappointed in this volume, a more discriminating critic will find a less conventional discipline. For here we find re-presented themes "of an ancient faith" expressed with what is finest "in the modern tradition".¹

In this book the young poet is already launched upon his three-fold thesis; his spiritual climb, his repudiation of modern materialism and his projection of contemplation as the antidote to the ills of modern civilization.

Paul Morton contends that few modern poets can be said to be "more achingly conscious" of the present world conflict. Yet the accepted treatments of war are entirely absent from his work. This reviewer considers his beautifully poignant poem, "For My Brother; Reported Missing in Action", possibly the greatest of its kind since the "Ave Frater Atque Vale" of Catullus.²

Besides a tender love for his "sweet brother", Merton exposes in this poem a criticism of modern civilization in its generent, war, together with an exposition of the sacrificial character of the Cistercian vocation.

Sweet brother, if I do not sleep
My eyes are flowers for your tomb;
And if I cannot eat my bread,
My fasts shall live like willows where you died.

1. Paul Morton, op. cit. p. 25

2. Paul Morton, op. cit. p. 25

If in the heat I find no water for my thirst,
My thirst shall turn to springs for you, poor traveller.

Where, in what desolate and smokey country,
Lies your poor body, lost and dead?
And in what landscape of disaster
Has your unhappy spirit lost its road?

Come, in my labour find a resting place
And in my sorrows lay your head,
Or rather take my life and blood
And buy yourself a better bed —
Or take my breath and take my death
And buy yourself a better rest.

When all the men of war are shot
And flags have fallen into dust,
Your cross and mine shall tell men still
Christ died on each, for both of us.

For in the wreckage of your April Christ lies slain,
And Christ weeps in the ruins of my spring:
The money of Whose tears shall fall
Into your weak and friendless hand,
And buy you back to your own land:
The silence of Whose tears shall fall
Like bells upon your alien tomb.
Hear them and come: they call you home.

Sister Julie, writing for America, considers the new poet's work "the epitome of Christian life, representing every stage of Christian development from the faith of a newly baptized to the fullness of sacramental life as expressed in "The Blessed Virgin Compared to a Window".¹

Because my will is simple as a window
And knows no pride of original earth
It is my life to die, like glass, by light,
Slain in the strong rays of the bridegroom sun.

1. Sister Julie, "New Directions Presents a Catholic Poet", America, vol. 73 (July 21, 1945) p. 316.

F. X. Connolly, reviewing this second book of poems, proclaims that now Merton's poetry is not only important but importunate. He considers this "valuable contribution to the body of creative literature", worthy of the admiration, homage and gratitude of Catholics. Thomas Merton has framed our Christian "aspirations with accuracy, sincerity and power".¹

Dr. Connolly and other critics agree that Merton's real inspiration derives less from sight than from insight. Thus when he moves into the sphere of mystical poet he achieves a freedom and a brilliant clarity not found in the "obscurity of his symbolism".²

Dr. Donnelly ranks Merton's poems, "St. John Baptist", "Clairvaux", and "The Biography" among the best poetry of our century.³

The poet still has not reached the perfection of his art in this book. Dr. Connolly points up the loss of "Tautness" and discipline found in "An Argument", where Merton is restrained by stricter pattern and regular rhythm. These are abandoned for a freer organization in later poems.

1. F. X. Connolly, "Review of A Man in the Divided Sea", Spirit, vol. 13 (Nov. 1946) p. 50.

2. Dr. F. X. Connolly, op. cit., p. 50.

3. Ibid.

done with an improved technique, a "liberated art", a "more certain imagery".¹

The first eight poems which together give the book its name are filled with the sadness of a mystic who views the world hurtling ruinward. The poet here uses the imagery of the Apocalypse and identifies New York with Ninevah and Tyre.² But he drives deep and these figures "twist in the mind like roots".³

In all the poems of this volume, the personal spiritual experience becomes identified with that of the twentieth century man in his crumbling civilization. The cries of his soul are no longer personalized and subjective. His experiences have true poetic depth so now he speaks with the tongue of universality bringing a subjective experience to an objective handling^{of} deeply poetic truths. And always it is the contemplative who speaks, who knows life's misery and its need of purging. In his first canto, the poet writes, identifying himself with those who await the Bridegroom:

For, from the beginning of the world

1. Fr. Sweeney, "Review of Figures for an Apocalypse" America, vol. 79 (June 19, 1949)

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, 13-28.

3. Cf. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 31.

How few of us have heard the silver of Thy creed
Or paid our hearts for hours of emptiness
With gold of Thy belief.¹

Even when he exhorts modernism to "fly, fly to the mountains", "fly, fly to the hills", warning that "the man in the silver garment" "strips down from heaven's temple door" and "raises the sickle" which begins to "sing like wind", "in the most quiet harvest of the midnight world",² in the midst of all the apocalyptical fleeing it all suddenly comes home to the poet's personal identical experience:

The first wild note begins to spring
And fires its anger, in an instant through the ranks
Of the attending angels
And bites my soul with lightnings live as steel.³

This personal identification with the woes and needs of his time appears even in his poem to our Lady, Canticle For the Blessed Virgin, to whom he appeals:

Lady, whose smiles are full of counsel and theology
Never have you withheld those seas of light
Whose surf confounds the keenest eye.
Grace me to be the soldier of your Scotus
Aiming my actions with the news
Of your Immaculate command.⁴

The poems dedicated to the Fathers and theologians

-
1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 13
 2. Ibid., p. 18-10.
 3. Ibid., p. 19.
 4. Ibid., p. 46.

Blinding us by Your evidence
Your too clear evidence. Your everywhere.¹

From here the thought flows on to the sense of
personal responsibility.

For the things that we utter turn and betray us
Writing the names of our sins on flesh and bone
In lights as hard as diamonds,
And the things we think have sold us to the enemy.

And our desires
Uncovering their faces one by one
Are seen to be our murderers.²

We find a trace of biography in lines such as:

Logic has ruined us
Theorems have flung their folly at us
Economy has left us full of swords
And all our blood is gone;³

Once again the personal mingles with the universal
as the poet reaches the mystical conclusion, the final
assuaging of the woes of our contemporary civilization.

But all our thoughts lie still, and in this shipwreck
We'll learn the theory of prayer
How many hate your Cross,
Your Key, the only one
To beat that last invincible don.
That will surprise us, Peace with Your invasion
And let us in those soundless fathoms where you dwell.⁴

In the final poem of this book, "The Poet, to His

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 71.

2. Ibid., p. 71.

3. Ibid., p. 71.

4. Ibid., p. 71.

Book", Thomas Merton poses and answers the problem of the contemplative poet. He asks:

And will I wear you once again in Purgatory
Around my mad ribs like a shirt of flame?

But finding the answer in obedience and in the monk's contemplata tradere he sends out his book with the hope that the fruit of his contemplation may be passed on to those who, sharing his experience of sin and suffering, may also share his thirst for God.¹

Go, stubborn talker
Find you a station on the loud world's corners
And try there (if your hands be clean) your length
of patience.
Use there the rhythm that upset my silences
And spend your pennyworth of prayer
There in the clamour of the Christless Avenues
And try to ransom some one prisoner
Out of those walls of traffic, out of those
wheels of that unhappiness.²

This book contains a further discussion of this problem in an essay Poetry and the Contemplative Life. The problem already discussed by Bremond and Maritain from the poet's point of view, is treated by Thomas Merton as a personal problem from the contemplative's point of view. This essay has caused considerable discussion in the literary world.

1. F. X. Connolly, "The Complete Twentieth Century Man", Thought, vol. 24, No. 29 (March 19, 1949) p. 14.

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 91.

The writer first describes the three degrees of contemplative life. The first is natural contemplation of God — that of the artist, philosopher and of the most advanced pagan religions. Active contemplation Merton considers to be the life of a baptized Christian making full use of all the means which the Church puts at his disposal.¹

The third degree he describes as infused contemplation, the fullness of the Christian life. Contemplation, whether active or passive, writes Merton, "brings us into contact with the one subject matter that is truly worthy of the Christian poet; God as he is seen by faith, in revelations or in the intimate experience of the soul illumined by the gifts of the Holy Ghost". Merton believes that "no Christian poetry worthy of the name has been written by anyone who is not, in some degree, a contemplative".²

The poet, then traces the influence of the poetic sense upon infused contemplation and the degree from the poetic sense as a remote disposition for mystical prayer to genuine esthetic experience as a supra-rational intuition to the contemplation per speculum of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure.³

1. Thomas Merton, "Poetry and the Contemplative Life", Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 96.

2. Ibid., p. 99.

3. Ibid., p. 103.

Speaking of the artist's preparation for infused contemplation, Merton writes:

And if God should grant that grace, the person so favoured will be much better prepared to recognize it and to co-operate with God's action within him.¹

Having arrived at "unitive or affective knowledge of God by infused contemplation, so Merton considers, the artist finds his poetic intuition "a fatal handicap". The artist enters himself to work, the mystic "to lose himself in the mystery and secrecy and infinite transcendent reality of God living and working with him".²

Merton believes that after this stage there is danger that the lower gift of artistic intuition and creation may rob the contemplative of the "infinitely superior gift of union of soul with God, which surpasses all understanding". Therefore while the artistic gift helps the soul "through that part of the journey of contemplation that is called Active", it may bar the way to the higher prayer. Merton remarks that "the sacrifice of an act would seem small price to pay for this pearl of great price".³

The publication of the essay, "Poetry and the

1. Thomas Merton, "Poetry and the Contemplative Life", Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 104.

2. Ibid., p. 108.

3. Ibid., p. 109.

Contemplative Life", as an article in Commonweal, and later in Figures for an Apocalypse, brought several attempted answers to the question it proposed. Father Gervase Toelle, O. Carm., treated the question with a surprising lack of discrimination, having read it as a poet rather than as a contemplative and giving Father Louis credit for little religious understanding of his vocation or avocation. Father Eric Bruno, O.F.M., treated the question with more sympathetic understanding.

It is Sister Mary Therese, Lentfoehr, S.D.S., herself a poet and, one suspects, a contemplative, who meets the problem in a most satisfying manner. Wisely, she lets Father Louis answer the problem he himself has posed, by publishing in the Catholic World and Renascence, hitherto unpublished parts of the manuscript of Seven Storey Mountain. The young monk describes how the writing he had heroically renounced, taken up once more, under obedience, became for him a practice in asceticism, a prayer, contemplation itself.¹

Sister Mary Therese adds to this article a comment showing deep insight into the poet's problem and its answer.

It would seem to be no inconsequential part of his

1. Thomas Merton, "Todo y Nada", Renascence, vol. 2, No. 2, (Spring 1950) p. 100.

(Merton's) personal apostolate to have brought his fellow poets up sharply against these issues and presented them a challenge to ponder and assess the status of their own gift against the dimensions of a more complete supernatural perspective.¹

The words of Leon Bloy: "When those who love God try to talk about Him, their words are blind lions looking for springs in the desert", inspired the title of Thomas Merton's latest book of poetry: Tears of the Blind Lions. The title leaves no doubt as to the subject of these poems. Nevertheless Thomas Merton's words are no longer "blind" lions but lit, now with the clarity of that lucent darkness of his contemplation. The lions, however, according to Sister M. James Powers, S.S.N.D., roar and foam at the materialism of the day. Merton has now achieved a new articulateness. The poem "The Quickening of St. John the Baptist" speaks of the contemplative vocation in tones of lyric joy:

Cooled in the flame of God's dark fire
Washed in His gladness like a vesture of new flame
We burn like eagles in this invincible awareness.²

Charles Francis Knauber, reviewing Tears of the Blind Lions, considers the poems in this volume a "Re-emphasis of what Merton has been saying."³ That is true in

1. Sister Mary Therese, "Todo y Nada", Renascence, vol. 2, No. 2, (Spring 1950) p. 101.

2. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, New York, New Directions, 1949, p. 10.

Charles Francis Knauber, "Review of Tears of the Blind Lions", Renascence, vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring '50) p.158.

the sense that these poems are still a criticism of the materialism of modern life and the offering of prayer as the tonic to revitalize it in Christianity.

The *Spiritual Biography* continues to be woven through the texture of these poems as in the preceding volumes. The poet continues his studies; he becomes a theologian and philosopher. He shows the deep influence of Duns Scotus and gives the cause of the attraction in a poem to the great Franciscan theologian: "I open the book of Duns Scotus, to learn the reason of theology".¹

"The Reader" may be considered one of the autobiographical poems for it describes a scene in the monk's daily life. This is a strange poem, building an atmosphere as well as a picture. Any religious will have been stirred by similar emotions as that which prompted this poem as the long line of prayer-absorbed monks "quicken" the sacred silence of the monastery refectory. A similar atmosphere pervades "The Song", which has the lines:

"Thus I live on my own land, on my own Island
And speak to God, my God".²

Reviewer Charles Knauber writes with insight:

This is the poetry of prayer, the prayer that

1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p.6.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

utters itself in the quiet abbey; the prayer that does not pray within the poem but outside it, in both the poet and the reader.¹

Father Louis is supremely conscious of his vocation as poet of the contemplative life, for he writes in "The Captives":

May my bones burn and ravens eat my flesh
 If I forget thee, contemplation
 May language perish from my tongue
 If I do not remember thee, O Sion city of vision
 Whose heights have windows finer than the firmament.
 When night pours down her canticles
 And peace sings on thy watchtowers like the stars
 of Job.²

Writing in Spirit, Jose Garvia Villa considers that moderns have been seeking someone who will justify their experiments, the great poet of modernism. He does not agree that Yeats, nor Auden nor Spender nor even Eliot, in spite of his Nobel Prize, nor Edith Sitwell, qualifies. When such a poet does arise he will unite what is best in the modern approach with what we have inherited from the past. Such a poet will be intelligible, he will write powerfully and directly in "a liberated but understandable medium". Thus he will be "closer to the manner of the great Christian poets of the past ages than to any of the present day idols". Garcia believes that this great poet of modernism may be

1. Charles F. Knauber, "Review of Tears of the Blind Lions", Renascence, vol. 2, No. 2. (Spring 1950).

2. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 21.

Thomas Merton.¹

Will Lissner, in "A Toast of the Avant Garde", writes of Merton and his poetry in its threefold character:

As a scourge of our times, as an evangel of the eternal life, that the Trappists try to live here in preparation for the hereafter, as a faithful chronicler of the cistercian spirit, Mr. Merton has given us a high earnest of his poetic achievement.²

In 1948, Harcourt, Brace, published Thomas Merton's biography Seven Storey Mountain, in England known as Elected Silence. Hubert Hart, who reviewed it in America, considers it "one of the most significant accounts of conversions from the Modern Temper to God, that our time has seen"³

Not only is this the realistic record of a complete twentieth century man, it is a book of varied interest but of simplicity of purpose. Thomas Merton is a poet, an artist, an intellectual. His rich and colourful life he describes with a clear objectivity and vitality, that is fresh and inspiring. The descriptions of the places in which he lived "capture their respective genius loci".⁴

1. John Duffy, Review of A Celebration for Edith Sitwell, Spirit, vol. 15 (Jan. 1949) p. 181.

2. Will Lissner, "Toast of the Avant-Garde", Catholic World, vol. 166 (Feb. 1948) p. 424.

3. Hubert Hart, "Twentieth-Century Augustine", America, vol. 80, (Oct. 16, 1948) p. 47.

4. F.X. Connolly, "Review of Seven Storey Mountain", Catholic World, vol. 168, (Nov. 1945) p. 167.

"This biography gives us the world within men and the world without".¹ It is a document of universal humanistic value.

Apart from the lyric beauty of the prose descriptions and humanistic discussions, this autobiography carries a message that is at once a challenge to the modern intellectual, and a description and explanation of his life. That message is simple and insistent. "Grace is everywhere!"² With this as thesis, Merton describes his climb up the Seven Storey Mountain of the steps of Grace from the amoral agnostic life of the intellectual sophisticate, to the contemplative life "enclosed in the four walls of (his) new freedom". Meanwhile he subjects the century to which he belongs to a critical scrutiny. As he himself reaches the mountain top of grace he offers to his "cruel century" the corrective of contemplative life.

Thomas Merton has written two biographies, Exile Ends in Glory, and What are These Wounds. Both of these are lives of Cistercian nuns. One, Mother Bertrand, was sent to revitalize the monastery in Cluna, in the last century. The other was a thirteenth century mystic, St. Lutgarde. As a biographer of women, even Trappestines, Merton is not so

1. F.X. Connolly, "The Complete Twentieth Century Man", Thought, vol. 24 (Mar. 1949) p. 10.

2. George Miles, "Review of Seven Storey Mountain", Commonweal, vol. 49 (Oct. 15, 1948)

so successful. The humanistic touch, the ability to recreate her genius loci, and deep understanding of women is lacking in these books.

As treatises on the contemplative life they are beautiful. Merton writes with assurance and a lyric prose when he writes of the marvels of grace and the glories of contemplation. What are These Wounds explains the place of mystic experience above the natural order, in the spiritual life.

When Thomas Merton wrote The Waters of Siloe in 1949, he "made the history of the Cistercian Order become the spontaneous expression of high doctrine".¹ It is quite in the order of development of the life he has lived and the spiritual vitality he offers his age in place of materialistic sentimentality that the writer should follow up his thesis by an exposition of the contemplative life as it is lived most purely by the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance.

Merton here writes beautifully and nobly of contemplation and activity, prayer and mortification, adoration and abandonment. He still writes with the same incisive wit and without artificiality. He maintains objectivity and

1. "Review of Waters of Siloe", Unsigned. Orate Fratres, vol. 23, (Sept. 1949) p. 94.

rarest honesty while writing with intensest love. He offers to uneasy moderns balanced judgement and real insight.

Finally in Seeds of Contemplation, Father Louis opens the way to contemplation, to the man in the world or in the cloister. Sister Mary Therese notes that this book is written after the extraordinary climb up the Seven Storey Mountain, at its summit of contemplation.

In Seeds of Contemplation, Father Louis proves that contemplation is for every man, the ordinary fulfilment of the Christian life of grace, man's highest function on earth, as it is his only occupation in heaven.¹

So Thomas Merton in his books of poetry and prose, draws the complete twentieth-century man in his weakness and sin and then in his idealistic fulfilment. He exposes contemporary ills in the clear vision of his incisive criticism. His criticism is constructive, however, and Father Louis not only points out the panacea of our ills but leads the way to it. In his vocation as priest and preacher, he prays for the men of his age:

Memento Dei Genitrix
Et miserere pauperum;
Largire vitam mortuis,
Ostende nobis Filium.

Emitte Sapientiam
Da nobis Lumen cordium

1. Sister Mary Therese, "Review of Seeds of Contemplation", Renascence, vol. 1 (Spring 1949) p. 65.

Dilectionis copiam
Et gloriae primordium.

Gloria tibi Deitas
Qui sempiternae caelitus
Regnas, Pater et Filius
Et utriusque Spiritus.¹

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 8.

CHAPTER III

SINS OF THE MODERN THINKER

1 Education

The stars put out their pale opinions, one by one,
While the black-friar breaks the Truth, his Host
Among his friends, the simple substances.
For thus he fathered minds to reason's peace
And fed the children of the Kingdom
With the Person in the intellectual Bread.

His mind had never smarted with the bitter reek
Of the world's night, the flesh's smoke.
His eyes were always cradles for the Word of God,
His intellect; His Bethlehem.¹

Thomas Merton, complete twentieth-century man, was perhaps, first and foremost, an intellectual. He dabbled in all the fashionable fads of the intelligentsia. At the Lycee of Montauban he belonged to the literary club. At the University too, he was at the centre of the intellectual group. He eagerly sought the ultimate of psychology, psychiatry, oriental mysticism, medieval philosophy, ultra-modern and ancient art.

From the fullness of this experience, Thomas Merton writes a scathing denunciation of the schools that have been fostered by the intellectual falsity of his time. School systems are both the flower and the seed of the mentality of

1. Thomas Merton, "St. Thomas Aquinas", A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 64.

an age. The mental outlook of the day forms the character of the school. Conversely, the school forms the mental outlook of its youth.

"The problems of education are closely articulated with society".¹ The social rectitude of any country depends upon the individual integrity of the citizens that are its components.² There cannot fail to be a relationship between the successive systems of education and the successive social states with which they have co-existed.³ These are the statements of the great students of education of our age. Historical fact bears them out.

It is significant of this fact that the Thirteenth and greatest century found in its Universities the great schoolmen of all ages: Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Giotto, Dante, Stephen Langton, St. Dominic, Duns Scotus, Robert of Sarbonne.

James Walsh writes on this theme:

To see, at once how well the Thirteenth deserves the name of the greatest of centuries, it is necessary only to open the book of her deeds and read therein

1. The Catholic Attitude on Education, Excerpt from a Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop and Bishops of U.S.A., Washington, 1919, published by National Catholic Welfare Council, 1943.

2. Cf. G. N. Wiley Jr., The Redirection of Secular Education, New York, Macmillan, 1940, p. 1.

3. Cf. Herbert Spencer, Education, Bint Co. p. 94.

what was accomplished during this period for the education of the men of the time.¹

And so it is, of every age, and the twentieth century too need only open the record of its deeds to show the character of her education and her consequent intellectual life.

There is perhaps no more bitter criticism of modern civilization written by Thomas Merton than his bleakly realistic memoirs of his successive schools. Yet his education was a matter of serious concern to his parents. They were eager for their sons to develop into intelligent young men unhampered by any narrowing influence. They chose the best and most advanced in secular education in order to achieve this.

Thomas Merton tells us that his training was that of "materialistic naturalism". Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical on Christian Education, condemns such education in very definite terms:

Every form of pedagogical naturalism which in any way excluded or weakens supernatural christian formation in the teaching of youth is false. Every method of education founded wholly or in part, on the denial or forgetfulness of original sin and of grace and relying on the sole powers of human nature is unsound.²

1. J. J. Walsh, The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries, New York, Catholic Summer School Press, 1924, p. 18.

2. Pius XI, Christian Education of Youth, New York, Paulist Press, 1929, p. 23.

The school to which Thomas was sent, after a year or so of preparation at the village school of St. Antonin, was The Lycee Ingres of Montauban. Merton writes that the boys of the Lycee were humane and peaceable enough separately and outside of school.

But when they were all together there seemed to be some diabolical spirit of cruelty and viciousness and obscenity and blasphemy and envy and hatred that banded them together against all goodness and against one another in mockery and fierce cruelty and in vociferous uninhibited filthiness.¹

Reflecting that contact with them felt like contact with "the mystical body of the devil", Merton asks is it any wonder that in a world where young people grow up without moral or religious discipline, and without charity and faith or any spirituality, that there can be no peace. Society lacks the virtues that "alone can safeguard the treaties and agreements made by governments."²

Merton describes the oldest boys who were stronger, craftier in the works of evil, louder in their obscenity and unrestrained in their brutality. He suggests that their evil friendships caused more harm even, than their enmity.

France's turning away from her old ideals towards the modern sins that have almost been her spiritual ruin, is implicit in Merton's account of the evils present in the

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 50

2. Ibid., p. 51.

schools of France represented by the Lycee Ingres.

The most shocking thing about France is the corruption of French spirituality into flippancy and cynicism; of French intelligence into sophistry of French dignity and refinement into petty vanity and theatrical self-display; of French charity into disgusting fleshly concupiscence; and of French faith into sentimentality or puerile atheism.¹

Then Merton indignantly impeaches the Catholics who neglect not only God's will but even the dictates of reason and prudence and allow their children to be trained to "a civilization of hyenas". When the havoc is wrought they will weep "that God does not hear their prayers for peace."² He closes the Lycee episode by saying, "my escape from the Lycee was, I believe, providential".³

The young Thomas next registered at Ripley Court in Ealing, a school run by his Aunt Maud's sister-in-law. Here the boy found peace and happiness. Perhaps this was because, here, for the first time in his life, he saw boys kneel beside their beds to pray before sleeping, and sit down to meals after saying grace. He remained here, however, only a short time, from the spring of 1928 to the autumn of 1929. By this time he was ready for the scholarship examinations for an English Public School.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 51.

2. Ibid., p. 51.

3. Ibid., p. 60.

Oakham, the Public School at which the fifteen year old Merton was then registered, was a typical English institution in a tiny town of the Midlands, complete with the atmosphere of the fourteenth century church of Catholic design and architecture and with twentieth-century Protestant service.

Merton's castigation of the English Public schools exemplified by Oakham is hardly less bitter than his denunciation of the Lycee Ingres. He writes of the students as "noisy, greedy, foul-mouthed, fighting and shouting". He satirizes the teaching of the chaplain, substituting humanism for charity in the teaching of St. Paul, and sums it up:

If I talk with the tongues of men and of angels and be not a gentleman, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal --- A gentleman is patient, is kind; a gentleman envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up ...

And so it went. I will not accuse him of finishing the chapter with "Now there remain faith, hope and gentlemanliness and the greatest of these is gentlemanliness", although it was the logical term of his reasoning.¹

It is at Oakham that Thomas Merton developed a "congenital distaste" for Platonism and Philosophic idealism which reduces all reality to the level of abstraction:

... as if concrete individual substances had no essential reality of their own, but were only shadows

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 74.

of some remote, universal, ideal essence filed away in a big card-index somewhere in heaven, while the demi-urges milled around the Logos, piping their excitement in high, fluted English intellectual tones.¹

None of the professors at this school seemed to have clearly defined assurances of anything, or anchorholds of reality or truth; but each seemed to have a special intellectual hobby which he rode to the extreme and to which he endeavoured to win his students as proselytes. With the chaplain the chief concern was with gentleness; the headmaster was an ardent apostle of Platonism. One master, designated solely as a Yorkshireman, held as the foundation of religion the Cogito ergo sum, of Descartes. Merton tells us that the professor came to this after he had proven the existence of God and of himself by this principle; and he comments that this proving of a first principle is necessarily illusory. How can we construct any kind of philosophy unless we accept self-evident, first principles as a foundation for reasoning.² Otherwise upon what can you base your conclusions, not immediately apparent? "If you have to prove the basic axioms of your metaphysics you will never have a metaphysics". Actually your first proof "will involve you in an infinite regress, proving that you are proving

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 75.

2. Ibid., p. 75.

what you are proving, and so on into interior darkness", with ultimate wailing and gnashing teeth.¹

Merton goes on with his satire of Descartes asking "if Descartes thought it necessary to prove his own existence from the fact that he was thinking"? Merton postulates that there are much better proofs of the existence of God than that he exists because Descartes had a clear idea of him.²

Under such instruction Merton who, as long as he had some faith and religion, willingly, even gladly, was subject to authority, had now lost the little he had. He became extremely egoistic and wilful "building up a hard core of resistance against everything that displeased him". And this is exactly what such institutions could be expected to produce and were producing all over the world.³

After Oakham, Merton took a holiday filled with the confusion of the aesthetic paganism of France combined with the sophisticated behaviorism of England and interpolated with the materialistic sentimentality of America. On the tide of this confusion he was "swept into the dark sinister atmosphere of Cambridge" and began his university career.⁴

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 75.

2. Ibid., p. 76

3. Ibid., p. 75

4. Ibid., p. 118.

Merton epitomizes Cambridge by its "sweet stench of corruption", the "superficial youthfulness" and the "abounding undergraduate noise", of which the bitter taste is with him still, all these years.¹

During this Cambridge phase, Merton admits he was "armoured and locked in within my own defectible and blinded self". The walls were "seven layers of imperviousness, the capital sins". These could be burned away only by the "fires of Purgatory or of Divine Love".²

From the big library of the Students Union at Cambridge, Merton now got all the books of Freud and Jung and Adler and studied the "mysteries of sex-repression and complexes and introversion and all the rest".³

At this time he became deeply concerned with psychoanalysis and with such disturbing results that he says that if ever he had become insane, psychoanalysis would have been chiefly responsible.

The only redeeming influence of his studies at Cambridge seems to have been the course on Dante with its "poetic synthesis of scholastic philosophy and theology".

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 118.
 2. Ibid., p. 123.
 3. Ibid., p. 124.
 4. Ibid., p. 123.

Merton calls this "the greatest grace in the positive order I got out of Cambridge."¹

So anguished is Thomas Merton's memory of his year at Cambridge that he prefers to let it lie in oblivion, under the burnt-out lava of the years. The result of it all was that the last remains of spiritual vitality were being crushed out of his soul, and he was "labouring to enslave" himself in "the bonds of (his) own intolerable disgust".²

It seems to be in Thomas Merton's nature to follow whatever philosophy of life he embraced, consistently, diligently, wherever it led. Having accepted the behavioristic naturalism of Cambridge he followed its lead, logically. So serious did his condition become that his guardian, a Harley Street doctor, in London, himself a cultured pagan, arranged that he should remain in America after his summer holiday there. Merton agreed easily with this decision, for it seemed to him that there was some subtle poison in Europe, that was corrupting, sickening, repelling him, "a sweet and nasty disease of the soul that seemed to be rotting the whole of Europe, in high places above all".³

It seemed to me that Cambridge and, to some extent, the whole of England was pretending, with an elaborate

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 123.
 2. Ibid., p. 121.
 3. Ibid, p. 126.

and intent and conscious, and perhaps in some cases a courageous effort, to act as if it were alive. And it took a lot of acting. It was a vast and complicated charade, with expensive and detailed costuming and scenery and a lot of inappropriate songs; and yet the whole thing was so intolerable dull, because most of the people were already morally dead, asphyxiated by the steam of their own strong yellow tea, or by the smell of their own pubs and breweries, or by the fungus on the walls of Oxford and Cambridge.¹

The emptiness of soul of these people was soon to be filled with fear and tragedy by the war, forebodings of which were like cold steel in their vitals.

Once again Merton considered his departure for a school to be a grace from God. With touching piety and deep sincerity he wrote of this years later:

Lady, when on that night I left the Island that was once your England, your love went with me, although I could not know it, and could not make myself aware of it. And it was your love, your intercession for me, before God, that was preparing the seas before my ship, laying open the way for me to another country.²

The impression first obtained at Columbia, seems to be that here there was a more unpretentious purposefulness, that the people were "more earnest and more humble", "poorer, smarter, perhaps, certainly more diligent" than at Cambridge. Merton was impressed by the fact that Columbia was "stripped of fancy academic ritual", and was imbued with a "genuine

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 127.

2. Ibid., p. 138.

intellectual vitality".¹

Later, however, he became acquainted with the wide general curriculum of an American university which instead of trying to teach you any one thing completely, strives to give its students a superficial knowledge of everything.²

It was men like Dr. Mark Van Doren who "purified and educated the perceptions" of their students, who gave Thomas Merton a deep respect for his new university.

Merton writes of the inner circle of sociologists and economists and lawyers at Columbia who exercised a powerful influence in Washington under the New Deal. He describes the "little galaxy of pragmatists in the school of philosophy and their pale spiritual offspring at Teacher's College.

These men case a "mighty influence" over the "whole American Middle West". They themselves were, nevertheless, conditioned by the very people they tried to condition. As a result of this policy "Teacher's College", says Merton, "always stood for colourlessness and mediocrity and plain hapless behaviorism."³

The liberalism of these three groups, the New

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 138.
 2. Ibid., p. 138.
 3. Ibid., p. 141.

Dealers, the pragmatists and the men of Teacher's College, was scorned even by the communists with whom they wished to compromise. At Columbia, the smartest students were "Red". The communists had control of the college paper and other publications. They were also members of the Student Board.

Merton describes the Young Communist League, the Peace Strike, the Oxford Pledge, the concern about war and peace, with mild satire. In Lumine Tuo Videbimus Lumen is the motto of Columbia University. It is one of the deepest and most beautiful lines of the psalms — the foundation of all Christian and Scholastic learning. It has so little to do with present day scholastic standards at Columbia, however, that Merton suggests it might better be changed to In Lumine Randale Videbimus Dewey!

Merton writes of one of the lecturers at Columbia, Professor Lyndall, an agnostic and rationalist and his "amused interest" in the "strange perversions of the religious instinct, that our world has seen in the last five hundred years.²

Yet, in spite of all this, Columbia, for Thomas Merton was a well of Grace, which came to him through Dr. Mark Van Doren's natural goodness and Dr. Dan Walsh's super-

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 177.

2. Ibid., p. 189.

natural goodness, and Father Ford's and Father Moore's instructions. For Columbia was not completely Godless. An article written by Merton, in the Columbian, of 1937, on the Newman Club (Merton was also the editor) informs us that in 1929 the University gave official appointment to the clerical representatives of the three major faiths.¹ It was here that Merton was converted and the seeds of faith were sown in the souls of several of his friends.

Merton is not a pessimist. The picture he draws of secular school life today is dark and sinister. Yet it has glints of light. Ealing, where there was a little faith and a little prayer and cleanness of life, was a happy peaceful oasis in the desert of his youth. Columbia, in spite of its sad deviation from its own motto In Lumine Tuo Videbimus Lumine, still had Dr. Mark Van Doren and Dr. Dan Walsh, and the Newman Club and a chaplain and some religious life and thought. There you could find hints of Scholastic Philosophy and come into contact with the great converts and philosophers, Maritain and Gilson, and hear of St. Thomas and St. Bernard. A little of the light was filtering through to enable soul to see the light, even if darkly.

2

Literary Life

1. Thomas Merton, "The Newman Club", Columbian, New York, Columbia University, 1937, p. 161.

"Learning is a great kind goddess", wrote Thomas Merton to his fellow students at Columbia. Yet he chides that they refuse her banquet "for a pretzel". They leave "reason" to the "schoolmen" who were all saints, chafed with hairshirts and sore in the knees — medieval.¹ The psuedo-schoolmen of the secular universities of today, immersed in the materialistic studies of science and economics, sneer at scholasticism and fear its subtleties.

Yet our mature civilization proves most credulous concerning the wisdom offered by her own philosophers, even though experience has taught us that they are able to solve few of our problems. Merton writes of the specialists of political science sitting in their conferences while:

Rivers clothe their houses
 And hide their naked wisdom.
 Their conversations
 Go down into the deep like submarines,
 Submerge them with their pale expressions.²

The materialism of modern society has choked its intellectual life, burnt it out, till the "skylights of our intellect have gone as grey as frost".³ Our worldly logic has ruined us. "Theorems have flung their folly at us; economy has left us full of swords, and all our blood is

1. Thomas Merton, "Oasis", Columbia Jester, Vol. 40 (Sept. 1940) p. 35.

2. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 5.

3. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 17.

gone". "For the things that we utter turn and betray us".¹

So far is wisdom from our ways that we are content while the bureaucrats, says Merton, "wiping the blood off their fingers, work their worldly wills in our name". In the very "Temple of Reason", they have "voted to poison the enemy's well".²

Our civilization is gnawed by the canker of false ideologies seeking in their various "isms" the answer to the great intellectual hunger of society, disappointed by the fads of the last century. One by one these "isms" rise, carry the unwary on the tide of their superficial or spurious promises, and go down in the ignominious defeat of wars that their underlying ambitions breed. At the moment the "ism" that is in the ascendancy approaching its zenith before the decline, in what may or may not prove to be another bloody debauch, is international communism.

As a youth Merton was superficially attracted by this ideology which seemed to repudiate the mediocrity of popular thinking. Communism was iconoclastic and revolutionary. It aimed to disturb the status quo. In such measure the university student was attracted by it. He attended a few student rallies, gave a few speeches,

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 71.

2. Ibid., p. 74.

picketed once for a strike, and discussed at length. But the young student had a mind not easily satisfied by the deceptive creed of communism, a mind to be satisfied only when it was kindled and became enamored of the "wonderful Sun" of scholastic philosophy.

Merton sums up the importance of communism as an ideology in a few brief words.

It is an indication of the intellectual instability of communism and the weakness of its philosophical foundation that most communists are in actual fact, noisy and shallow and violent people, torn to pieces by petty jealousies and factional hatreds and envy and strifes.¹

The paucity and insufficiency of the intellectual life in our civilization is due, of course, to the fact that it is a godless civilization. Merton, the poet, laments the absence of God's Truth in public life.

Not in the streets, not in the white streets
Nor in the crowded porticoes
Shall we catch You in our words,
Or lock You in the lenses of our cameras
You Who escaped the subtle Aristotle,
Blinding us by your evidence,
Your too clear evidence, your everywhere.²

In the face of all this "grim cartoon" "Heaven with a strange impassivity shows no particular horror". We are allowed to blunder along creating more tragedy and chaos.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 146.

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 71.

Our intrigues embroil us in cold wars, mechanized wars,
atomic wars. And still:

... No fire falls
No brimstone burns these absinthial silences
Or purifies the poisoned sanctuary to pile of ash.¹

For reason comes not to the "Lamb's bright feast",
even though "created wisdom makes at best a metal monstrance
for His crown".² "Reason and knowledge have bought oxen and
they cannot come". "Thrift and prudence", busy in the marts
of men, "give their own excuses", and justice, corrupted by
concupiscence "has a wife and must stay home".³ Each new
day the citizens "build themselves ... another idol out of
mud".

They cut themselves a crooked idiom
To the winged animals, upon their houses
Prayers are made of money, songs of numbers
Hymns of the blood of the killed.⁴

The Truth has been killed and "wisdom turned to salt
upon the broken piers"⁵ and "wit walks out in envy's mask".⁶
The dilettante intellectuals have "a rather strict standard

-
1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 74.
 2. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 146.
 3. Ibid., p. 146.
 4. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 21.
 5. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 128.
 6. Ibid., p. 149.

of values, critical values concerning literature, art, music and science and fastidious behavior".

These values are "entirely worldly and cosmopolitan" says Merton. They imply, he explains, "a certain worldly moral standard", fused in a single "order of taste" with the artistic values. Merton implies that man must be smart and "keenly attuned to their psychology" to get the significance of this unwritten law. They attacked "bourgeois pharisaism and middle-class hypocrisy" without truce, but never expressed any hatred of evil or any "explicit condemnation" of vice. They disposed of other "deordinations with quiet and pointed mockery."¹

The most the writers of the age seem to have contributed was a "comfortable and materialistic skepticism". They built up a type of pantheistic idealism — gathering a little from Spinoza and Kant and Bergson.²

Even Aldous Huxley, whom young Professor Merton considered "an intellectual man" who "sees more clearly than his contemporaries the end for which man was created", is "perplexed and confused over the "means of attaining that end".

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 80.

2. Thomas Merton, "Huxley's Pantheon", Catholic World, Vol. 152, No. 908 (Nov. 1940) p. 206.

Although Huxley's "criticism of literature is full of erudition and perspicacity, yet his contribution to constructive thinking is a dream of a certain Mr. Prosper, "the dullest character in the whole history of the English novel" contends Merton. Ends and Means, is concerned with Mr. Prosper's dream of "a small agrarian community in some fertile valley, a sort of beaverboard Shangri-la". Here a "few chatty contemplatives, "withdrawn from the actuality of life "wait out the war in seclusion and safety".¹

Meanwhile novelists and dramatists grope to express an all inclusive way of life, satisfying not only to the material but the spiritual aspirations of man. They struggle to find a re-evaluation of man in his relation to the cosmos. Of course Catholic writers have the stable philosophy and the background of tradition to guide and sustain them. Hubert Hart, one of the very able literary critics of this decade enunciates the theses:

If Christianity is true, obviously theology is queen of the sciences, obviously ethics is Christian morality and education is the fostering of this morality.²

But theology and Christian doctrine strike terror

1. Thomas Merton, "Huxley's Pantheon", Catholic World, vol. 152, No. 908 (Nov. 1940) p. 208.

2. Hubert Hart, "A Letter in the Alphabet", Catholic World, vol. 171, (July 1950) p. 285.

into the very heart of the "unenlightened modern mind". Thomas Merton depicts the effect made upon him as a student, before his conversion, by the words Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur found in Gilson's book The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy. These words he says, imply to the mind "that has its roots in Protestantism", all kinds of "sinister secrets". It is impossible for a Catholic to understand, he says, "the number and complexity of fearful associations that a little thing like this" can convey.¹ These words, telling the non-catholic student that what he was about to read was in "full conformity with that fearsome and mysterious thing, Catholic Dogma", struck him "with an impact against which everything in (him) reacted with repugnance and fear".² Yet even at that time Thomas Merton admired Catholic culture while he feared the Catholic Church. And he tells us that this is a common attitude in the world.

It was when he finally read Gilson's book, that Thomas Merton became thrilled by the knowledge, new to him, of God as Aseity — actuality.

The form of literature in our age has been chaotic, disturbed. Sister Mariella Gable, in an introduction to a collection of short stories, proves the thesis that matter

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 172.

2. Ibid., p. 172.

and form are one, and that this chaotic form of modern literature reflects "in its mode of expression", the thing it expresses".¹ Recently new critics, Yvor Winters, I. A. Richards, William Empson, Robert Penn Warren, Kenneth Burke and others, have been "preoccupied with an analysis of contemporary literature as communicating man's loss of faith, his loss of God. "The craft of the godless", says Sister Mariella, "cannot be the craft of the God-filled", and the substance expressed will always determine the form of expression."²

When Thomas Merton found scholastic philosophy, he found also the cause of the insufficiency of unaided human reason. He found there too the antidote for the groping fallacy of the intellectual life of his age.

It was Dr. Mark Van Doren, himself at the time a non-catholic, who prepared the young student's mind and opened its receptivity to scholastic reasoning. Dr. Van Doren seems to have been, with Dr. Dan Walsh, the teacher who most earned Merton's respect and appreciation. Speaking of Dr. Van Doren's teaching, Merton exposes, by comparison, the tricks of the less adequate professors. Dr. Van Doren never had any fancy tricks to hide his unpreparedness. In

1. Sister Mariella Gable, "Introduction", Many Colored-Fleece, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1950, p.xv.

2. Ibid., p. xvi.

his classes there were never any "periodic tirades" or storms of temperament". He never wasted time flattering or cajoling or joking. Merton appraises him:

Now a man who can go for year after year without all these non-essentials both honors his vocation and makes it fruitful. Not only that, but his vocation in return, perfects and ennobles him.¹

Dr. Van Doren never permitted himself to fall into the error of reading "some private doctrine" into the literature he taught. He abhorred the "smug assurance with which second rate left-wing critics", find "dialectical materialism" in all writers from "Homer to Shakespeare", to recent favorites. He did not read into classical poetry the teaching of class struggle, of fascism, or the favorite ideology of the moment. He was not one of those who make all literary heroes revolutionary leaders, and all their "favorite villains", capitalists and Nazis.²

Merton attributes this mental rectitude in Dr. Van Doren to his "virtual scholasticism". He knew the modern scholastics, Maritain and Gilson, and the "American neo-Thomists". His own "temper was profoundly scholastic". "His clear mind looked directly for the quiddities of things". "He sought being and substance under the covering of accident and appearances". He taught poetry as "a virtue

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 140.

2. Ibid., p. 140.

of the practical intellect", not a "vague spilling of the emotions, wasting the soul and perfecting none of our essential powers".¹ Tracing Dr. Van Doren's influence upon himself, Merton writes:

The influence of Mark's sober and sincere intellect and his manner of dealing with his subject with perfect honesty and objectivity and without evasions, was remotely preparing my mind to receive the good seed of scholastic philosophy.²

Merton says that Dr. Van Doren's course was the best he ever had at college. One of its virtues was that it taught literature alone and made no attempt to teach economics or philosophy or sociology or psychology. The material of literature, says Merton, is human acts, free acts, moral acts. Literature gives the interpretation of these acts. You miss "all the deepest meaning of Shakespeare, Dante, and the rest" if you confound literature with some other science and "reduce their vital and creative statements about life and men to dry, matter-of-fact terms of history or ethics" or science. This course was the only place where the student Merton "ever heard anything really sensible said about any of the things that were really fundamental — life death, time, love, sorrow, fear, wisdom, suffering, eternity!"³

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 140.

2. Ibid., p. 140.

3. Ibid., p. 180.

Mark's balanced and sensitive and clear way of seeing things, at once simple and yet capable of subtlety, being fundamentally scholastic ... presented these things in ways that made them live within us and with a life that was healthy and permanent and productive. ... This class ... was, that year, my only health, until I came across and read Gilson's book.¹

So as Merton became acquainted with Truth through St. Thomas, by way of the modern scholastics, other "stars put out their pale opinions", in his mind, "one by one".

In St. Thomas he finds the corrective to the defects of modern thinking:

His mind had never smarted with the bitter reek
Of the world's night, the flesh's smoke;
His eyes were always cradles for the Word of God

...
Better than Jacob's dream
He saw how all created essences go up and down
Upon their own degree of likeness
To the Pure Act and Perfect Essence.²

Man's intellect is the most god-like feature he has. Whereas the Divine Intellect is pure act, man's intellect is potentiality to act, and created intellect bears the relationship to Divinity that potentiality bears to act.³

The mistake of modern intellectuals has been that they do not realize that whereas "the operation of the intellect has its origin in the senses" still "the intellect

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 180.

2. Thomas Merton, "St. Thomas Aquinas", A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 64.

3. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part 1, q. 79, Art. 4 & 5, p. 400.

knows many things that the senses cannot perceive".¹ Yet "in God alone His intellect is his essence" in "other intellectual creatures, the intellect is a power". God's action of understanding is His very being.²

In this materialistic age, as Merton shows, men's intellects are clouded by "fleshly smoke". Even their lower reason is unenlightened. Father Humbert Clerrisac used to make it his daily prayer for the world "that intelligence and beauty be rendered to their Lord".³ Leon Bloy held that Christian life is based on intelligence — on God's Truth.⁴ Thomas Merton adds to this idea: "God utters me like a word containing a thought of Himself". And asks of modern man: "What one can enter into himself and find the God Who utters him"? Then promises:

But if I am true to the concept that God utters in me, if I am true to the thought of Him I was meant to embody, I shall be full of His actuality and find Him everywhere in myself and find myself nowhere. I shall be lost in Him.⁵

In the poem "The Word — A Responsory", on the line

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part 1, q. 78, Art. 4, p. 398.

2. Ibid.

3. Raissa Maritain, Adventures in Grace, New York, Longmans, Green, 1945, p. 10.

4. Ibid., p. 10.

5. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 31.

Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum, Merton shows what the function of the poet truly is, in the light of true intellect.

My heart hath uttered ...
The vital sap
And blood of growth
Verbum bonum!

Whose keyless news
Unlocks the secret places
Of the peace-enfolded soul:
Whose exultation
Rifles the hidden riches of the will,
Oh be our glory! Never die!

My heart hath uttered a good Word,
Whose Name is "Sent"
Whom we desire to love:
Strong in the fathoms of the heart, unseen,
Sending us heaven silent as a spring,
A perfect Word!
O Verbum bonum!¹

Merton questions his own writings in words that might well apply to those whose gifts have been used to pervert or tull the intellectual life of their century:

And will I wear you once again, in Purgatory
Around my mad ribs like a shirt of flame?
Or bear you on my shoulders for a sorry jubilee
My Sinbad's burden?²

For himself, Thomas Merton has gone to the very fountain and immersed himself in the knowledge, intelligence and wisdom of the great early theologians. Fortunately living in a monastery, containing the finest incunabula in

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 82.

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 91.

the New World,¹ he has saturated his intellect with the writings of St. Bernard, St. Alberic, St. Benedict, St. Jerome, St. Aelred, Duns Scotus, and the mystics St. John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila.

Duns Scotus seems to have had greatest impact upon his mind and soul and he asks our Lady to "grace (him) to be the soldier of (her) Scotus. "For Scotus is (her) theologian". "There is no line of his that has not blazed (her) glory in the schools, though in dark words, without romance". But "His thoughts strode through those words", "far too puny for his great theology", bright as the conquering Christ".²

Merton offers Scotus as the model for intellectuals for he struck "like lightning, to the quick of the real world", and "mined all ranges to their deepest veins". We can almost feel the swift intake of breath at the "lance-lightning, blade-glitter, banner progress" of "his clean embattled reasons", as Merton exclaims:

But where, oh on what blazing mountain of theology
And in what Senai's furnace
Did God refine that gold?
Who ruled those arguments in their triumphant order
And armed them with their strict celestial light?³

1. Cf. Sister Mary Therese, "First Christmas at Gethsemani", Catholic World, vol. 170, (Nov. '49) No. 1017, p. 168

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 48.

3. Ibid., p. 48.

Merton tells us that he opens "the book of Duns Scotus to learn the reason for theology". From it he writes his tremendous poem on the Trinity and truly he may cry "God, my God! Look, Look! I travel in Thy strength."¹

This is the book whose vision is not its own end,
Whose words are the ways of love, whose term is Trinity:
Three Who is One, Who is Love.

One, because One is the reason for loving
And the One Love loved. But Three
Are the Three Lovers Who love and are loved
And are Love.

One is the Love we love, and love for:
But Three are those we love and
One our Three Lovers, loving One another.
Their One Love for One another is their Love for us,
And one is our Love for all Three and all One
And for us, on earth, brothers, one another!

One God is the One Love propter quam amatur
And Three Persons of the One Love are quae amantur.
So to love One alone is little better
Than loving none.
But to love Three is to love One.

Now today, while these Three
Love One another in me,
Loving me, and I love them,
Suddenly I can no longer live in mortal flesh.

Faith is the first and ultimate exercise of the will. Merton calls faith an intellectual assent. Instead of destroying the mind, as the pragmatists say, it perfects it. It "puts the intellect in possession of Truth which reason cannot grasp by itself". "It gives us certitude concerning

1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 6.

God as He is in Himself", it is a "vital contact" of the soul with a "God Who is alive", not with any "abstract First Principle worked out" from "evidence of created things", by syllogisms.¹ It does not frustrate or deny or destroy the intellect. Under the guidance of love it can "accept quite rationally" the conviction of truth. In an act of faith, says Merton, the intellect accepts God's "statement about Himself on His own terms". Since God is "infinite actuality" He is therefore infinite Truth, Wisdom, Power, Providence. He "can reveal Himself with absolute certitude in any manner He pleases".²

"Ultimately Faith is the only key to the Universe". It is the "final meaning of human existence". "All our happiness" depends on it "and cannot be found in any other way".³

Thomas Merton proves that in the world today, the desires of the flesh, "appetites for comfort and ease and human respect are fruitful sources of every kind of error and misjudgment". If our intellects operated in a vacuum they would register what they saw, with pure impartiality. Because of these yearnings, however, they present to us

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 78.

2. Ibid., p. 78.

3. Ibid., p. 78.

"everything distorted and accommodated to the worms of our desire".

"We have gone to much trouble" to convince ourselves that our intellects are infallible, yet we have become "marvels at self-delusion". Our intellect is constantly being blinded and perverted by passion. Our impartiality and objectivity of judgment is "frought with interest and propaganda".¹

Merton presents the ascesis that the logical development of the truth concerning intellectual life as illucidated by Aquinas and the theologians is its maturity in contemplation.

It is in contemplation that we will "receive the gift of an interior light that is so simple that it baffles description and so pure that it would be coarse to call it an experience. But it is true light, perfecting the intellect of man with a perfection far beyond science."²

In contemplation, explains Father Mary Louis, the contemplative, "God judges the infinite distances" between Himself and us, in what he calls "supernatural missions of His own Life".

The Father, dwelling in the depths of all things and in my own depths, communicates to me His Word and His Spirit, and in these missions I am drawn into His

1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 6.

2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 81.

own Life and know God in His own Love.¹

For people who are "immersed in sensual appetites" are not in a condition "to handle abstract ideas". While no one needs to be a saint in order to be a clever metaphysician still "a certain amount of purity of heart" is necessary for the intellect to become sufficiently detached and clear to work out problems" even in the purely natural order.² "Every thing you love for its own sake outside of God ... blinds your intellect and ruins your judgment".³

From these truths Thomas Merton is impelled, in his own life, to face the total "demands of grace" implied in these considerations of faith and intellect. He has answered with "the expropriation of spirit of the todo y nada of St. John of the Cross".⁴

For him everything in the cistercian life, asceticism penance, labour, silence, humiliation, obedience, all have one end only, the stripping away of the non-essentials that hinder contemplation.

In contemplation where there is the greatest perfection of faith, "the infinite God Himself becomes the light of

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 33.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 94.

3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 124.

4. Cf. Sister Mary Therese, "Todo y Nada", Renascence, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1950) p. 88.

the darkened soul". God then possesses the soul "entirely in His Truth". And at this moment, he explains, "faith turns into understanding".¹

Merton says that contemplation is "the reason for our creation by God". It is our "true and proper element". We will all be contemplatives in heaven. We have "deep capacities in us that will never" be fulfilled in any other way". He defines it simply as the means

... by which we honor and love God as He is in Himself apprehending Him in a deep and vital experience which is beyond the reach of any natural understanding.²

Since there is in all souls a hunger of the spirit that can only be satisfied by God's Truth, Merton holds that all men should be contemplative within their own sphere of life. Not even the distracting duties and work will be able to interfere with the deep and urgent sense of identification born of contemplation.³

Father Mary Louis, the Contemplative, cloistered monk, writer and poet, prays for himself and his contemporaries:

... Justify my soul, O God, but also from your fountains fill my will with fire. Shine in my mind, although perhaps this means "be darkness to my experience", but

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 82
 2. Ibid., p. 144
 3. Cf. Ibid., p. 144.

occupy my heart with your tremendous life". Let my eyes see nothing in the world but your glory, and let my hands touch nothing that is not for your service ... Let me use all things for one sole reason: to find my joy in giving you great glory.¹

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 35.

CHAPTER IV

SINS OF THE MODERN ARTIST

Thomas Merton is an artist, son of artists. His parents were idealistic people who strove to give their sons high standards and discriminating taste. He writes that they "were in the world but not of it, not because they were saints but because they were artists". The integrity of the artist, Merton affirms, "lifts a man above the level of the world without delivering him from it".¹

Thomas learned much from his father whose "vision of the world was sane" and "full of balance". It was a religious vision and clean, and for that reason "his paintings were without decoration or superfluous comment". As a religious man he respected the "power of God's creation to bear witness for itself". His comment in view of these thoughts is an indictment of the artistic sins of his contemporaries. He writes simply: "My father was a very good artist".²

His father's style was slightly abstract, original and simple, and definite in what it had to say and without superficiality.

When Owen Merton went to France, he took his son

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 3.

2. Ibid., p. 20.

over the French countryside quietly showing him its beauties and imparting to him his own stable and artistic evaluations. Then Thomas learned from the French towns and his father's instruction that there is no other purpose for art than that of raising men's souls to God and proclaiming His Glory. He saw this in the "whole landscape, unified by the church and its heavenward spire". They said to him:

We have fashioned, in all our perfection, each according to his own nature, and all our natures ordered and harmonized together, that man's reason and his love might fit in this one last element, this God-given key to the meaning of the whole.¹

Merton writes of the home his father built for them at St. Antonin. Owen Merton drew the plans, simple and strong and artistic. It consisted of one big room, a studio and dining room and living room; upstairs, bedrooms. He had bought the ruins of an old abandoned medieval chapel and used the stones and beautiful thirteenth century window and door arches and fireplace in his new home. He had found, too, a winding stone stair. They dug a well and near it planted two poplar trees and "to the east of the house", the father "laid out a large garden". Truly the home of an artist.²

Merton, with an advanced and modernistic taste,

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 39, 43, 59.

balanced with a reverence for the beauties of ancient art, and a horror for anything roccoco or baroque, learned one more lesson in central France. At Murat he saw "a colossal statue of the Immaculate Conception", It seemed too big and seemed to "bespeak too much religious enthusiasm". Merton adds with an implied criticism to ultra-modernists; that now he realizes that there was no religious excess in it at all. It was art because it expressed what they wished to say, and, he says:

These people wanted to say in a very obvious way that they loved Our Lady, who should indeed be loved and revered, as a Queen of great power and a Lady of immense goodness and mercy, mighty in her intercession for us before the throne of God, tremendous in the glory of her sanctity and her fullness of grace as Mother of God. For she loves the children of God, who are born into the world with the image of God in their souls and her powerful love is forgotten, and it is not understood, in the blindness and foolishness of the world.¹

While the Mertons lived in France they visited Switzerland as usual on an art tour. The museums, Thomas tells us, were filled with "huge canvasses by some modern Swiss national artists". Most of them represented "monstrous great executioners trying to chop the heads off Swiss patriots". "Instead of the comfort of a few decent pictures" they would find an "immense red and yellow cartoon by this

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 55.

Swiss jingo".¹

Merton traces the formation of Western Europe from the dregs of the world, Goth, Frank, Norman and Lombard, "mingled with the rot of old Rome", into a "patchwork of hybrid races", all noted for "ferocity, hatred, stupidity, craftiness, lust, brutality". Yet from all this came

Gregorian Chant, monasteries and cathedrals, Poems of Prudentius, the works of Bede, the Moralia of Gregory the Great, St. Augustine's City of God and his Trinity the writings of St. Anselm, St. Bernard's sermon on the Canticles, the poetry of Caedmon and Cynewulf and Langland and Dante, St. Thomas' Summa and the Oxoniense of Duns Scotus.²

His ideal of France shows here again in his admiration for her artistic ability, for he says, "a couple of French stonemasons", or carpenters can "put up a dovecote or a barn" "that has more architectural perfection than the piles of eclectic stupidity" built on the campuses of American Universities and costing "hundreds of thousands of dollars."³

Merton explains this special perfection of which France is so full, as due to its early Christianity which so completely held the hearts of its people. Even the corruption of decadent French society today, cannot completely

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 46.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

3. Ibid., p. 30.

poison those "springs of natural waters" once "purified and cleaned by grace".¹

Writing of Rome, Merton remarks that to most Anglo-Saxons "the real Rome is the Rome of the ugly ruins, the Rome of ... the grey cariated temples", between the hills and slums of the city. After a few days of visiting these and trying to reconstruct them in his mind, he suddenly came to the conclusion that it was not worth his while. He realized that imperial Rome must have been "one of the most revolting and ugly and depressing cities of the world". The ruins, he says, with the trees growing in their midst, "were far more pleasant than the reality must have been".²

Finally he found himself looking into churches "rather than ruined temples". The discovery of the beautiful frescoes there, depicting the mysteries of religion, came with a tremendous impact. He had found another and very different Rome.

After all the vapid, boring, semi-pornographic statuary of the Empire, what a thing it was to come upon the genius of an art full of spiritual vitality, and earnestness and power — an art that was tremendously serious and alive and eloquent and urgent in all it had to say. And it was without pretentiousness, without fakery and had nothing theatrical about it.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 30.

2. Ibid., p. 107.

The solemnity of this art was entranced by its simplicity. He found much of it hidden obscurely away, sometimes serving other ends "architectural, liturgical and spiritual".

Merton was fascinated by the Byzantine mosaics and became a sort of pilgrim visiting the great shrines of Rome. He explains that was the first reason for them.¹

For these mosaics and frescoes and all the ancient altars and thrones and sanctuaries were designed and built for the instruction of people who were not capable of immediately understanding anything higher.²

The mosaics, says Merton, "told me more than I had ever known of the doctrine of a God of infinite power, wisdom and love. These things were implicit in every line of the art which the young artist contemplated with love and admiration. The mind of the artist reached his mind, and "spoke to it his conception and his thought". Thus he could not fail to catch "something of the ancient craftsman's love of Christ". And this is the function of all true art.³

2 Movies

One of the mediocrities which has replaced the art of the theater is the movies. Thomas Merton shows how they have become the absorbing entertainment of the middle class.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 109.

2. Ibid., p. 110.

3. Ibid., p. 110.

He himself, as a student, and his brother and their friends were much addicted to them. He asks rhetorically, "why did we ever go to all those movies?" Then answers himself: "That is another mystery".¹

Like most young Americans, he saw most of the movies that were produced and he sums up their value: "most of them were awful". They fascinated the younger generation and yet turned into "a sort of hell" for them. They seemed to be hypnotized by "those yellow flickering lights and big posters."²

Yet these movies caused acute suffering to the finely attuned poetic mind of the young Merton. He tells us that the "suffering" of having to sit and look at so much colossal stupidity "made them almost "physically all sick". Finally they could hardly "sit through a show".³

Yet Merton confesses to a "secret loyalty to the memory of his "great heroes" — Chaplin, W. C. Fields, Harpo Marx — The pictures made by these actors were rare, however."⁴

The sophisticated young college men, fascinated by the movies, yet despising their mediocrity, amused themselves

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 149.
 2. Ibid., p. 149.
 3. Ibid., p. 149.
 4. Ibid., p. 149.

by "perversely admiring the villains and detesting the heroes". The villains were the better actors usually. They were "delighted with everything they did", laughed uproariously at the scenes that were supposed to be "most affecting, tender and appealing to the finer elements in the human soul". Merton touches with light satire "the tears of Jackie Cooper", "the brave smile" of Alice Faye, in jail.¹

Some movies were photographed near the Merton home in Douglastown. Merton describes one touching scene he saw photographed of Gloria Swanson in a gypsy marriage. Without unnecessary comment Merton satirizes its lack of any Christian ideal. Even as a child, which he was when he saw these scenes taken, he much preferred the comics of W. C. Fields.

These movies have succeeded in distorting the idea and meaning of virtue to such an extent that it has caused virtue to be ridiculed and despised. Merton traces this condition to the influence of the Calvinists and Puritans during the past three hundred years. Now, says Merton:

In our own days the word leaves on the lips of cynical high-school children a kind of flippant smear, and it is exploited in theaters for the possibilities it offers for lewd and cheesy sarcasm.²

Yet people are indifferent to the deliberate distortion of true concepts as they are to the lowered standards

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 149.

2. Ibid., p. 204.

offered them as vicarious experience in Movies. Merton writes of the hero worship of the "stars" even by respectable conservative people. He writes of his grandparents' devotion to the current "stars" of the time, Doug and Mary. They revered them as some kind of saints, endowing them with all the natural virtues — "a somewhat corrupt form of hyperdulia".¹

In them were all the perfections of beauty, wit, majesty, grace and decorum, bravery and love, gaiety and tenderness, all virtues and every admirable moral sentiment, truth, justice, honour, piety ... above all marital fidelity.

Then Merton drily muses that it was a sad day for their worshippers when Doug and Mary, the exemplars of these perfections, were divorced.

The Movies, says Merton, have become a sort of religion to many Americans. His grandfather made money by "selling to his employers, Grosset and Dunlap, Publishers, the idea of making books of current movies, "illustrating them with stills from the films", and selling them "in connection with the publicity given to the picture itself".² So, from being an economic interest, the movies came to be a kind of family religion.

Merton caustically relates that his grandfather's

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

favorite place of worship was the Capitol Theatre in New York. When the family went to Hollywood, their trip was "something of the nature of a pilgrimage".¹

One of the first things the young convert felt impelled to do when he began to live the fuller life of a Christian was to free himself from "the habits and luxuries that people in the world think they need for comfort and amusement". Drink, smoking and movies were the first to be repudiated, for he felt it necessary to rinse his eyes "of the grey slops of the movies". When he had freed himself of the thralldom to one of the greatest of the peace-time inventions of the "age of invention" his "taste and vision" were at last "clean".²

3 Liturgical Music

Owen Merton was a musician as well as an artist. He played the organ for a while in the Zion Church at Douglaston.³ Years later Thomas, then a student at Columbia, was invited to hear a lecture given there, entitled Music at Zion Church. The minister urged him to go because his father's music would be mentioned in it.⁴

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 305.

3. Ibid., p. 13.

4. Ibid., p. 177.

When Mrs. Merton was ill and the family needed money the father obtained a position playing the piano at the local movie theater. With characteristic economy of emotion and expression, Thomas Merton briefly comments: "we surely needed money".¹

The father's interest, which was imparted to his son was in modern music. Merton tells us that when they were reluctant tourists in Switzerland, on the occasion of his grandparents' visit, while the Mertons lived at St. Antonin, the most interesting thing of all their journey was a concert given by an American jazz band.

As a young student Thomas' taste turned to "hot" records. He seemed to carry a small portable phonograph with him all over the world. Like every college boy, he entertained friends in his room, with his favourite singers and orchestras. He amused his guardian, Doctor Tom and his wife Iris, with his beloved Duke Ellington songs.

He had a tendency towards the "Blues" that were popular during the "twenties" and early thirties". During a vacation in France he distressed one of the innkeeper's relatives, depressing her with thoughts of death, when he played the St. Louis Blues on the piano. He tells us that he thus earned a vicarious experience in the life they

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 13.

bewailed with all its woes and suffering.

When Merton came into intimate contact with the church, his deep literary insight, his aesthetic intuition, his artistic temperament and his love of music combined to enamour him completely, with the compelling music, poetry and drama of the Liturgy. From the beginning of his conversion to his present state as contemplative monk, his chief characteristic has been his liturgical bent. He writes of the liturgical ceremonies and prayers of the church with clarity and insight and with lyricism as the joy it produces in him overflows into the poetry of his contemplata tradere.

While teaching at St. Bonaventure's College, at Olean, New York, he bought a set of Breviaries. Often, he read the Little Hours, on the train from New York to Olean, in the early morning. He considers this almost accidental purchase, to have been in reality a great grace,¹ and writes of the Canonical office as "the most powerful and effective prayer" he could have chosen. He describes it as the "prayer of the whole church". "It concentrates in itself all the power of the church's impetration, centered around the infinitely mighty sacrifice of the mass". The liturgy is the setting for the jewel of the Mass.²

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 301.

2. Ibid., p. 301.

The sheer lyricism of the psalms gives Merton an overflowing aesthetic joy. He describes the beautiful country-side through which he rode as he read the Office, with "the sun blazing on the trees and moist rock". He could see it "flashing on the surface of the shallow river" and playing in the forest foliage". All this was "very much like what the book was singing" and he quotes the exultant words of the psalm:

Thou sendest forth springs in the vales; between
the midst of the hills the waters shall pass over them,
the birds of the air shall dwell, from the midst of the
rock. They shall give forth their voices. Thou water-
est the hills from thy upper rooms; the earth shall be
filled with the fruit of Thy works.¹

His own poem "A Psalm" describes the joy he experiences in the Liturgical poetry.

When psalms surprise me with their music
And antiphons turn to rum
The Spirit sings, the bottom drops out of my soul.
New eyes awaken.²

When he himself, now, sings these psalms in choir
with his fellow religious, the experience is deepened by an
active functioning:

I send Love's name into the world with wings
And songs grow up around me like a jungle.
Choirs of all creatures sing the tunes
Your Spirit played in Eden.

L. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 302.

2. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 30.

Finally, through the great unifying power of the liturgy, God himself participates in the song of Man.

Then one more voice
Snuffs all their flares in one gust
And I go forth with no more wine and no more stars

And God sings by Himself in acres of night
And walls fall down, that guarded Paradise.

This is very much like the "perfection of the whole Christ, the final glory" given to God by the "resplendent Bride"¹ For the liturgy does very fully what Merton likes to discuss, the identification of the individual with his race, whether christian or pagan.

Father Louis writes with impassioned beauty, of the power of the Gregorian chant. He makes "the cold stones of the Abbey church ring" with the flame of "clean profound desire". Yet the warmth of the plainsong is an austere warmth. Its emotion is "deep beyond the ordinary". It makes no "cheap demands upon your sensibilities". It saves you from your own imagination, from "the inherent vulgarity of your own corrupted nature". It "draws you within", and you are lulled in peace and recollection where "you find God and rest in Him" as "He heals you with His secret wisdom".²

"What springs of life and strength and grace" Merton

1. Thomas Merton, "The White Pebble", in Where I Found Christ, John A. O'Brien (ed) Doubleday, 1950, p. 234.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 379.

found in the singing of the monks. "The whole earth came to life and bounded with new fruitfulness and significance in the joy of their simple beautiful chanting". And this chanting was the expression of souls united in charity and joy:

Day after day the round of the canonical hours brought them together and the love that was in them became songs as austere as granite and as sweet as wine.¹

Father Louis points up the fusion of the tone of the liturgy with the spirit of the ecclesiastical seasons. In Lent it is reduced to "the ultimate in simplicity". It becomes, however, "all the more splendid because the splendour was intellectual and effective, and not mere flash and glitter of vestments and decoration". The strong, mighty, tremendously sorrowful tone is all sung on "three monotonously recurring notes", singing thus "a lament that was as rough and clean as stone".

The Easter hymns and antiphons are full of variety, infinitely rich, subtle and spiritual and deep.²

Father Louis writes of advent hymn Conditor Alme Siderum. He revels in the "measure and balance and strength in its simplicity, where the measured tone took the old

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 317.

2. Ibid., p. 421.

words of St. Ambrose and "infused into them more strength and suppleness and conviction and meaning", so that they "flowered before God in beauty and in fire". Then the tones vanished in the "darkness of the vaulted ceiling", leaving the souls of the monks "full pf peace and grace".¹

Father Louis has described the beautiful Christmas Liturgy as it appeared to him in his first Christmas at Gethsemani. The monks usually rise in the night, at two o'clock, for Matins. On this feast the night office starts at nine.

It begins at once with a solemn and stately invitatory that nevertheless rocks the church with cadences of superlative joy ... As the Midnight Mass begins, the whole place glows with happiness and after that it is indescribable, building up to the climax of unworldly interior peace at Communion.²

For Father Louis, the Liturgy opened up new intellectual and artistic possibilities. It awakened his conscience and educated it to new realities.³ The musician in him too was inspired by the power obtained in the severe economy of the Gregorian Chant. The whole rich treasure never leaves the narrow range of the eight Gregorian modes. In Lent this is reduced to three. Yet within these severe

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 350.

2. Thomas Merton, "First Christmas at Gethsemani", Catholic World, vol. 170, No. 1017 (Dec. '49) p. 170.

3. Ibid., p. 168.

limits, stripped of every conceit and ornament, what we would expect to be monotonous is driven into the depths of its own true emotions and becomes subtle, spiritual and deep.

The structure of the music of the Advent hymn Conditor Alme Siderum, says Father Louis, "is mighty with a perfection that despises the effects of the most grandeloquent secular music". Within the range of an octave, it manages to say "more than Bach".¹

Liturgical chant has absolutely "none of the tricks and resources of modern music". It is "rooted far beyond the shallow level of virtuosity and technique", in the very "abysses of the human soul". As a result it attains "a warmth and meaning and gladness that no other music possesses". "By submitting to the rigour of these liturgical rules that "would seem to destroy individuality", the plain chant has "acquired a character that is unique, unparalleled."²

4

Poetry

Thomas Merton has been hailed by the avant-garde as the modern poet who has justified their experimentation. He has been received with acclaim as the poet of prayer and contemplation because of the exceptional power he has of objectifying and universalizing his "personal version" of the spiritual life".³

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 350.

2. Ibid., p. 421.

3. Sister Mary Therese, Catholic World, Vol. 170. No. 1017, (Dec. '49) p. 173.

In view of these paradoxical attributes, it is not surprising that nowhere is the immediacy of his criticism so impelling as in the field of poetry.

In this field, however, Merton's criticism is not actively destructive. It is, nevertheless, definitely twofold: passive and constructive.

What may well be considered a quietly deliberate, yet aloof and passive criticism, lies, by inference, in his complete avoidance of the extravagance and fallacies of the school whose techniques he followed. Entirely an individualist, he maintained his liberty and with it a balance and proportion, as his father did in art.

The constructive criticism is most purposeful. The essay, "Poetry and the Contemplative Life", sums up, digests and restates the thesis that occurs incidently along the pathway of Merton's writings.

The avowed enemy of mediocrity, Merton the poet, repudiated the facile ways and obvious stamp. He was modern by taste and affinity. Since poetry is primarily the expression of truth in terms of beauty and music, Merton's soul was hounded by the need to seek that truth till he finally came to rest and fruition in the recognition of Truth itself. He tells us that he never could write Poetry till he came to know and love God. He proves that "no Christian poetry worthy of the name has been written by anyone who is not in

some degree a contemplative".¹

With the moderns, Merton criticizes the "cracked old tune that the Georgians inherited from Tennyson and Swinburne."² The victorian spirit of compromise is completely alien to his nature. Yet, not even in his days as pagan sophisticate is there any resemblance to Swinburne's divinization of man. His rugged individualism, with its complete lack of subserviance to the dictates of a reading public, are slightly reminiscent of Browning. His occasional obscurity, his unconventional handling of metre, his deliberate dissonances and startling metaphors, even outdo Browning's.

Yet as a musician and artist he can turn as suddenly to lyric melody and artistry in poems like "The Psalm" and the organ-toned cadences the "Hymn for the Feast of Duns Scotus", as could Browning with his "Toccata of Goluppi's". Still the arresting, breathtaking ecstasy of Father Louis's contemplative poems soar like eagles beyond the sparrows flight of Browning's celestial utilitarianism.³

Nevertheless Merton himself belonged to the Georgian school. He repudiated the dissecting biological interest of the naturalists and he is no descendent of the dwellers in

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 99.

2. Ibid., p. 99.

3. Cf. Percy Houston, Main Currents of English Literature, New York, Crofts, 1934, p. 382.

the Ivory Tower. But he belongs to the contemporary poetical Renaissance in his avoidance of cliché and search for economy of expression.¹

In Art he and his father were attracted by post-impressionism and cubism. Merton mentions his interest in Picasso,² though his father's own work, judged from his son's evaluation of it, qualified very well for the Neo-Thomist school.³ Perhaps it would not be stretching the point to trace the influence of this tendency in Merton's poetic ideals. A fusion of a natural simplicity plus a geometrical accuracy of detail together with abstract expression has now grown to an ability to express with clarity and precision, very abstract conceptions of religious experience.⁴ Such a use of the tools of the moderns must be disconcerting to some of their school, for, as Will Lissner remarks, "while he speaks their language with artistry, he develops ideas which they must find profoundly disturbing".⁵

1. Cf. Percy Houston, Main Currents of English Literature. New York, Crofts, 1934, p. 382.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 80.

3. Cf. J.C. Websley, Cubism, in Collier's Encyclopedia, vol. 6, p. 155, New York, Colliers & Sons, 1950.

4. Ibid.

5. Will Lissner, "Toast of the Avant-Garde", Catholic World, vol. 165, (Feb.'48) p. 425.

Although many of Merton's poems are startling in their sharp imagery, they never descend to the cynicism and hopelessness of "the modern voices". In poems like "Aubade"! Lake Erie"; we find the "expression of a poet facing unshrinkingly the ugliness of a materialistic culture because he knows the wisdom of a better way".

Sister Jocelyn discusses the parallel and divergence of Merton and the moderns.

The difference between Merton and the moderns whom he resembles in technique is brilliantly illustrated by a comparison of the Aubade with Stephen Spender's "An Elementary School Classroom in a Sun", which expresses the same revulsion from the city's hideousness without the positive optimism of the Aubade.¹

The ability to lead the mind from image to symbol and further into the "larger landscape of pure etherial loveliness, where we breathe the lucent atmosphere of eternal truth, sets Merton irrevocably apart from the pagan exemplars of his own school of poetry.²

There are "Huysman-like patterns" in Merton's poetry, "sensuous word play" and "strongly individualized lines" that resemble the decadents, especially in his earlier poems. As the content reaches toward sublimity, however, the language

1. Sister M. Joselyn, "Thomas Merton, Poet of Contemplation", America, Vol. 82 (July 22, 1950) p. 420.

2. Sister Julie, "New Directions Presents a Catholic Poet", America, Vol. 73 (July 21, 1945) p. 316.

tends to simplify. The tortuous striving to express the inexpressible would have made of him a metaphysical poet. Merton holds that any poet with intelligence can write metaphysical poetry. He, himself, has been saved by becoming a mystical poet, the poet of prayer and the contemplative life. He has achieved an extraordinary facility for elucidating the most difficult philosophical and theological concepts.¹

The poet whom Merton loved best, with an appreciation absorbed from his father, was William Blake. Merton says that this love "had something in it of God's grace" and it "entered deeply into the development of (his) life."²

Merton holds that Blake is greater than the other romantics because his was "the deeper and more solid inspiration". Blake, he says, "wrote better poetry when he was twelve than Shelley wrote in his whole life". That was because his vision of supernatural things was clearer and purer.

Merton believed that Blake remained "uncontaminated" by his own "crazy symbols" because he was "a sincere and holy man" with a faith "so real" and "love for God so mighty!" These words could be applied equally well to Thomas Merton

1. Cf. Paul Morton, "Review of Thirty Poems", Spirit, Vol. 12, Mar. '45, p. 25.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 87.

himself.¹

Blake (and Merton) condemned hypocrisy and petty sensuality and skepticism and materialism. These things are set up as barriers, by trivial minds, between God and the souls of men.²

Blake, a romantic poet, is, says Merton, vastly different from his contemporaries. Blake's metaphors astound, but they have depth and power. Blake detested Rousseau and Voltaire, and what they stood for. He abominated materialistic deism, and the polite natural religions of the eighteenth century; the agnosticism of the nineteenth; and, in fact, most of the common attitudes of our day. Blake himself was a revolutionary, yet he detested the greatest and most typical revolutions of his time.³

Merton is attracted by the depth and power of Blake's metaphors. He recognized the confusion of the "heterodox and heretical mystical systems", yet he found his rebellion to be "fundamentally the rebellion of the saints", the rebellion that grew out of an intense and irresistible desire for God. Again the affinity between Merton and his

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 87. Cf. also Thomas Merton, Nature and Art in William Blake, Thesis for Master of Arts, New York, Columbia University, 1939.

2. Ibid., p. 87

3. Ibid., p. 87.

favourite poet is evident.

In a brief and pointed aside, in a chapter on war and fear, Merton gives a first directive to the Catholic poet.

A Catholic poet should be an apostle by being first of all a poet, not try to be a poet by being first of all an apostle. For if he presents himself as a poet he is going to be judged as a poet, and if he is not a good one his apostolate will be ruined.¹

Then he attributes the lack of success of many poets to the fact that they are not saints; they "have never succeeded in being themselves". "They never get around to being the particular poet ... they are intended to be by God" or the one they are called to be by the circumstances of their individual lives.

Merton castigated those who spend their time trying to imitate others, especially popular writers. He points this up as an "intense egoism", the hurry to "magnify themselves by imitating what is popular by people who are "too lazy to think of anything better".²

The hurry of modern life ruins saints and artists alike, says Merton. Everybody, including poets, wants quick success so that in the haste to get it "they cannot take time to be true to themselves". When the sadness is upon

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 71.

2. Ibid., p. 65.

them they argue that their very haste is a species of integrity.¹

Father Louis shows how in a poet, humility and integrity must coincide. "It takes heroic humility to be yourself, and to be nobody but the man, or the artist, that God intended you to be". He warns that the poet may be made to feel that his nonesty is only pride; he shows the danger of building up "a defense for the false personality" that is not your true self but "the creature of your own appetite for esteem".²

"Great humility can be learned from the anguish of keeping your balance" of refraining from "asserting your false self against the false selves of other people".³ In this spirit of humility the Catholic poet must write for God. If he keeps this end persistently in mind he will reach many men and bring them joy. On the other hand, if the poet writes for himself he "may make some money" and "give someone a little joy" and "make a noise in the world for a little while". Then when he reads what he has written he "will be so disgusted" that he "will wish (he) were dead".

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 66. Cf. Sister Mary Therese, "Review", Renascence, vol. 1 #2, (Sept. 1949) p. 89.

2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 67.

3. Ibid., p. 68.

For Father Louis, the perfect poet is the saint. His asceticism "establishes and maintains the balance of a genuine and authentic Christian humanism". The intrinsic holiness of things requires a selflessness in the poet. Renunciation therefore, an interior stripping, is his first preparation. His final aim is to connect God and creatures.¹ This Christian humanism holds that "the function of art is to prepare the human race for contemplation, the spiritual joy of which surpasses every other joy and seems to be the end of all human activities".² For poetry discovers "the relations between the eternal first principles and secondary truths of life."³

Here more than anywhere else is it evident that Thomas Merton's achievement is "one piece with his vocation". Like Eliot and Hopkins, through the medium of his poetry he has struggled to give "meaning and form to the eternal effort of the human spirit to liberate itself from the darkness of the senses, the intellect and sin".⁴ He found

1. Cf. Sr. Mary Therese, "Review", Renascence, Vol. 1 #3 (Spring 1949) p. 68.

2. Francis X Connolly, "Review", Spirit, vol. 13, No. 5 (Nov. 1946) p. 151.

3. Gouverneur Paulding, "Reason in Poetry", Spirit, Vol. 9 (May 1942) p. 58.

4. F. X. Connolly, "Review", Spirit, Vol. 13, p. 151. No. 5, (Nov. 1946).

verse",¹ yet he never loses sight of the summum bonum, and cries out in the poem "The Captives", "may my bones burn and ravens eat my flesh, if I forget thee, contemplation".²

In the field of constructive criticism, Thomas Merton has worked out with accuracy and deep insight a comprehensive theory of the role of poet as contemplative and the relationship between the intuitive perception of aesthetic experience and divine contemplation.

Merton claims that no one can be a great poet without also being in some degree a contemplative. He describes three degrees of contemplation. The first is "a natural contemplation of God — that of the artist, the philosopher, and of the most advanced pagan religions."³ The second is what is usually connoted by the term "active contemplation", where the "initiative belongs to our own powers, prompted and sustained by grace". This prepares the soul for the third, "the life of infused or passive or mystical contemplation". This last is "the fullness of the Christian life".

Contemplation brings the poet into closest contact with the one subject matter that is truly worthy of the Christian poet: God as He is seen by faith, in revelation, or in the intimate experience of the soul

-
1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 24.
 2. Ibid.,
 3. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p.95.

illuminated by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.¹

Christ, therefore, is the inspiration of the poet, as "Christ is the center of the contemplative life". The one thing necessary to vivify and enrich the life-stream of Catholic poetry "will be for our ... poets to start leading lives of active contemplation", which is the "full Christian life". They must do so within the range of their own state of life and actual vocation. This means simply that the poet must integrate solidly his work, religion and family life and recreations in one vital harmonious unity with Christ at its center.²

Father Louis shows the relationship between the intuitive experiences of the artist and of the mystic. The genuine esthetic experience transcends the sensible order. "It is a supra-rational intuition of the latent perfection of things". "Its immediacy outruns the speed of reasoning and leaves all analysis far behind". "It is an analogue of the mystical experience which it resembles and imitates from afar". It apprehends things by reaching out "to grasp the inner reality", a sort of "effective identification of itself with it", which Father Louis calls "connaturality". The union by which it rests in the perfection of things

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 97.

2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 101.
Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Vol. 1,2, p. 383.

resembles the soul in its immediate affective contact with God in the obscurity of mystical prayer". "Yet there is an abyss between them".

In contemplation of the mystical order which is an act of the "superior soul", the "internal image must be reformed by grace",¹

we must enter into ourselves by recollection withdrawing our faculties from external things into the inner sanctuary which is the substance of the soul itself ... (This) is an abode of silence and peace ... where the diversified activities of the intellect and will are collected, so to speak, into one intense and smooth and spiritualized activity which far exceeds in its fruitfulness the plodding efforts of reason working on external reality with its analysis and syllogisms.²

Here in the center of the soul contemplation begins when, after purification, "the obscure light of infused contemplation" given by God permits an "experimental contact with Himself without medium of sense species".

In the natural order the esthetic experience "introduces us into this interior sanctuary" and to its "irrepressible simplicity and economy and energy and fruitfulness" without, of course, attaining to God in us. In this way the natural contemplation of the artist or metaphysician has prepared him for infused contemplation. "If God should grant that grace, the person so favoured will be much better

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 103. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Vol. 1. 2, 77, Art 1

2. Ibid., Part 2, Q. 180, Art. 5, p. 1935.

prepared to recognize it and to co-operate with God's action. The artist or poet, therefore, should be less prone to the faults that prevent the light of infused contemplation. Sensible satisfactions, imaginable thrills, emotionalism, sentimentality are less prone to cause the degeneration of their souls. Thus the poet enters into his inner sanctuary in order to "reflect upon his inspiration and clothe it with a special and splendid form". There "he returns to display it to those outside".

In view of these truths the liturgy is a "school of literary taste and a mine of marvellous subjects". Christ is the "fount of all art" and grace and wisdom.

The liturgy "contains the greatest literature" from Scripture and "from the genius of the Patristic and the Middle Ages". It exploits all the possibilities of both the natural and supernatural life. Its dignity and vitality derive from its dramatic, simplicity and its "resources of pictorial and plastic art".¹

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 98.

CHAPTER V

SINS OF THE MODERN MAN

Although my life is written on Christ's Body like a map,
The nails have printed in those hands
More than the abstract names of sins
More than the countries and the towns
The names of streets, the number of the houses
The record of the days and nights
When I have murdered Him in every square and street.¹

The God who is feared and shunned in the intellectual life of the world is "torn and trampled" in His living Flesh by the sins of the flesh of a materialistic, pleasure-mad age.

The very schools of secular education reek with unchecked concupiscence. Thomas Merton, writing of the French Lycee Ingres speaks of the vicious, cat-like faces of the precocious boys whose tongues dripped with obscenity and whose lives were corrupt with uninhibited filthiness.²

The stench of this corruption pervaded Cambridge where the unfettered liberty of the student brought him only disgust and a deep despair.

At Columbia, again, the same sorry spectacle moved even the student to accuse his fellows that "the sober folds of your commoner's gown will drag in the mire while you

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 72.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 50.

chase after a slattern". The indictment of their own university, supposedly an intellectual centre of America, is devastating.

The filth of the dormitories, the rank stench of the alehouse, and the foulness of the gambling hell, this will all teach you the manners of bowzers and instruct you to court sluts.¹

This is the education that prepares the generation whose minds are prisoners of their own pleasure and captive of their own desire, who cannot accept the seeds of a higher pleasure or any supernatural desire.²

For Thomas Merton, however, it was not satisfying. He soon realized that there could never be any liberty of spirit for a man shackled by sin. Soon he learned that there was nothing interesting about sin. Since evil is "not a positive entity" but the absence of a good that ought to be there, it is essentially boring, lacking any appeal to our wills and our minds.³

And this was simply a telescoping of the view of the state of the world at large. The minds of men were prisoners of their own pleasure so that they could not "accept the seeds of a higher pleasure. Their wills are so captive of

-
1. Thomas Merton, Columbia Jester, vol. 40 (Sept'40)
 2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 17.
 3. Ibid., p. 75.

their own desire that they cannot support a supernatural desire.¹ Merton asks for them, "how can I receive the seeds of freedom if I am in love with slavery".²

People waste their whole lives in "appaling labour and difficulty and sacrifice", in a mad effort to get the things that "make real life impossible". For it is the easiest thing in the world, says Merton, to possess "life in God" and His "eternity of joy". Why, therefore, do men go to "such great labour" to possess these satisfactions "that cannot last an hour", and which bring only misery.³ When the pleasure is finished "you have nothing of the happiness that would have enriched you forever". If men would "take or forsake" pleasure "in the way God wills it", Merton holds, they would retain the pleasure, in the happiness of union with God. "It would be with them always and follow them everywhere in God's will". It is impossible for a man who is sane to regret any act he has performed "in union with God's will".⁴

To the fleshly man, Merton the ascetic says:

You fool! You have really done what you did not want to do! God has left you with the pleasures because the pleasure also was His will; but you have

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 17.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

3. Ibid., p. 97.

4. Ibid., p. 123.

neglected the happiness or perhaps the greater happiness He intended for you, without the pleasure and beyond and above it ... You have eaten the rind and thrown away the orange.¹

Merton tells us that he had seen enough of sin to warrant its punishment in a frightful war. For "there has never yet been a bomb invented that is half powerful as one mortal sin". Sin is so destructive because it is only negation, only annihilation; nothingness; a blank; a moral vacuum.

It is only the infinite mercy and love of God, that has prevented us from tearing ourselves to pieces and destroying His entire creation, long ago ... Consider how in spite of centuries of sin and greed and lust and cruelty and hatred and avarice and oppression and injustice, spawned and bred by the free wills of men, the human race can still recover, each time, and can still produce men and women, who overcome evil with good, hatred with love, greed with charity, lust and cruelty with sanctity. How could all this be possible without the merciful love of God, pouring out His grace upon us? Can there be any doubt where wars come from and where peace comes from, when the children of this world, excluding God from their peace conferences, only manage to bring about greater and greater wars the more they talk about peace.

Father Louis, the moral theologian, explains that modern man is not actually seeking sin. He seeks the good that surrounds sin. In sins of the flesh, he seeks the pleasures of the flesh, which are not evil in themselves, but good, willed by God. It is "the direction of the will to them under circumstances that are against the will of God",

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 122.

that becomes evil,

... because the direction of the will is evil it cannot reach the mark which the will intends. Therefore it defeats itself and therefore there is ultimately no happiness in any act of sin.¹

It is our sin that has made the world a shambles. Merton warns that it is to us the prophets spoke when they cried: "Hearing, hear, and understand; and see the vision and know it not". Yet we have only to "open our eyes and look about us to see what our sins are doing to the world".²

Still through all the "bloodthirsty and lustful ages there are still saints and the "quietness and hiddenness and placidity of the truly good people in the world all proclaim the glory of God". And of these every "graceful movement, every ordered act of the human will" are prophets sent from God to warn us. Still so many refuse to hear "the million different voices" and they harden their hearts, against God's grace, more and more with each refusal. "Yet he continues to speak to us" and still men say "He is without mercy"³

Yet, with all the warning, "no one who loves the fleeting life", says Merton, "will feel the light of morning stab his flesh".⁴

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 122.
 2. Ibid., p. 122.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 129.
 4. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea,

"For Flesh cannot wrestle with the waters that are in the earth, nor spirit rest in icy clay!¹ And "how can I receive the seeds of my freedom if I am in love with slavery" and if I am filled with another "opposite desire" "how can I cherish the desire of God.

Now "we who have lived too long among your wicked children"² look around and see in our civilization "the anguish of hell". "We find something of the joy of blessedness and something of the pain of loss, which is damnation".³ "The fulfilment belongs to the reality of the created being" which comes from God and reflects God. "The anguish belongs to the disorder of our desire", because we seek "a greater fulfilment than it is capable of giving". In this way and to this extent we are worshipping ourselves, but because the reality of our being is not "one that can be worshipped," we worship nothing, when we worship self and "the worship of nothing is hell".⁴

Merton the poet, describes the confusion wrought by this self worship in sins of the flesh:

Wit walks out, in envy's mask;
Love will hide and be a lecher

-
1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 127.
 2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 86.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 23.
 4. Ibid., p. 23.

Adultery, by taking thought
Adds a cubit to his stature.

Until we scan the wastes of death
And wind blows through our cage of bones;
Sight leaves the sockets of the skull,
And love runs mad among the stones.¹

Boredom, tedium, ennui, satiety, are characteristics of the modern citizen. Thomas Merton traces the roots of these in the sins that envelope their lives. Since sin is an absence of perfection, it is not a positive entity. There is nothing interesting, therefore, about sin as sin. It is essentially boring because it is the lack of something that could appeal to our wills and our minds.²

For the sinner the world is "full of betrayal, full of illusion, full of deception". For this reason they hate everything. They are essentially boring "because they are the most bored". "They are the ones who find life most tedious". "They try to overcome the tedium of life by noise, excitement" and "agitation and violence". Any life devoted to "the love of values that do not exist" must bear these "inevitable fruits". Then "they become something more than boring". "They are the scourges of the world and of society"³

That is why society presents such a sorry aspect.

-
1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 149.
 2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 75.
 3. Ibid., p. 76.

Thomas Merton shows us a terrible picture of Harlem, as a huge cauldron where "natural gifts and vices boil in a distillation of despair". In that "dark furnace" of marijuana, gin, insanity, hysteria and syphilis, "thousands upon thousands of souls are destroyed by vice and misery and degradation".¹

The terrifying paradox of the negro, imitating the white man's culture and vice, says Merton, is that Harlem is a "divine indictment" of "New York City and the people who live downtown."²

The brothels of Harlem, and all its prostitution and its dope rings, and all the rest are the mirror of the polite divorces and manifold cultured adulteries of Park Avenue. They are God's commentary on the whole of our society.

Harlem is, in a sense, what God thinks of Hollywood ... Yet there is not a negro ... who does not realize ... that the culture of the white man is not worth the dirt in Harlem's gutters ... The whole thing is rotten ... a fake ... spurious, empty, a shadow of nothingness.³

Viewing the unholy picture, Merton, the poet, asks:

Shall the Spirit be poured out upon this land?

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 346.
 2. Ibid., p.
 3. Ibid.

Shall ever life swell up again in the drained veins,
As wild as wine?¹

In an Apocalyptic vein he writes of the last day in such a society of the millenium, the wilting away of the state. Men are still at the "Fauntelroy Bar" with brimstone in (their) sorry drink". Their eyes, then, will be "sharp as stones", "mad as rocks", for it will be "too late to fly away from the city full of sulphur, from the wide walks where antichrist slips us his cruel snare". Then men will try to "bargain for a reprieve", or "forge a paper to Paradise".² But he cries:

Look in the night, look, look in the night:
The man in the silver garment
Steps down from heaven's temple door.
The seas of the dark world
Boil to the brim with fear.³

Merton writes, with first hand knowledge of the dreadful condition in which families are crowded together in tenements so that little children six or seven years of age are completely familiar with every "excess of passion", every "perversion of the natural appetite". Vice and evil take place "hourly and inescapably before their eyes". This says Merton, is an accusation of the "polite and expensive and furtive sensualities and lusts of the rich whose sins

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 16.

3. Ibid., p. 16.

have bred this abominable slum".

Merton points out that the effect "resembles and even magnifies the cause". "Harlem", he says, "is the portrait of those through whose faults such things come into existence".¹

What was heard in secret in the bedrooms and apartments of the rich and of the cultured and the educated and the white is preached from the housetops of Harlem and there declared for what it is, in all its horror, somewhat as it is seen in the eyes of God, naked and frightful.²

With prophetic warning the poet cries:

He raises the sickle. The blade flashes like a cry.
He thrusts in the sickle
And it begins to sing like wind
In the vast quiet harvest of the midnight world.

Fly, fly to the mountains!
The temple door is full of angels.
Fly, fly to the hells!
The men on the red horses wait with guns
Along the blue world's burning brim!

Then suddenly ...
Beyond the infinite air ...
Out of the core of some far, furious trumpet
The first wild note begins to spring,
And fires its anger, in an instant through the ranks
Of attending angels,
And bates my soul with lightnings live as steel.³

With deep humility Thomas Merton identifies himself in his personal guilt with the composite guilt of society.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 346.

2. Ibid., p.346.

3. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 19.

He asks himself, "Did I know that my own sins were enough to have destroyed the whole of England and Germany?"¹

He writes of his time at Cambridge that his soul, and all its faculties, was going to seed "because there was nothing to control his appetites. These were "pouring themselves out in an incoherent riot of undirected passion". His guardian, Dr. Tom, sent for him finally to come to London to explain his conduct. As soon as he tried to justify himself "by making it seem possible for a rational creature to live that way", he writes, "the whole bitterness and imptiness of it became very evident to me".²

Reading Freud and Jung and Adler, he had come to believe that the cause of his unhappiness was sex repression. Studying his responses, analyzing his emotions and searching his reactions, he came to be what he feared most: an introvert.³

Merton describes the end of a fellow student who was filled with the same "emptiness" and floundered in the same confusions.

He was the noisy and hearty type, he was altogether jolly. A great eater and drinker, he chased after girls with an astounding heartiness of passion and emotion ...

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 128.

2. Ibid., p. 124.

3. Ibid., p. 124.

The next year I heard how he ended up. The porter ... went down into the showers under the buildings of the Old Court at Clare and found Mike hanging by his neck from a rope slung over one of the pipes, with his big hearty face black with the agony of strangulation. He had hanged himself.¹

But Thomas Merton was saved from such a fate by his correspondence to the merciful grace of God. And now a priest and monk, he begs our Lady to "grace him", "arming his actions with the news of (her) Immaculate Command".²

You who saved me from the ones about to break me
On the iron wheels of sin
And bought me from the torturer
With all the florins of the Paraclete;

If Christ will burn me clean
Of my red-handed perjuries,
Win me His Blood again, and blazon me His priest.³

He prays for perseverance, begging God to keep him "from the deadly sin which puts hell" into his soul. He flees from the "murder of lust", that "blinds and poisons" the heart. He shies away from "sins that eat a man's flesh with irresistible fire until he is devoured".⁴

Then in all humility he adds:

But if my hands that one time wore the stench of death
Are too unworthy of the Liturgy
That speaks our deathless Pasch in veils of Bread,

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 127.
 2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 46.
 3. Ibid., p. 46.
 4. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 36.

Make me, until my death, His priest in secret
Offering Mass in all day's sacrifice
Then will obedience bring forth new Incarnations
Shining to God with the features of His Christ.

CHAPTER VI

SINS OF MODERN SOCIETY

Can we console you stars
For the long survival of such wickedness.¹

Throughout Thomas Merton's writing there is an acute realization of the identification in responsibility of the individual man with the civilization of which he is a component.

Born during World War I while a few miles away men were rotting in ditches, he has lived the life of his time. Wars and rumours of wars, cold wars and suspicious peace, comprised the historic background of his life story.

Merton repeatedly draws the parallel of this turmoil with that in the souls of contemporary men. He identifies himself with his contemporaries in their common responsibility for the evils of their day. When writing of his brother, Jean Paul's reluctance to discuss the savageries he encountered as an air-pilot, just before his death in World War II, Merton comments with tragic pathos, "John Paul had come at last face to face with the world he and I had helped to make".² With bitter anguish, Merton the poet,

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 21.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 402.

cries out: "Oh, where will Christ be killed again in the land of these dead men?" But he prays for a land "without prayer", where blind men "walk on water all winter, in a year that wants more war".¹

Pointing up this identification, Merton contemplates the dire wretchedness of the life he had built up in his early student days. They had made of him "a complete twentieth-century man". The soul of this modern worldling was the reflection and expression of the age which balanced on "the doorsill of the Apocalypse". Conversely too, this world was modern man's achievement, with its scientific miracles, the world of poison gas and atomic bombs.² He considers it his photograph and calls the war, his mirror.³

Merton's social criticism indites a bitter impeachment of the modern pagan materialism which moulds its citizens into its own image and likeness. The reason that the original and the photograph must at this phase be a ghastly picture rests in the essential paradox that "lies at the very heart of human existence". This paradox, explains Merton, "must be apprehended, before any lasting happiness is possible in the soul of man", and any social reform

-
1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 28.
 2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 85.
 3. Thomas Merton, A Man in a Divided Sea, p. 25.

becomes effective. The paradox, he claims, is the inability of man's nature, which is ever seeking happiness, to settle its own problems. Merton warns, "if we follow nothing but our own philosophy, our own level of ethics, we will end up in hell". The reason is that "God gave man a nature that was ordered to the supernatural life". Man cannot bring his own soul to perfection. It must be perfected by Him. "We were never destined to lead purely natural lives, and therefore we were never destined in God's plan, for a purely natural beatitude. The free gift necessary for the supernatural beatitude is sanctifying grace which perfects man's nature."¹

Apart from the identification in guilt of the individual with the state which he helps to compose, Merton localizes his anathemas of contemporary civilization to certain definite centres of infection.

Womanhood, as the product, as well as the perpetrator of a materialistic, pagan civilization, has particularly failed. To England belonged the corrupt system of education that embittered his young manhood. There too, the cultured *intelligentia* are weighed in the balance and found wanting. France, his beloved, gave him his only years of quiet peace in its beautiful Midi. Yet the frightful *Lycees* give the most tragic picture that Merton describes in his biography.

1. Thomas Merton Seven Storey Mountain, p. 169.

With deep insight and tender understanding, the writer probes France's wounds and, loving her beauty, finds the cause of her infection.

It is America, however, with her "woe-begone old towns"¹, exemplified in New York, with her "six million poor"², that showed the young intellectual what modern paganism ultimately means.

The analysis of these ills, the aching misery that they cause, their fulfilment in war and ultimately in hell, form the thesis of Merton's criticism of the social evils of modern life.

1
Woman

There seems to be a special bitterness in Merton's arraignment of modern pagan womanhood. Certainly he sought diligently for what she could offer, hoping, against the futility of hope, to find at last a hidden ideal, an inner beauty, an unleashed power and dignity. His failure to find in her any saving virtue makes the worldly woman a constant target for his bitter revilement and rejection. His poems refer repeatedly to her "high-heeled eyes"³, eyes like

-
1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 54.
 2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 23.
 3. Ibid.

"wicks of light" and "drops of water".¹

Merton rebukes pagan womanhood in the "dead gauds of her mardi-gras" and warns her that the ugly vintage is over, "the gathering shall come no more". He castigates the socialite, as "grey artificial Shebas, spurious queens"², "with their bodies all spine", "willow women with their jewelled bones". These are chattering futile creatures who babble the "unquiet noises of the dawn", or "talk among themselves like violins".³

Instead of building homes that are hearth-centres of virtue and fidelity the "thin unprofitable queens" wear themselves out in the race for money and pleasure. They are not helpmates to their men, but leeches draining them dry of vitality. Man is to them an expedient of supply and pleasure. In bitter satire he makes man speak to them — "Shake me, I ring like a bank". He promises them the ultimate of their futile hopes. "You shall all marry rectangles". Then with soul-crushing desolation he urges them to "sew in your houses and cry".⁴

In this war-aching world, while men are broken and

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 20.

2. Thomas Merton, Figure for an Apocalypse, p. 16.

3. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 31.

4. Thomas Merton, Figure for an Apocalypse, p. 20.

shattered, he cries out to the war widow, "all your men are sleeping in the alien earth". For those whose men return from the dreadful carnage of war, expecting solace and a staunching of their wounds of soul and body, he flings the taunt of their infidelity. "Clytemnestra ... Bleeds in her conscience, twisting like a root".¹

Then with the calm strength of contemplative thought with economy of touch and true poetic utterance, Thomas Merton prescribes the depurient.

But already, down the far fast ladder of light,
The stern astounding angel
Starts with a truer message
Carrying a lily.²

This is the answer to all their needs, the fulfillment of womanhood. It is quietly satisfying in its cadence of inevitability.

So deep are the roots of Merton's disillusionment in women that even now as a priest, monk and writer, when he writes of women his books fail to measure up to the criterion of his best works. Exile Ends in Glory is the story of a Cistercian Religious. As an exemplary of the Cistercian ideal, Mother Berchman's life is beautiful. But when the author deals intimately with her as a woman he does not

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 31.

2. Ibid., p. 20.

sustain the high tenor of his writing.

What are These Wounds explains with clarity and precision the difficult doctrine of mystic favours. As a contemplative, Father Louis has developed an extraordinary ability to make the mysteries of the contemplative and mystical life comprehensible to the uninitiate.

St. Lutgarde is a strong, virile character, but the picture is given in idealistic outlines, never in intimate details. The author eschews the intimacy of women even in an intellectual discussion. This is probably the ultimate result of his having been scorched at the flame of her worldly sisters.

The fact remains that in religion the young convert has found the catholicon for the woes of womanhood. The Little Flower of Jesus has become the patroness of his contemplative life. He promised to become her monk.¹ Father Louis has stripped away the frill and fluff of sentimentality that has popularly surrounded the reputation of the heroic young Carmelite of Lisieux. Her message to him is one of an asceticism and an unflinching immolation to God so intense as to complete its work in her soul in the few years of her short life. Here is one woman who has met the demands of his ideals. She is the strong woman of the

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 364.

Gospel and he writes of her with ease and understanding, as well as with admiration and love.

It was through Gheon's sensible book that Thomas Merton made his first acquaintance with the Little Flower. He was strongly drawn to her with an attraction which was the work of grace since, as he tells us, it took him through "a thousand psychological obstacles and repugnances".¹

Merton found it difficult to accept sainthood from the midst of the smug mediocrity of the bourgeois society from which Teresa Martin came, and in spite of her taste for "oversweet art" and the bad poetry she wrote and all her bourgeois tastes. Yet he came to consider her not only the greatest saint of modern times but "even greater in some respects, than the two tremendous reformers of her Order, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila".²

It was as a trappist monk that Father Louis came to find the answer to all his searching, the ultimate of all his demanding idealism, not only in a woman, but in the prototype of all womanhood. In the poem, The Blessed Virgin Compared to a Window, he gives Mary all the strong, heroic virtues. He writes of her will, "simple as a window", which "knows no pride of original earth", "whose life it is

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 354.

2. Ibid., p. 355.

clothes, using the proper spoon, not being a cad or a bounder", these were the moral virtues.¹

Professor Buggy transliterates Saint Paul's beautiful lines on charity to fit his own sterilized philosophy: "and there remain faith, hope and gentlemanliness". With a satire that drips of the gall of disappointment, Merton forces the issue to its consistent conclusion, "and the greatest of these is gentlemanliness".²

The doctor of Harley Street, Merton's friend and guardian, is an example and perfect product of this philosophy of worldly rectitude. In a home where gracious living was a fine art, Merton as a student on holidays, became intimate with the best that modern civilization can produce of its own power, untouched by any faith or theological morality. There, he familiarized with culture on a high plane, refinement, dignity, good taste. Savoir faire, noblesse oblige, and fastidiousness were the bolsters of their morality. Doctor Tom was a pagan gentleman, worthy of respect. His wife Iris was a chatelaine of charm and beauty. Both practised natural virtue to an eminent degree. Merton touches their story with the affection and gratitude that is their due. He leaves little doubt in the mind of the reader

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 73

2. Ibid., p. 74.

none-the-less, that this was a sterile virtue and that theirs was a philosophy utterly inadequate as a bulwark against which to face the stark brutality of twentieth century materialism.

3
France

Love and respect for France are deeply rooted in Thomas Merton's nature. These are always suggesting themselves in the midst of apparently irrelevant reflexions. In a discussion of New York, for example, the author stops to muse on the synthetic "cloisters". This little museum, over-looking the Hudson River, contains a reproduction of the medieval monastery of St. Michel de Cuxa. The very stones, it seems, were brought from the French Midi and reassembled there. In the heart of New York this spot supplies an oasis of quiet and meditative peace in the midst of the rush and roar of modernity. Merton says that it is a reproach to everything around it, except the trees and the palisades.¹

Thomas Merton admits that he belongs to France, if he "belongs to any land at all".² He was born there, "down among the shadows of some French mountains".³ He thanks God

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 6.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

3. Ibid., p. 3.

that is so and thanks Him too, that he was brought back there to spend the best and happiest years of his childhood.

These were the years that he spent in close intimacy with the father who seems to have been the tenderest love and saving balance of his life. His father loved the basic stability and honesty of France and taught his son to share his idealistic view of the country of his birth. Merton came to consider this land as the "fountain of the intellectual and spiritual life of the world to which he belonged".¹

It was at St. Antonin, in the heart of the Midi, that they lived. Here Merton found the secret of the strength and beauty of France. It was a medieval town, shorn, in the twentieth century, of the "colour and noise and gaiety of the Middle Ages". Yet here "nothing had been touched by man only by ruin and by the passage of time".²

The centre of all the activity had been the church, which even now dominated the town. The streets seemed to run towards a common hub, the Church. The Angelus bell, ringing out three times a day, reminded the people of this central focus of their lives. For this was the vitalizing, light-giving power of the Holy Sacrament of the altar, housed by the village Church.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 30

2. Ibid., p.36.

Merton decides that this influence produced in these people a sacramental, liturgical life that is their safeguard and anchorage in a world of corruption. In impassioned prose he develops this theme:

... it is that Sacrament, and that alone, the Christ living in our midst, and sacrificed by us, and for us, and with us, in the clean and perpetual sacrifice, it is He alone Who holds the world together and keeps us all from being poured headlong and immediately into the pit of our eternal destruction. And I tell you there is a power that goes forth from the Sacrament, a power of light and truth, even into the hearts of those that have heard nothing of Him and seem to be incapable of belief.¹

Thomas and his father boarded with a family called Privats, at St. Antonin, Auvergne. These people exemplified all that is sober and judicious and peaceful in the peasant. Merton was deeply impressed by their simplicity, their kindness and goodness, but most of all, their peacefulness. He considered the Privats real saints, sanctified by leading ordinary lives in a supernatural manner. Grace from within transformed their routine tasks into habitual union with God. "Their far, their family and their Church were all that occupied these good souls, and their lives were full".²

Even the little children of the French village were different, "more graceful, their speech more intelligent and

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

sober, their eyes calmer and more profound than those of children of other nations".¹

Merton so loves France that he considers even the country landscape to be full of a "special perfection", as a setting for "the best of the cathedrals, the most interesting towns, the most fervent monasteries, and the greatest universities".² With filial affection he describes the low hills and "lush meadows" and the apple orchards of Normandy. He writes of the "sharp and vivid outline of the mountains of Provence". He loves the "vast rolling, red vineyards of Langued'oc".

The cities of France, Merton claims, in their Christian days, produced the "finest flowers of delicacy and grace". They were the schools of "intelligence and proportion and taste."³

All France's perfections, in Merton's mind, harmonize wonderfully. He says "she possessed all the skills from cooking to logic and theology, from bridge-building to contemplation, from vinegrowing to sculpture, from cattle-breeding to prayer".⁴

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 31.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

3. Ibid., p. 30.

4. Ibid., p. 31.

He maintains that she possessed them all more perfectly, separately and together, than any other nation.¹ He adds that even "the corruption and decadence of French society of our day" have not been able to poison the "spring of natural waters purified by grace" that produced France's glory.²

Merton writes, however, that he did not keep his thirteenth century France for long. "The bitter lye" of the Lycee Ingres ate away the peace and joy of the quiet country life. The decadence and corruption have indeed wrought havoc with the beautiful France of the Middle Ages so that now only this little vestige of memory remains hidden away in the hills of the Midi.

The sweet village children of St. Antonin have their rivals in the students of the French Lycees, and Merton draws a drastic picture of them, "tougher", "more cynical" and "more precocious" than any found elsewhere.³

The peaceful countryside with its sacramental life is crowded aside by pagan city life. One of every three Frenchmen is a pagan, four out of five million citizens of

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 31.
 2. Ibid., p. 31.
 3. Ibid., p. 30.

Paris are "completely out of touch with the Church".¹

The decline of France can be traced to the system of education. Merton shows the type of student produced by the Catholic school run by the brothers, sober, intelligent, good. He draws the bitter contrast of the Lycee, where children were turned into precocious devils, impure, flip-pant, cynical, bereft of any belief in anything, with no values, no standards, no ideals — devastating young pagans. From these have grown the citizens of today.

The factory replaces the Church as the centre of society. The labourer has become a galley slave in a concentration camp.² French culture and intellectual life have become effete, corrupt. Merton gives the answer to all this as "corruptio optimi pessimi". "Evil", he says "is the defect of good", the lack of good that ought to be there — and therefore the greatest evil is found where good has been corrupted.

So, Merton contends, the great graces of France are now the very seats of her corruption. French spirituality has degenerated into "flippancy and cynicism". French intelligence under the influence of modern paganism has

1. Stephen Roche, "France", Catholic Digest, vol. 13, No. 12 (Oct. 1949) p. 49.

2. Jean Calvert, "France: The Answer", Catholic Digest, vol. 13, No. 12 (Oct. 1949) p. 53.

become "sophistry". French dignity and refinement have descended to "petty vanity", and "theatrical self-display". The beautiful French charity that made of the French a predestined race is now merely "disgusting fleshly concupiscence. French faith has turned into sentimentality and puerile Atheism.¹

4
New York

"New York, you are mine! I love you".² This cry of the Thomas Merton, student and young modern, is deeply significant of the fascination this great city holds for her millions of citizens. Merton writes of the "embrace" in which the "big wild city" holds her lovers.³

To Thomas Merton, as to most of the world today, New York is synonymous with America. Yet for him as for many others of her six million the illusion was early dispelled, the fascination soon broken. America for him was "found and lost soon".⁴ He writes of the times "we nearly died by trickery", in the places made "for our destruction". For a little time he and his friends were "led by recklessness into

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 51.
 2. Ibid., p. 136.
 3. Ibid., p. 136.
 4. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 62.

the nets, and planned their fortunes in an open trap".

Merton now asks, "Who saved us?"¹

For Merton, with his poet's soul and artist's temperament, soon found his century to be a "hurried, harried existence, riddled by all kinds of 'isms' including pessimism and materialism".² He found that this was the world that Christ would not pray for. Merton considers modern New York

... the unquiet city of those who live for themselves and are therefore divided against one another in a struggle that cannot end for it will go on eternally in hell. It is the city of those who are fighting for possession of limited things and for the monopoly of goods and pleasures that cannot be shared by all.³

In the struggle of materialistic ambition men's bones had begun to turn to money". New York "dressed herself in paper money" and had nickels running in her veins". Her eyes are blue as gin which her men drink from their "phony grails" and she "nailed them all the days of her life through the heart of her six million poor".⁴

Her great treasures are owned by her flint-eyed brats", and her "wide walks are snares of antichrist".⁵ No

1. Thomas Merton, Tears of the Blind Lions, p. 62.

2. Isabel Harriss Barr, "Proving-Ground for Poetry" Spirit, vol. 8 (Sept. 1941) p. 14.

3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 57.

4. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 23.

5. Ibid., p. 86.

man trusts his neighbour, they write their very names in code and "sit with eyes as sharp as stones" with "brimstone" in their "sorry drink".¹

The temporal cruelties, the degradation, futility and despair that are the progeny of this materialistic civilization whose god is Mammon, find their dreadful climax in the Bellevue Morgue. Merton describes a visit he made while at Columbia, with a group of students of "Contemporary Civilization". He remembers the "clammy silence" of the rows and rows of ice boxes containing the human refuse of the big, evil city.² This poor dreadful, motley crowd had been picked up from the streets of New York. Merton's picture shocks the reader out of his selfish complacency.

The dead ruined by raw alcohol. The dead that had been found starved and frozen, lying where they had tried to sleep in a pile of old newspapers. The pauper dead from Randall Island. The dope fiend dead. The murdered dead. The run-over. The suicides. The dead negroes and Chinese. The dead of venereal disease. The dead from unknown causes. The killed by gangsters. They would all be shipped for burial up the East River in a barge, to one of those islands where they also burned garbage.³

These were the citizens of New York who died, victims of contemporary civilization.

Merton the poet laments the sickly state of his

-
1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 17.
 2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p.
 3. Ibid., p. 152.

nation into whose heart the "long deep knife is driven" and "night devours our days", and "death" of soul and body", "puts out our eyes" so that we are blind to so much wickedness and "no voice prophecies".¹

In a "Dirge for the Proud World" the poet traces the ultimate degradation of this materialistic, godless civilization. He asks, then, "Where is the millionaire who squandered the bright spring and describes his death as "bare as a tree" "bereft now of the golden fortunes of the fall". Where, now, he asks, "is the crazy gambler, amid the nickels of whose blood have fallen heavy half dollars of his last of life?"

The deepest cancer of the great festering city is Harlem, where the cruel inhumanity of man has cursed his fellowmen to live in poverty, squalor and vice. Here the daylight, revealing the filth and decay, drives "iron spikes into the flesh of Jesus' hands and feet" and "four flowers of blood have nailed him to the walls of Harlem".²

Here, as in all his writings, Thomas Merton quotes from experience: While he was teaching at St. Bonaventure's College and praying over his vocation, while living like a lay contemplative, he met the Baroness Catherine de Hueck.

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

She was working, at that time, at Friendship House in Harlem. Her apostolic zeal, at once convincing and inspiring, moved him to join her in her work. He spent several months working at Harlem, studying the negro problem, seeing daily the heart-breaking misery wrought by racial discrimination, prejudice and indifference.

The Baroness convinces Merton that Catholics and the world in general would have nothing to fear from Communism if Christians, particularly Catholics, lined up to their obligations and "really did the things Christ came on earth to teach them to do; if we loved one another and did something to win justice for the poor". According to the Baroness, if we could see Harlem as Christ sees it, we could "not stay away". Hundreds of Catholics would spend their lives trying to relieve

the tremendous misery, the poverty, the sickness, degradation and dereliction of a race that was being crushed and perverted, morally and physically under the burden of a colossal, economic injustice.¹

Catherine de Hueck censured the American's responsibility for "the starvation and disease in those evil tenements" of Harlem. Thomas Merton, moved to Harlem. He worked there, particularly among the boys and girls, in the library and recreation rooms, it seems. Studying them, he

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 340.

"got some insight into the problem of Harlem".¹

He saw the hundreds of thousands of negroes "herded together like cattle", in the "huge, dark, steaming slums". Most of them had "nothing to eat and nothing to do", becoming acquainted with them, he found them to be a race of "vivid feeling and deep emotional reactions". In Harlem conditions were such that their "senses and imagination, and sensibilities and emotions and sorrows and desires and hopes" were "forced in upon themselves", by frustration and the prejudice that hems them in like a wall.²

He found in these people "inestimable natural gifts, wisdom, love, music, science and poetry". But all of this was "stamped down" and left "to boil", with "the dregs of our elementally corrupted nature". Here in Harlem, thousands upon thousands of souls are destroyed "by vice and misery and degradation". They are "washed from the register of the living, dehumanized". And he asks, "What has not been devoured in your dark furnace, Harlem, by marihuana, by gin, by insanity, hysteria, syphilis"?³

And this festering sore of civilization exists in the wealthiest city in the world — city of millionaires. A few

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 345.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

blocks away from its decaying fire-trap slums are skyscrapers that are the greatest feats of engineering ever accomplished. In the laboratories and hospitals of New York the most expensive and advanced equipment in the world is used to fight disease. In her night clubs unparalleled luxury prevails, in her penthouses the latest in fashion and the ultimate in comfort are found. And in her vitals is the running sore, "the smoking hemorrhage" of Harlem.

Merton considers Harlem an accusation of the "furtive sensualities and lusts of the rich whose sins have bred this abominable slum".¹ He continues his indictment:

The effect resembles and even magnifies the cause, and Harlem is a portrait of those whose fault such things come into existence. What was heard in secret in the bedrooms and apartments of the rich and of the cultured and of the educated and the white is preached from the housetops of Harlem and there declared, for what it is, in all its horror, somewhat as it is seen in the eyes of God, naked and frightful. No, there is not a negro in the whole place who can fail to know, in the marrow of his own bones that the white man's culture is not worth the jetsam of the Harlem River.²

Yet Merton believes that Friendship House and Catherine de Hueck worked for Harlem with success. The secret of this he attributes to her dependence, not upon human means, though she did use theatricals and meetings and speeches and conferences, but upon "God, Christ, the Holy

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 346.

2. Ibid.

Ghost".¹

And although contemporary civilization and its great exemplary, New York, look, in God's sight, as Harlem does to us, yet Merton does not despair of it.² Whether because of the work of Catherine de Hueck and her social workers, or the critical writings, like Merton's, which have exposed these evils, work is being done at least for Harlem. The slums are being torn down and decent living concessions have been built. The social question is, at least, widely discussed. There remain the white man's personal evils, chastened, we hope, a little, by the pain and punishment of war. The great remedial prayer must surely staunch her wounds. The hundreds of contemplative vocations that have risen in a great surge since World War II, among American men and women, will surely be her salvation. For "in the priestly darkness" of America's Gethsemani's and Bethlehem's prayers "talk with tongues of candle flame". The "long Gregorian cry" of those citizens of contemporary civilization who spend their days and nights in silence and in prayer "bows down the stars' Samaritan, to rue the pity of so cruel a murder".³ These silent watchers do not forget the city they have left. They

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 347.

2. Ibid., p. 346-7.

3. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 33

dream of her, their still beloved and Merton voices for them
the question:

How long are we to wake
With eyes that turn to wells of blood
Seeing the hell that gets you from us
With his treacherous embrace.¹

5

Fear and Hate

Thomas Merton writing of Rome in an introduction to The City of God, inscribes words that are logically applied to the City of Man, the City of Today. He tells us that Saint Augustine traces the history of that "city of conflict and hate" through its development from "the fall of Adam to the end of time and even into eternity". In contrast to this Saint Augustine exposes "the other city, planned by God, to repair the work that Adam's sin could not be allowed to ruin".²

It was in the "New Adam", Christ that man was to be raised again to the friendship and vision of God / not indeed the contemplation Adam had enjoyed in Eden, still less the clear vision of beatitude; but heaven was to begin on earth in faith and charity. God would be "seen", but only in darkness and man would be united in "one body", but only at the cost of struggle and self-sacrifice. The whole of history since the ascension of Jesus into heaven is concerned with one work only; the building and perfecting of this "City of God".³

-
1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 34.
 2. Thomas Merton, "Introduction to City of God", New York, The Modern Library, Random House, 1950, p. xii.
 3. Ibid., p. xii.

In our own century it is the devastating lack of faith and charity which would have built our world into a "City of God", that is the root of our ills. "Since God is Truth", Adam's apostasy, and with it that of Modern Man is a "fall into falsehood and unreality, "Since God is unity", the sin of man is "a collapse into division and disharmony". As "Adam's soul was divided against itself in sin", we trace the analogy in mankind today "divided against one another by selfishness. Murder was bred into "a world where each self-centered individual had become his own little god, his own judge and standard of good and evil, falsity and truth".

This division of mankind is aggravated in our century by the appalling ascendancy of materialism and pagan love of personal pleasure and well-being, coupled with a lack of belief in any God. Since materialistic possessions and pleasure is the ideal and criterion of achievement, man is pitted against man in a struggle that grows into fear and hatred.

Merton tells us that there are "two things men can do about the pain of disunion with other men". "They can love or they can hate". Modern man seems to have chosen hate, which "recoils from the sacrifice and the sorrow that are the price of this resetting of bones".

Hatred tries to cure disunion by annihilating those who are not united with us. It seeks peace by the

elimination of everybody else but ourselves.¹

Because of the rush for materialistic possession and the race of ambition and greed, people hope to make themselves "real" by building barriers of contract and distinction from other men. The code now becomes:

I have what you have not. I am what you are not. I have taken what you have failed to take and I have seized what you can never get. Therefore you suffer and I am happy, you are despised and I am praised, you die and I live, you are nothing and I am something, and I am all the more something because you are nothing. And thus I spend my life admiring the distance between you and me; at times this even helps me to forget the other men who have what I have not and who have taken what I was too slow to take and who have seized what was beyond my reach; who are praised as I cannot be praised and who live on my death.²

This type of man has ceased to be a reality; his life is a "living in death". And when he dies, says Merton, "God Who is infinite reality", will say to him, "I know you not".³

These men, born to love God, are living "in fear and hopeless self-contradictory hungers", "existing in an icy dream, in laboratories of greed and grief".⁴ They do not even know enough to cry "oh save us, in the dark tornadoes of Genesareth".⁵

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 55.

2. Ibid., p. 38.

3. Ibid., p. 38

4. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 3.

5. Thomas Merton, Man in the Divided Sea, p. 37.

Fear of insecurity, of hunger, of dirt, rides the earth. Yet poverty is in its very nature, a beatitude, it liberates and frees. The more the faculties are "emptied of their desire and their tension towards created things", the more men "collect themselves into peace", the more they "reach into darkness where God is present to their deepest hunger", says Merton, the more will be their need to be "free and rid of all the last obstacles and attachments that prevent them from becoming "filled with God".¹

But men will suffer poverty and privation, they will go and live with the poor and share their suffering, not because they love them and wish to help them, but because of the very hatred of their fellow men that is sorted in their souls. They will go to untold lengths to stir up the poor against the rich in a class of hatred that will ferment revolution and war.²

Thomas Merton says that "in the image of the world into which (he) was born", he, like the men of his century, was born to love God, but was "living instead in fear and hopelessness and self-contradictory hungers".³

Yet in the dark fears that clutch him the very man

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 167.
 2. Ibid., p. 167.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 3.

who needs God most, ignores his love and peace". "How many men", asks the poet,

... have rock and flood undone, who never cry in the
welter of the deadly weather, oh save us in the dark
and tornadoes of Genesereth.¹

And modern man may well fear -- for his own civilization contains his wreckage. Merton warns him "be aware of danger growing like a nightshade".² "But mostly", he urges, "fear the forum" for the very institutions to which we turn for protection and guidance will betray us. There the "guilty war-lord" prepares his plans, which, to our guilelessness appears "much like the white geometry of peace".³

There is much to fear. "Fear the drowners", fear the dead", warns Merton, but more, if you are of the guilty crowd who "swagger like the warring leaders", then you have need to "fear far more". Our condemnation is bitter -- the "curse of the little children killed".⁴

Days and nights are filled with fear -- fear of atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs, of wars, and disease and strikes and debt. The poet urges the victims of this fearful society to "fly without passports", to "hide, while

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

3. Ibid., p. 35.

4. Ibid., p. 34.

cities turn to butter", "for fear of the secret bomb".¹

So many promises are offered by our magnificent civilization, so little realized. The poet accuses — "oh prophet, when it was afternoon you told us: tonight is the millenium — the withering away of the state". We still wait hoping stupidly for the skies to melt all injustice in the reign of their breezy love.² Always we are awaiting "the golden age" when "the human race will wake up and find dollars growing out of the palms of their hands". And when it comes, this prize of materialistic dreams, the world will die of brotherly love.

Thomas Merton exposes the spirit of the world as "selfishness and envy and conspiracy and lust and terror". It is the spirit of avarice and oppression that "arms men against one another and divides them against themselves and others". It splits the world into armed camps".³

The Dreaming Trader is a bitter poem which gives a picture of this modern materialistic society and its resultant evils.

You shall set sail from the steps of the Sub-Treasury
And pass Grand Central at the fall of night
And never be heard of again.

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 17.
 2. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 20.
 3. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. 332.

world that takes with it any private selfishness simply puts a man "into a position where the evil within him will either possess him like a devil or drive him out of his head".¹

For, of course, he takes his fears with him, with his selfishness. Merton offers us the evangelical counsel, only "perfect charity casteth out fear". "Fear is not in charity". "And he that feareth is not perfected in charity. Let us therefore love God, for God hath first loved us."²

Then Merton asks: "Is it any wonder that Trappist monasteries are places full of peace and contentment and joy?" For these men have withdrawn from the world to live in silence and charity. He explains their joy. Though these men have none of the pleasures of the world, they have all the happiness that the world is unable to find. Though they live in silence far from the noise of politicians and radios, their very silence is supremely elequent. Though there is no laughter among them, their smiles are filled with joy. They live in the midst of the beauty of the hills and the sky. They are fatigued with work but their hearts are at rest.

They are absorbed in a companionship that is tremendous, because it is Three Persons in One Infinite Nature,

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 57.

2. Ibid., p.57.

the One Who spoke the universe and draws it all back into Himself by His love; the One from Whom all things came and to Whom all things return and in Whom are all the beauty and substance and actuality of everything in the world that is real.¹

Merton offers two antidotes for the staunching of the wounds of fear and hate bred of modern materialism. They are withdrawal from the spirit of the world and charity. Since division and selfishness are the causes of fear and hate, the union of men in Christian charity and the love of all men in God is the cure. For his brother in the world Merton prays:

Staunch in me the rank wound of covetousness and the hungers that exhaust my nature with their bleeding. Stamp out the serpent that stings love with poison and kills all joy.²

It is consoling to think that the very healing power is found within man's own nature. His true nature simply needs to be healed, returned to its likeness of God in love. "Our happiness consists in sharing the happiness of God. God is unlimited freedom which we share when we are perfect in love."³

1. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. xxi.

2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 26.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

To achieve this love and union with God which will bring union with our fellow men, it is necessary to withdraw from the world. For those who cannot actually leave the world and must live in it, if not of it, Merton plans the method.

First there should be some time and place in every life for the withdrawal that is necessary in order to find God at least for a few minutes at a time. Merton advises men to have a room or a corner where no one will disturb or notice. There at intervals men should "untether themselves from the world". They should consciously try at set intervals to "loose all the fine strings and strands of tension that bind, by sight, sound and thought, "to the presence of other men".¹

Love mends the broken unity of mankind, not humanity but supernatural love in God, heals the wounds of our nature. Suffering and sacrifice are demanded of men if they are to "live together in the peace and harmony that love has perfected" in them.

Christianity, lived in its fullness would solve the problems of social civilization. "For Christianity is not a doctrine or a system of beliefs, "it is Christ living in us and uniting men to one another in his own life and unity.

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 60.

I in them and Thou, Father, in me, that they may be made perfect in One ... and the glory which Thou hast given me I have given them that they may be One as we also are One ... He that loveth not abideth in death.¹

Although this union is achieved by renunciation of self-interest, once it is attained it becomes man's fulfillment. Man finds his identity in "the one mystical person of Christ, in Whom we all complete one another" unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ".²

Thomas Merton holds that the perfection of love and unity of man is found in contemplation. In this exercise "our inalienable personalities", although they remain distinct, yet combine into "One Person" and finally, each one of us will find himself in all the others. God will be the life and reality of all.³

It is only the union in love of God which, by transforming us into Him, in sanctity, that can heal our separation from one another. Without that love "union among us will be a precarious and painful thing full of labour and sorrow and without lasting cohesion."⁴

6 Hell

Of course the final point of it all is Hell. "The

1. St. John, New Testament, ch. 17, cited by Thomas Merton in Seeds of Contemplation, p. 56.

2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 53.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

scattered and dispersed and its citizens are cast out in every direction like sparks and smoke and flame.¹

While kings and dictators and "the mighty of the world" accomplish their works with great noise", "with speeches and drums and loud-speakers and brass and thunder of the bombers", God does His own work in silence. Amid the confusion and terror of armies and dictators and war-lords, who "set their mark upon the world" by "tearing pieces out of the map", God builds life where they have "sown death" and He will eventually bring sanctity out of the "poisoned stream of their hatred".²

7
War

Thomas Merton traces the corruption in men's souls bred by materialistic greed and avarice through the lack of charity and the disunion they cause among individuals into its logical result in society. Merton says, "all over the face of the earth the avarice and lust of men breed unceasing divisions among them". The sins of the individual become the sins of the group — and what was discord and lack of harmony in a group becomes war and destruction in nations. "The wounds that tear men from union with one another, widen and open out into huge wars".³

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 74.
 2. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. 332.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 54.

War has become murder on a vast scale: "massacres, revolution, hatred, the slaughter and torture of the bodies and souls of men". And now in this twentieth century, the triumph of materialistic achievement has been mechanized war with its dreadful progeny: "The destruction of cities by fire, the starvation of millions, the annihilation of populations and finally the cosmic inhumanity of atomic war". And all of this is the magnified picture of the destruction caused by vice in a human soul. "Christ is massacred and his members torn limb from limb: God is murdered in men". Once again Merton traces the analogy of the individual's guilt with the collective guilt of his society. "The history of the world", he writes, "with the materialistic destruction of nations and people, expresses the division that tyrannizes the souls of all men".¹

Yet, though the root of war is fear, men do not trust one another; Merton holds that this is basically a fear of themselves. Men can not trust themselves because they recognize their own evil. "They cannot trust anything, because they have ceased to believe in God".²

Then Merton claims that if we wish to end wars we must teach men to "love and trust God". Then they will be

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 54.

2. Ibid., p. 71.

able to love the men they cannot trust and through that love they will "dare to make peace with them", because they do not trust them but they do trust God. And Merton sums it up: "For only love — which means humility, can cast out the fear which is the root of all war".¹

Not only is there a retributive justice to the individual in the punishment of war, but it is supremely instructive to the man who will see the analogy. Merton reiterates that the world is a picture of what the majority of individuals had made of their own souls. When the evil rests within our own souls, though we are "raped and defiled by sin", we fail to see the ugliness". "Now for our inexorable instruction" we see in the social order, "the whole thing ... take place all over again before our eyes, physically and morally."² "Says the radio, the war's my mirror, and there's no good Friday".³ God permits it so that "some of us, at least, might have "some conception of what we had done".⁴

In the light of this understanding each of us may say: "I myself am responsible for this. My sins have done

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 71.
 2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 248.
 3. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 25.
 4. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 248.

this". The responsibility for war lies, not alone, with a Hitler nor a Stalin. "I have my share in it too".¹

These wars and persecutions so "terrible to read about", and "more terrible to live through" are the flails by which God separates the wheat from the chaff, "the elect from the damned". God uses all in his great craftsmanship. They have been the tools "that have fashioned the stones which God would set in the walls of His city of vision".²

8
Peace

The peace that "the world" desires is not peace at all and God allowing war and destruction, gives them what they really want. The worldling's peace is simply another kind of War. "For the revolutions of men change nothing".³

The only influence that can really upset the injustice and inequality of men is the power that breathes in Christian tradition reviewing our participation in the Life that is the fight of men.⁴

So Merton urges, instead of seeking what we think is peace, let us love one another and instead of hating war and the makers of war, let us turn to our own souls and hate the evil we find there.⁵

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 248.
 2. Thomas Merton, "Introduction to City of God" p xii
 3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 72.
 4. Ibid., p. 85.
 5. Ibid., p. 73.

For men are weary and seek peace. Even as they make war, they dread it. As it comes home to them individually with its death and brutality and starvation, they flee from it in terror and try frantically to find a remedy.

In the "Bombarded City", Merton draws the picture of war-harassed man seeking peace at last but not knowing how to find it nor where to seek it. He finally realizes that his "dream of peace" has failed.

For even in the dream of peace
 The forum fallen down,
 The cursed arenas full of blood
 Hearing the wind in the crannied stone,
 Oh no man can remain!
 Hearing those souls weep in the hollow ruin.¹

Meanwhile there have been little oases, where God brings his chosen ones, who, even while world is drunk with wine from the great chalice of war, are refreshed with "the peace that is born of the love of brothers living together in unity".² The monasteries are filled till they overflow into new foundations all over the country. Many of these men came from the armed forces, from the hell of war to the peace of the contemplative life.³ They have seen the fruits of modern civilization, they have lived the results of the

1. Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea, p. 35.

2. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 200.

3. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. 332.

wisdom of men. They can no longer be happy in an atmosphere "where people are looking for nothing but their own pleasure and advantage and comfort and success."¹

Worldlings envy these wise ones their peace. Their happiness is a reproach to the world's uneasiness. The life they live is a condemnation of the life of "the world". Their poverty accuses the rich of injustice, their community life and brotherly love condemn the inhuman and complacent hatreds of the communists. Even the humanists, in the light of this charity, see their insufficiency. The life of the cloister denies "everything that the world stands for".²

Yet it is in these men "who love God with their whole mind and their whole strength, that peace is established in the world". Because they are the tabernacles of God, they are the safety and strength of the world. They "keep the unwise from being destroyed".³ And they have found peace and happiness.⁴

Interior peace is detachment. Without union with the will of God "peace is completely impossible". If we give up worldly desires and seek only God's will "He will

1. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. 338.

2. Ibid., p. 332.

3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 200.

4. Thomas Merton, Waters of Siloe, p. 338.

give recollection and peace in the middle of labour and conflict and trial.¹

If men really wanted this peace and asked for it, God would give it to them, says Merton. Then he asks, "why should God give the world a peace which it does not really desire?" To many man peace means something very different from this spiritual conception. Merton traces the different "good" sought in the name of peace by the different types found in contemporary civilization: the materialistic man, the social economist, the man of purely natural appetites. To the first type peace means "freedom to rob another without interruption". To the second it means "leisure to devour the goods of the earth without being compelled to interrupt their pleasures to feed those whom their greed is starving". To practically everybody, concludes Merton,

peace means the absence of any physical violence that might cast a shadow over lives devoted to the satisfaction of their animal appetites for comfort and pleasure.²

This type of peace is only another form of war. Yet the two wars of our century have "shaken materialistic culture to the depths". "Unquiet men" are more and more seeking a truer peace, they hunger now "for truth that is objective and

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 128.

2. Ibid., p. 72.

solid and lasting". The civilization they have built by their dumb appetites "has finally sickened them with its deceptions. They are beginning "half consciously", to realize that this dissatisfaction is an argument for some form of religion.¹

Meanwhile the church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is beginning again, in European occupied countries, to suffer and bleed once more in the persecution of a "cold war". Yet immutable and unchanging, she prays for all men, for justice and truth and peace. Thomas Merton analyzes the beautiful liturgy of the mass and speaks of the Preface, "those ancient and splendid and holy words of the Immortal Church".

Vere dignum et justum est aequum et salutare nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere, Domine Sancte, Pater omnipotens aeterne Deus.²

Merton comments on these holy words of the daily mass offered all over the earth for the souls of all men, allies or enemy at war and in peace. This passage is an example of the vital, vibrant pulsating absorption of his mind with the mind of the liturgy. It shows his special gift for expressing theological and philosophical truth with such clarity and inevitable simplicity that it becomes

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 72.

2. Preface of the Mass, cited by Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 249.

comprehensible and intellectually actual to the popular reader.

It was the voice of the Church, the Bride of Christ who is in the world yet not of it, whose life transcends and outlives wars and persecutions and revolutions and all the wickedness and cruelty and rapacity and injustice of men. It is truly meet and just always and in all things to give Thee thanks, Holy Lord, omnipotent Father, eternal God: a tremendous prayer that reduces all wars to their real smallness and insignificance in the face of eternity. It is a prayer that opens the door to eternity, taking our minds with it in its deep and peaceful wisdom. Always and in all things to give Thee thanks, omnipotent Father. Was it thus that she was singing, this Church, this one Body, who had already begun to suffer and to bleed again in another war?

She was thanking Him in the war, in her suffering: not for the war and for the suffering, but for His love which she knew was protecting her, and us, in this new crisis. And raising up her eyes to Him, she saw the eternal God alone through all these things, was interested in His action alone, not in the bungling cruelty of secondary causes, but only in His love, His wisdom. And to Him the Church, His Bride, gave praise through Christ, through Whom all the angelic hierarchies praise Him ...

CHAPTER VII

SINS OF MODERN RELIGION

All Thomas Merton's writing is religious in content and intent. His biography draws the picture of his personal struggle to find the Truth and free his soul from the shackles of falsity. His poetry is an invitation to the men of his century to slough off the ways of the world that are a hindrance to his peace and liberty and seek them in the sweet content of a life of union with God. His doctrine teaches that the ultimate end of man is contemplation and his true happiness can only be found there.

In his criticism of social life Merton shows the pursuit of materialistic gains, comforts and pleasures to be the cause of the contemporary ills of society. Fear and hatred making a hell of this life while leading inevitably to an eternal hell are their first fruits. War is the logical consequence and loss of liberty of body and mind follow in its wake. He offers as a healing force the power of the Christian life lived in its entirety.

For those who are not "strangers to the ways of grace, Thomas Merton has criticism. First he speaks to those Christians whose lives are governed by the fear of hell alone. These are the men who list the affairs of their lives in two columns. The dividing line is the margin they

must not pass without committing mortal sin.

"This hopelessly misleading division of possibilities is what serves large numbers of Catholics as a whole moral theology".¹ Things are mortal sins per se, or not mortal sins per se. All that are mortal sins are illicit, all that are not are licit. Therefore, they hold that to say that a man ought not to do these things that are not mortal sins per se, is heretical. And so there are a great many "drunken Irishmen in the world on Saturday night". These people can even argue themselves into believing "that it is virtuous to go to the movies, to gamble, to get half drunk".²

People who are constantly mindful of their own pleasure and desire cannot accept a higher pleasure nor a supernatural desire. Merton asks

How can I receive the seeds of my freedom if I am in love with slavery and how can I be filled with the desire of God if I am filled with another and an opposite desire?³

Merton arraigns certain spiritual faults in the Christians who really aim to live religiously, who know God and follow his laws with an exterior exactitude. The first of these is spiritual pride, "which eats out ... sanctity

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 242.
 2. Ibid., p. 243.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 17.

before it is mature". This is a "peculiar unreality" that gets into the hearts of men who should be saints. It consists in taking to themselves the "reality" of the good they do. They destroy even their virtues by "claiming them for themselves". They tend even "to clothe their own private illusion of themselves with values that belong to God".

Merton questions searchingly,

Who can escape a secret desire to breathe a different atmosphere from the rest of men? Who can do good things without seeking to taste in them some sweet distinction from the common run of sinners in this world.¹

Then he warns that when this "sickness" appears to be humility it is most dangerous. "When a proud man thinks he is humble, his case is hopeless", for by then he has come to think that "his own pride is the Holy Ghost".²

This spiritual pride soon corrodes religious obedience. The devil perverts even the desire to do God's will. If the criterion is the "warm-glow" of comfortable self-satisfaction, it will counsel falsely. It is easy for the tenet 'obey God rather than man' to grow into disobedience.³

"Fickleness and indcision", says Father Louis, "are signs of self-love". Perhaps the vacillation "from one

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 39.

2. Ibid., p. 39.

3. Ibid., p. 64.

opinion to another" of "what God wills for you", may be an "indication that you are trying to get around God's will" to do your own "with a quiet conscience".¹

The absolute extreme of self-love, of course, is despair. "It is reached when a man deliberately turns his back" on the helps that are always reached out to him, "for the rotten luxury of knowing himself to be lost".² "Despair is the ultimate development" of a great and stiff-necked pride. "It selects the absolute misery of damnation rather than accept happiness from the hand of God", which would entail acknowledging "that He is above us and that we are not capable of fulfilling our destiny by ourselves". A humble man cannot despair. "The beginning of humility is the beginning of blessedness and the consummation of humility is the perfection of all joy."³

Many religious men, says Father Louis, are attached to activities and enterprises that seem to give importance to their lives. They are blinded by a "desire for ceaseless motion". They need a sense of achievement to keep them going. They are "famished by a crude hunger for results, for

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 174.

2. Ibid., p. 108.

3. Ibid., p. 108. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part 2, 2.161, Art. 6, p. 1852.

visible and tangible success". If they can keep busy at a dozen jobs at the same time they imagine they are pleasing to God. They lament that they have no time for prayer, yet they involve themselves in more and more work. They go on and on till "God allows their mistakes to catch up with them" and they become involved "in some gross and obvious sin against justice, or against their obligation of their state".

Finally Father Louis criticizes the "kind of crude materialism in religious life", which infects men striving for holiness. This is the belief that abnegation is an exterior thing, that it consists in "giving up things that please the five exterior senses". They miss the spiritual growth they would otherwise achieve because they do not realize that this is only the beginning. They must become more and more detached "even from rational and intellectual and spiritual good" if they wish to make progress in the spiritual life.¹

All these faults can be summed up in the lack of love for God. Father Louis sadly insists that:

All sorrow, hardship, difficulty, struggle, pain, unhappiness and ultimately death itself can be traced to rebellion against God's love for us.²

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 124.
 2. Ibid., p. 181.

Mediocrity in any form never fails to draw Father Louis's sharpest indictment. Mediocrity in religion deserves his special formality which only the gift of God can teach us to differentiate from the "living inner current of Divine Life".¹

There are some religious people who expect to "acquire virtue like a hat". "They devour books of piety indiscriminately". Their chief concern is not to apply their teachings to their own souls, but rather "to acquire as many externals as possible". They wish to adorn their persons "with the features" they have "come to associate with perfection". Some do this so well that their "spiritual disguises" are much admired. They are successful; their sanctity has become commercialized. "There is not much hope for them" as saints.

They have become satisfied with their own brand of sanctity and with the perfection they have woven for themselves out of their own imagination.²

Other religious people set all their hope of sanctity in acquiring a special virtue. Kindness, or broad-mindedness or charity becomes their special attraction. "They let everything else go". "If you are unselfish in one way", warns Father Louis, "and selfish in another, it will not do

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 86.

2. Ibid., p. 68.

you much good". It is probably simply another form of selfishness disguised. They expect all the evil in them to be excused or forgotten on account of the one good quality they claim to have.¹

Middle class culture, with its system of evasions, is a "structure of fiction and abstractions", says Father Louis. These form a screen behind which "human nature can be as small and greedy and as mean as it pleases, without being ridiculed or disturbed".² We excel in the art of shifting our responsibilities. But Father Louis warns us of our insufficiency.

For Christianity is not merely ... a system of beliefs, it is Christ living in us, and uniting men one to another in His own life and unity.³

Yet while communists discuss our great Encyclicals like Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno, the average Catholic knows little of what they contain and practices less. And communists accuse him of this and they ask "do Catholics practice these things"? And they use them against us.⁴

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 68.

2. Thomas Merton, "Contemplation in a Rocking Chair", Integrity, vol. 2 (Aug. 1948) p. 15.

3. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 56.

4. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 342.

For all the "stuffy, overplush, overdecorated comfortable ugliness and mediocrity of the bourgeoisie", however, it has its special saint who grew to sanctity in its midst. Theresa of the Child Jesus was a daughter of the French Middle class of the nineteenth century. She took into the cloister with her the "nature that had been formed and adapted to that background and mentality". Nothing could have been more complacent. It seemed impossible for grace to penetrate "the thick resilient hide of bourgeois smugness" yet grace reached the immortal soul of this little child and made of her one of the greatest saints of the church. So great is the power of grace.

2
CONTEMPLATION

"Love is my true identity", Father Louis tells us. "Selflessness is my true self" and "love is my true character". This sums up the whole teaching of Christianity.¹

Man cannot realize his true identity, cannot come into his real self, without a twofold abnegation. He must denude himself of all the trappings of a life that keeps him from seeking the Love of God, and union in that love, unhampered.

His vision of his true goal must be sure, and

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 46.

unswerving. Then he must go consistently, uncompromisingly towards it, if he wishes peace and joy in this life in preparation for the same in the Beatific vision of the next.

The external denuding, says Father Louis, involves abnegation, renunciation of all the luxuries, frivolities and extravagances that worldly people consider necessary in their lives. In this way the true Christian unshackles himself from the hindrances to his progress towards the one vital thing in life — Union with God. These things have no other meaning. Even in the cloister, the silence, labour, penance, fasting, humiliations and obedience of the monk are useful only as they further and foster the unhampered flight of the soul to God in contemplation. In the life of a man in the world, striving toward the fullness of the Christian life they are a clearing away of rubble and refuse that might impede his way to God. In any life they must not be considered as ends in themselves. The truer asceticism is that of the spirit. Humility must detach a man even from "attachment to his own works" and reputation.¹

A man who is not stripped and poor and naked within his own soul will always unconsciously do the works he has to do for his own sake rather than for the glory of God.²

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 44.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

Since love is my identity I cannot "do anything, (nor) think anything, (nor) say anything, (nor) know anything, (nor) desire anything that is not purely for the love of God". If I do "it cannot give me peace, or rest, or fulfilment, or joy".

To find that love, then, is the great and only true work of life. To find it, Father Louis says, we must "enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden; which is the essence of God".¹ Father Louis has shown that the way to this sanctuary, even for the ordinary man in the world, is through contemplation. Both the preparation for this and its result is holiness. "To enter into His sanctuary I must become holy".² This means leaving "all the ways that men follow or understand",³ even when it does not mean leaving my ordinary state in life.

I who am without love cannot become love unless love identifies me with Himself. But if He sends His own Love, Himself, to act and love in me and in all that I do, then I shall be transformed, I shall discover who I am and shall possess my true identity by losing myself in Him. And that is what is called sanctity.⁴

This love of God in sanctity has its intercourse in contemplation. The essence of prayer, Father Louis explains,

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 46.

2. Ibid., p. 46.

3. Ibid., p. 46.

4. Ibid., p. 46.

rests in the "will to pray", in the desire to find God and to love Him.¹ The "contemplation by which we know and love God" is a "deep and vital experience" in which we apprehend Him in a way that is beyond natural understanding.²

Although contemplation is above our nature, it is "our proper element", willed for us by God, "because it is the fulfilment of (the) deep capacities in us" that cannot be "fulfilled in any other way".

All those who reach the end for which they are created will therefore be contemplatives in heaven; but many are also destined to enter this supernatural element on earth.³

Father Louis discusses "the many who are destined to enter this supernatural element on earth". He believes that they are not necessarily those who live in the cloister. He points out that a Cistercian monk, "by failing to make the proper use of the means God has put at his disposal", may fail to reach it. Many a poor housewife or laborer in the world, however, may do so more successfully. For the secret of sanctity is only the perfection of charity, reached "most easily and quickly", by union with God in contemplation".⁴

This frui Deo, the perfect love, draws the soul

1. Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation, p. 143.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

3. Ibid., p. 144.

4. Thomas Merton, "Death of a Trappist", Integrity, Vol. 2, No. 2. (Nov. 1947) p. 5.

"into such close likeness to God" that it is "transformed into Him", "lost in His infinite perfections".¹ When man has achieved this fusion he has been "delivered from his own selfishness and his own callousness and hardness of heart". "The penetrating fire of infused love has made all selfishness intolerable for him". It has "purged him slowly and inexorably of every desire for created pleasure, every ambition, every hope of fame or power".

St. Augustin, in The City of God, writing on the eternal felicity of that city, shows the beauty and joy of a state where all men were united with God in love.

How great shall be that felicity, which shall be tainted with no evil which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all.

True peace shall be there ... God Himself, who is the author of virtue, shall be its reward.²

Father Louis hails this City of God which becomes immediate actuality for the contemplative. It is a city purged of its social evils, intellectual shortcomings, artistic failure and religious weakness, and enveloped in sanctity.

City, when we see you coming down,
Coming down from God
To be the new world's crown:
How shall they sing, the fresh, unsalted seas

1. Thomas Merton, "Death of a Trappist, Integrity,

2. St. Augustine, The City of God, N.Y. Random House (1950) p. 865.

Hearing your harmonies!

Oh City, when we see you sailing down,
Sailing down from God,
Dressed in the glory of the Trinity, and angel-crowned
In nine white diadems of liturgy.¹

1. Thomas Merton, Figures for an Apocalypse, p. 27.

CHAPTER VIII

RESPONSIBILITY OF MODERN MAN: THE CLIMB

Thomas Merton's spiritual epic unravels as a strange and gripping story. Using Dante's symbolism for Purgatory, the author portrays the great miracle of grace in seven storeys up the mountain from the amoral life of a modern pagan to the summit of perfected human joy and liberty in a life dedicated to contemplation.

Dante begins the first canto of his Purgatorio:

... of that second region will I sing,
In which the human spirit from sinful blot
Is purg'd and for ascent to Heaven prepares.¹

The young Merton remained all his early youth in the ante-purgatory at the foot of the hill, before he began the climb that was his "search for liberty".² Highly gifted in the natural order, the future poet and writer was prepared by heredity and training for a life unfettered by any mediocrity. In place of religion he was given a strange mixture of artistic idealism and intellectual integrity, a dissatisfaction with coarseness and materialism in a world from which his parents strove to shield him.

1. Dante Alighieri, Purgatory, (The Rev. H. F. Cary A.M., Translator) New York, Wurtele Lovelle, 1881, Canto I p. 121.

2. Dante, op. cit., Canto I, p. 123.

The author introduces the reader to his parents in his Seven Storey Mountain:

My father and mother were captives in that world, knowing they did not belong with it or in it, and yet unable to get away from it. They were in the world and yet not of it, not because they were saints but in a different way because they were artists.¹

Then he remarks:

The integrity of the artist lifts a man above the level of the world without delivering him from it.²

This son of artist parents further explains the integrity of those serious young people:

Neither of my parents suffered from the little spooky prejudices that devour the people who knew nothing but automobiles and movies and what's in the ice-box and what's in the papers and which neighbours are getting a divorce.³

The inheritance of "integrity, versatility, capacity for work", "vision", "enjoyment", and "expression" that ought to have made the young modern a "kind of king", had the standards of the world been those of faith, merely prepared him to become a superior sort of product of his age. He admits that he was moulded "in the image of the world into which he was born", created to love God, yet living in fear and in the morass of hopeless, self-contradictory energies.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 3.

2. Ibid., p. 3.

3. Ibid., p. 3.

In Prades, France, this first son of the Merton's was baptized. His father obtained this for him because he himself had been brought up a faithful Anglican. Of this baptism, however, Thomas writes:

I don't think there was much power in the waters of the baptism I got in Prades, to untwist the warping of my essential freedom, or loose me from the devils that hung like vampires on my soul.¹

For a little while the Merton family lived in the peace and the beauty of the French mountain valley. The love for such solitude and intimacy with nature that held the young writer throughout his life seems to have possessed his soul in Prades in the first year of his life. The picture of these years is idyllic:

My mother would paint in the hills under a large canvas parasol, and father would paint in the sun and the friends would drink red wine and gaze out over the valley.²

Merton preserves memories as an artist does, in pictures, and as a musician in sounds. He writes in this same bucolic strain of his early life in Flushing, New York, after his younger brother was born.

Every evening it was the same tune (that the baby, John Paul, sang) very simple, very primitive, a nice little tune, very suitable for the time of day and for the season. Downstairs we would all fall more or less silent, lulled by the singing of the child in the crib, and we would see the sunrays slanting across the fields

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 6.

and through the windows as the day ended.¹

There was never any religious instruction for the Merton children. Thomas reveals that although his parents were concerned almost to the point of scrupulosity about keeping the minds of their sons uncontaminated by error and mediocrity and ugliness and sham, they had not bothered to give them any formal religious training. His mother seemed to consider organized religion as below the standard of intellectual perfection she wished for them. Thomas was five years old when his Anglican grandmother taught him The Lord's Prayer.

At this time, too, Thomas's education was begun according to progressive ideas. The system seems to have been that of John Stuart Mill and the philosophy that of Freud. The general notion was to confront the child with what was finest in literature and history and science and allow him to absorb it.

Thus the bent of his mind began to be shaped and he built up the vague fragment of a religion and of a philosophy which remained hidden and implicit in his acts. These asserted themselves in "a deep and all-embracing attachment" to his own will and judgment, a "constant turning from subjection", even to things, and a need for freedom of

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 8.

outlook and situation.¹

Mrs. Merton wished her son to be independent, original, individual; to have a definite character of his own not to run with the herd, or be cut from the common bourgeois pattern.

As the mother died in 1921, the training was not permitted to make of the Merton boys good-mannered, polite, intelligent sceptics. Musing over this Thomas writes: "The way would have been all smooth and perhaps I would never have ended up as a monk". This, of course, was the last thing his mother would have dreamed of, "the boomerang of all her solicitude" for an individual development.

Young Mrs. Merton herself informed her little son by mail of her approaching death. He was not allowed to see her. She feared it would make a child morbid to see illness and death. Since this was a death without any prayer or sacrament "to stabilize and make some meaning" of it, Merton admits that it was probably a good thing that he was not plunged into the naked suffering of this emotional crisis.² He did not know enough to pray for his mother; it was not until twenty years later, when he became a Catholic, that it finally occurred to him to pray for her soul.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

In Exitu Israel de Aegypto
All with one voice together sang
... If ye know
Declare what path will lead us to the Mount.¹

Now began a new phase in the preparation of Thomas Merton's soul for its ascent up Dante's Mountain.

For a period of some years after his mother's death Thomas travelled with his father. They sought places to paint. For a while his father filled an ambassadorial post² Merton calls this his "prisoner's-base stage". Sometimes he stayed with his father and did not go to school. Sometimes he was left at various boarding houses and attended school. He met all kinds of people and heard all sorts of talk and this he drank in with his wide-open and acquisitive understanding. He was becoming a young cosmopolite, a citizen of the world.

After a successful exhibition of his work in New York, Owen Merton went to Europe, leaving Thomas with his grandparents in Douglaston. In this family the movies were "the family religion" and the Capitol Theatre in New York, his grandfather's "favourite place of worship".³

Merton's grandfather, whom he calls "Pop" in Seven Storey Mountain, was a member of the Masonic Order, the

1. Dante, op. cit., Canto II, p. 126.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 20.

3. Ibid., p. 22.

Knights Templars. Perhaps because of this, all religions were acceptable to him except of those of Jews and Catholics. Merton says that the Catholic Church was the only one against which he had ever heard his grandfather speak with any definite bitterness or animosity.¹

Part of the young boy's sparse religious training had been the impressing upon him of the idea of the wickedness of the Catholic Church. Because of the dishonesty of certain New York politicians at that time, Catholicism came to be associated in his mind with everything crooked and immoral. This hatred and suspicion of Catholics took root in young Thomas Merton's mind and became part of his mental attitude.

Now Mr. Merton rejoined his son again and both went to live in France. Thomas has a great love and veneration for France, le Midi, especially. He writes of his return in 1925:

... returning to the land of my birth, I was also returning to the fountains of the intellectual and spiritual life of the world to which I belonged.²

Flying over Orleans, Thomas's father told him the story of Joan of Arc and this impressed him deeply. It may have been the first awakening to the touch of actual grace

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 25.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

in this young child's soul:

Maybe the thought of her, acting as a kind of implicit prayer by the veneration and love it enkindled in me, won me her intercession in heaven, so that through her I was able to get some sort of actual grace out of the sacrament of her land, and to contemplate God without realizing it in all the poplars along those streams, in all the low roofed houses gathered about the village churches, in the woods and in the farms, and the bridged rivers.¹

I
Ante-Purgatory

... For how of him
Depriv'd, might I have sped, or who beside
Would o'er the mountainous tract have led my step?²

... Meanwhile we had arrived
Far as the mountain's foot and there the rock,
Found of so steep ascent, that nimblest steps
to climb it had been vain.³

Now the soul of Thomas Merton was to be launched upon the perilous beginning of his ante-purgatorial climb, steep and difficult and fraught with mortal danger. After a year at the village school of St. Antonin, Thomas went as a resident student to a French Lycee at Montauban. This was a devastating experience for the young boy. After describing the school, he writes: "I was to have my fill of bitterness in those building in due time."⁴

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 32.

2. Dante, op. cit., p. 128.

3. Ibid., p. 129.

4. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 48.

Now began the process of corruption of that young soul with all its beautiful propensities for good, the frightening spiritual decay that is the corollary of modern secular education. The picture he draws of the brutality and bestiality of the young boys in this French Lycee causes the reader's mind to recoil in revulsion. Soon the innocent little Thomas had learned "a great deal of obscenity and blasphemy ... simply by being the direct or indirect object of so much of it".¹

And now the mature Christian Thomas comments upon this phase of his education:

What is the good of religion without personal spiritual direction; without sacraments; without any means of grace except a desultory prayer now and then at intervals, and an occasional vague sermon?²

The future writer, however, was already evolving. His favourite pastime at the Lycee seems to have been writing novels. All the villains in these stories were Catholics, who were, for some strange reason, in league with Spain.³

Thomas's father, meanwhile, was becoming more and more an intimate and potent influence in his life, militating against the corroding influences of secular education.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 49.

2. Ibid., p. 53.

3. Ibid., p. 52.

Owen Merton seems to have been a sort of "natural" saint, a man of deep natural virtue. The integrity and idealism of an artist of high calibre were infused with great sweetness and gentleness of character. Towards his son he evidenced an intelligent understanding and that tenderness untouched by sentimentality that is the counterpoint of strength of soul. While he lived he unerringly guided his son towards the mount he was to climb with such labour and pain in after years. Likening his father to Leon Bloy, Merton says:

If he had been a Catholic, his vocation as a lay-contemplative would certainly have developed along the same lines (as Bloy's). He had the same spiritual poverty and all of Bloy's hatred of materialism and of false spiritualities.¹

In 1928 the Mertons left their beautiful France and its frightful Lycees. Thomas was put to school at Ealing in England. Here, at last, he went to church regularly and sang hymns and read Pilgrim's Progress. Later he was to consider the two years he spent there as his "religious phase".² With clear-sighted self-analysis he criticizes his own lack of religious stability:

If the impulse to worship God and to adore Him in truth by the goodness and order of our own lives is nothing more than a transitory and emotional thing that is our own fault ... We talk about what is substantially deep and powerful and lasting moral

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 55.

2. Ibid., p. 65.

impetus supernatural in its origin ... and reduce it to the level of our own weak and unstable and futile fancies and desires.¹

In two years Thomas prepared for the English Public Schools and registered at Oakham. He calls his experience there "the harrowing of hell". At Oakham, religious and moral training consisted mostly in vague ethical remarks on obscure ideals of English "gentlemanliness". Charity, here, meant good-sportsmanship, cricket, the decent thing, wearing the right kind of clothes, using the proper spoon, not being a cad or a bounder.²

Now his education was beginning to bear fruit and by 1930 Merton became infected with an "intellectual rebellion ... and found himself an individuality with an unhealthy egotistic turn". St. Thomas tells us that "it is the part (in grace) of man to prepare his soul, since he does this by his free will".³ Yet if God was moving him and drawing him to Himself,⁴ Thomas Merton was not yet corresponding to that grace. Through the years when Thomas was being given the "best in secular education and was building up the mentality of a secular man, we are given a practical example of the

1. Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 73.

3. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, "The Necessity of Grace", Part 2, Q. 109, Art. 7. p. 1129.

4. Cf. Ibid.

necessity of God's grace and the devastation that breeds in its absence. The very disgust and despair generated in Thomas's soul through these years was to be used by God to prepare his will for the great graces of the future.¹

Owen Merton was ill now, suffering from a tumour on the brain. Remembering his desolation, Thomas writes that he was

... without a home, without a family, without a country without a father, apparently without any friends, without any interior peace or confidence or light or understanding of my own - without God too ... without grace, without anything.²

His father's death in 1930 plunged Thomas into a depression, which, at its passing, left his soul devastated.

Moral rebellion and apparent emancipation now became the dominating interests in the life of this young derelict, cut loose from the cables of any confining influence. The secular education which was now his only source of enlightenment pandered to his pitiful idealism. He found himself completely stripped of everything that "impedes the movement" of his own will to do as he pleased. Imagining he was free, it took him five or six years to "discover what a frightful captivity" he was really in.³

1. Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., Art 6, Q 109, p.1127.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 71.

3. Ibid., p. 85.

Now, he tells us, his "dry soul" finally sloughed off any last traces of religion it may have had. Later he laments:

There was no room for any God in that empty temple, full of dust and rubbish, which I was so jealously to guard against all intruders in order to devote it to the worship of my own stupid will.¹

Thomas Merton was now the "complete twentieth century man" who belonged to the world of poison gas and atomic bomb; a man "with veins full of poison, living in death".²

During the summer of 1931, Merton fancied himself in the role of a Communist. He was not sure what Communism was, as is the case of so many, "who do no little harm by their sheer inertia, lost as they are in their own confusion".³ He considered himself a great rebel who had risen above all the errors and stupidities of modern society. Still through all runs the thread of his determined seeking for better. He sought it in the wrong places and wrong things, however, and would continue in frustration until the Christian religion taught him to "walk the ways of grace".

When illness overtook the pagan adolescent and he

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 85.

2. Ibid., p. 85.

3. Ibid., p. 93.

found himself facing death, there was no Ignatian conversion for there were no lives of the saints for him to read. He lay on his bed "full of gangrene" and his soul "rotten with the corruption of his sins", and filled with coldness and indifference even in the face of death, "without any compunction nor any faith".¹ Indeed, in that year the thought of God or of prayer brought to his mind only denial and rejection. When the students stood in the chapel and recited the Creed, he shut his lips tightly, thus stubbornly declaring: "I believe in nothing".

Of the state of his soul at that time, Merton later writes:

My soul was simply dead. It was blank, a nothingness ... it was a kind of spiritual vacuum as far as the supernatural order was concerned. Even its natural faculties were shrivelled husks of what they ought to have been.²

2
Purgatory — First Terrace

... Nearer now we draw,
Arrived, whence in that part, where first a breach
As of a wall appear'd, I could decry
A portal, and three steps beneath that led
For inlet there ...³

The soul of the young Thomas Merton had, no doubt, reached the nadir of its misery. But at this lowest ebb of

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 97.

2. Ibid., p. 97.

3. Dante, op. cit., Canto IX, p. 151.

his soul's darkness, the first of a great series of graces was waiting for him. Like Dante, he stood at the gate of the "Purgatory" of the soul's life. He had still to mount the "trinal steps" of Faith, Hope and Charity. He had still to be inscribed by the Angel's sword with the sevenfold mark of his "inward stain". He had still to hear and recognize the Angel's admonition: "Look ... When entered, that thou wash thine scars away".¹

Having finished at Oakham in 1932, Merton visited Rome where he was to meet with the first of these graces. Faith was here to cause some first faint stirrings in his soul. Hope was to light his days for a little while and he was to recognize the love of God through the human Christ of Rome's frescoes and of the Gospel story.

Quickly bored and fatigued by the ugly ruins of the Rome of the Empire, the young artist wandered by accident into a Byzantine Church. It was through his artistic gift that God was to come to his soul. Stirred and drawn by the beauty of the churches he now haunted, he visited all the great shrines of Rome like a pilgrim, though unfortunately without any spiritual reason. He exclaims, however:

... yet it was not for the wrong reason either. For these mosaics and frescoes and all the ancient altars and thrones and sanctuaries were designed and built

1. Dante, op. cit., p. 152.

for the instruction of people who were not capable of immediately understanding anything higher.¹

From these shrines Thomas began to get some obscure but true conception of Christ. From the Presence of Christ corporeally in the tabernacles, he began to receive the grace of God. His artist's mind caught something of the ancient craftsman's love of Christ.²

In order to understand the stories of the frescoes the young pilgrim read the New Testament. His love of the old churches grew from day to day and now he revisited them not only for the art but for the deepening interior peace that came to him in those holy places. So far, there had been no conversion of the will.

Suddenly one evening he felt, in his room, the presence of his dead father, who seemed to be communicating to him an interior light from God about the condition of his soul. For the first time in his life he prayed:

... out of the roots of my life and of my being, and praying to the God I had never known to reach down towards me out of His darkness and to help me to get free of the thousand terrible things that held my will in slavery.³

The next morning the deeply moved and awed son went to the Dominican Church, Santa Sabina, took holy water at the

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 108.

2. Ibid., p. 108.

3. Ibid., p. 111.

door and went straight up to the altar rail, knelt, and said the Our Father with all the belief he had in him. Then for a little while he had peace and joy in his heart.

Without the sustaining power of the sacraments, however, when he withdrew from the atmosphere of love and holiness and went to university at Cambridge, he soon lost this new-found peace of soul. The Cambridge interlude left him with a deep and abiding bitterness. He spent his days trying to stamp out of his soul the liberty God's grace had been planting there. After a year of such life, he went to America for the summer and did not return.¹

Still the young Merton was in the state of Dantè's pilgrims on his first terrace of Purgatory

... all sore beset
But with unequal anguish, wearied all
Round the first circuit, purging as they go
The world's gross darkness off.²

The "mercy-tempered justice" would enable him to "stretch his wings" to find the "ladder which leads the shortest way". Now the pilgrim had

... reach'd the summit of the scale and stood
Upon the second buttress of that mount
Which healeth him who climbs.³

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 111.
 2. Dante, op. cit., Canto XI, p. 156.
 3. Dante, op. cit., Canto XIII, p. 163.

3
Second Terrace

Writing of his return to America to make his permanent home there, Thomas Merton thanks Our Lady for this grace:

Lady, when, on that night I left the Island that was once your England, your love went with me, although I could not know it and could not make myself aware of it. And it was your love, your intercession for me before God, which opened the seas before my ship ... whose track lead me across the waters to the place I had never dreamed of and which you were even then preparing for me, to be my reserve and my shelter and my home. And when I thought there was no God, and no love, and no mercy, you were leading me all the while into the midst of His love and His mercy.¹

By this time Thomas was too miserable to go on with his strange vague hedonism. It did not take much reflection to show him that his dreams of fantastic pleasure and delight were crazy and absurd and that everything he had reached out for had turned to ashes. He now found that he was vain, self-centered, dissolute, weak and undisciplined. "Even the sight of my own face in a mirror", he tells us, "was enough to disgust me".²

Finally, Merton concluded that he, with all his sins and faults, was the product of the times. He traced the corruption of his age to the abuses of Capitalism, and Communism seemed to be the cure-all. He explains that Communism seemed plausible because he failed to distinguish

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 129.

2. Ibid., p. 133.

between the reality of the evils which it was trying to overcome and the validity of its diagnosis, and the chosen cure.

The soul of the young college man was striving at this period for some sort of moral reform. With this came a conviction that he must do something about the evils of society and the problems of his time. In his biography, Thomas Merton now frequently identifies first his own soul and its ills, and later the sins of all twentieth century men, with the trouble and hate and degradation in the social and political life of his time. We find this theme in his biography by inference, in The Waters of Siloe, and phrased with bitter conviction in his poems. At no time in his life was his Communism any more than a vague idealism, a passive acceptance of the tenets of the system. The Communistic phase lasted three months.

At Cambridge Thomas's ambition was to experience as much pleasure as possible. At Columbia it seemed to be to accomplish as much work as possible. There were no repetitions in his life — mistake followed mistake, perhaps, but each was a new one, not so vicious as the last and each a stepping stone in his climb up the mount of penance to virtue.

At Columbia Merton worked hard at many things and achieved a high scholastic record. He wrote for all the

student publications. His writings in these periodicals drip with bitterness over the social evils inherent in student life.¹ At the end of his second year he collapsed from overwork and fatigue, "overstimulation", the doctor called it. This psychological illness was so distressful that it is rather a wonder that he did not lose his mind.

Frank Sheed tells us that sanity means living mentally in the real world. "But some of the most important elements in the real world", Sheed explains, "can be known only by the revelation of God which it is theology's business to study."²

Lacking this knowledge (and at this stage Thomas Merton surely lacked it) the mind must live a half-blind life trying to cope with a reality most of which it does not know is there.³

Thomas was trying to cope with a reality which, perhaps, he did not know was there, but which was driving, impelling him in the search — urging him up his seven storey mountain.

Now the ascent towards conversion was becoming more rapid. The story becomes the thrilling adventure of the

1. Cf. Thomas Merton, Columbia Jester, "Oasis", V. 40 (Sept. '40) pp. 38-39.

2. Frank Sheed, Theology and Sanity, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1948, p. 2.

3. Frank Sheed, op cit., p. 2.

ever perpetrated miracle of grace. The loving "hounding" of the Redeemer can be traced from Merton's very birth. Now at Columbia the footsteps were coming nearer.

4

Third Terrace

Dante's angel says to the pilgrim as he reaches the third terrace of the purgatorial climb:

If these my words avail not to allay
Thy thirsting, Beatrice thou shalt see,
Who of this want, and of all else thou hast,
Shall rid thee to the full. Provide but thou
That from thy temple may be soon erased
E'en as the two already, those five scars
That when they pain thee worst, then kindest heal.¹

As the angel encouraged Dante with the hope of seeing Beatrice, the symbol of Reason, so Columbia held graces for Thomas Merton that were to enlighten his reason and finally illumine his soul.

The first influence for good that Thomas Merton's soul found at Columbia came from Mark Van Doren. With his thoroughly scholastic outlook, Professor Van Doren interpreted literature with a sane moral judgment and led his students to a critical rejection of the banal and futile and unbalanced in books. Dr. Van Doren remained Merton's friend and adviser until the day when, not a Catholic himself, he spoke to Thomas of the priesthood.

In 1937 Thomas Merton signed up for a course in

1. Dante, op. cit., Canto XV, p. 172.

French Medieval Literature. He found that his mind was now turning back to the things of the old St. Antonin days. The deep, naive, rich simplicity of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were beginning to speak to his soul. He was being drawn into a Catholic atmosphere and could feel the healing power of its working within him.¹

The grace of God leading the young intellectual upward seemed to be saying to his heart, as did Dante's guide: "What thou sawest, Was shown, that freely thou mightst open thy heart To the waters that flow diffused From their eternal fountains".²

Now unobtrusively grace was directing his reason along definite channels where fidelity would soon win for him the gift of Faith. It seemed to be just an accident that he bought and read Gilson's Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, yet of it Merton writes: "The one big concept which I got out of its pages was something that was to revolutionize my life".³ He was particularly moved by the scholastic concept of God as Aseity: that God is the pure act of existing.

As a result of the reading of Gilson, Merton at once

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 171.
 2. Dante, op. cit., Canto XV, p. 172.
 3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 172.

acquired an immense respect for Catholic Philosophy and for the Catholic Faith he had been brought up to fear and despise. He recognized at last that Faith was something that had a very definite meaning and a most logical necessity.¹

Now Thomas began to go to church a little — to the Protestant Episcopal Church, where his father had played the organ, for he lived at Douglaston while he attended Columbia. He began, too, to pray a little. This was in the midst of his illness and he writes that the prayer had enough of healing so that he was again able to return to Columbia after some weeks of absence.

It was chiefly through the medium of human friendship that the Holy Ghost worked His ways of grace in the soul of the young man who was striving now very earnestly to follow His inspiration. Merton explains this:

God brought me and a half a dozen others together at Columbia and made us friends in such a way that our friendship would work powerfully to rescue us from the confusion and misery in which we had come to find ourselves ... and our common respect for Mark's (Van Doren) sanity and wisdom did much to make us aware of how much we ourselves had in common.²

Books, of course, were always important to Thomas Merton and it is not surprising that they should be used by

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 175.

2. Ibid., p. 178.

the Holy Ghost in his conversion. In the winter of 1938 Merton received his degree and began working on his M. A. thesis. William Blake's poetry was an early love of his life and he now returned to it and chose it as subject for his thesis. Constant contact with Blake for many months had the result of making him conscious of the necessity of a vital faith. It brought him to recognize the "unsubstantiality and unreality" of the "dead, selfish rationalism" which had been numbing his mind and will for seven years.¹ Merton writes of this new experience:

Before the summer was over I was to become conscious of the fact that the only way to live was to live in a world that was charged with the presence and reality of God. Yet this consciousness was still simply an intellectual realization and did not yet involve the love of God.²

It was in the summer of 1938 that Thomas Merton began reading the Imitation of Christ, on the suggestion of Bramichari, a Hindu student at Columbia. Now, too, in the midst of his studies on Blake, Merton was reading Maritain and Scholastic Philosophy. Up to this time the young student had tried to resolve his problems and those of the world into a matter of sociological laws and economic forces divorced from Faith and Charity. He writes of Blake's influence:

-
1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 191.
 2. Ibid., p. 191.

... I who had always been anti-naturalistic (like Blake) in art, had been pure naturalist in the moral order. No wonder my soul was sick and torn apart, but now the bleeding wound was drawn together by the notion of Christian virtue, ordered to the union of the soul with God.¹

At this stage Merton not only accepted what he was reading in Gilson and Maritain, Aquinas and a Kempis; he had now begun to desire it. He was receiving what St. Thomas calls co-operating grace and was soon to evidence the third effect of grace in his soul: to carry into effect the good proposed.²

He had begun to desire to dedicate his life to God, to His service. He writes that still this notion was vague, obscure and impractical. Nevertheless he was convinced now of the reality of the goal and confident that it could be achieved. Merton proclaims that his muddle of good desires and intentions with human weaknesses and wrong habits of life could only be resolved by grace and docility to grace.³

One Sunday, alone and of his own volition, prompted by some unrecognized grace, he went to Mass at eleven o'clock in Corpus Christi Church. For the first time, he writes, he saw people, men and women and children, young and old, real, living, vital people, go to church simply to pray.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 203

2. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, "The Division of Grace", Q. 111, A. 4.

3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 204.

And there they prayed sincerely, without self-consciousness. He was impressed by the seriousness and the prayerful atmosphere and he was touched by the sermon.

A young assistant spoke on the humanity and divinity of Christ as given us by the teaching of the Church. He concluded:

And no one can believe these things merely by wanting to, of his own volition. Unless he receives grace, an actual light and impulsion, of the mind and will, from God, he cannot even make an act of living Faith. It is God, Who gives us faith, and no one cometh to Christ unless the Father draweth him.¹

Merton writes that when the Mass of the Catechumans was over he understood no more and as the solemn part of the Mass approached he was driven from the church by fear.

I suppose I was responding to some kind of liturgical instinct that told me I did not belong there for the celebration of the Mysteries as such.²

Peace and contentment now flooded his soul and he could not understand what had made him so happy, for he was "not yet used to the clean savour that comes with actual grace". It was the sermon that most impressed him with a conviction of the co-ordination, purpose and effect, the vitality, the inevitable sureness of Catholic doctrines.³

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 210. Account of a sermon by Father Moore, Corpus Christi Church.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 210.

3. Ibid., p. 212.

Soon after this, while reading of the conversion of Gerard Manley Hopkins and of his letter to Newman, Merton was impelled to go to Corpus Christi Church to see Father Ford. He wished to become a Catholic.

Father Moore, the young priest who had preached the sermon the Sunday of Thomas's first Mass, was to be his instructor. Merton writes of his teaching: "It is one of the most tremendous things in the world, this planting of the word of God in a soul".¹ His desire for baptism grew and burned in him as he attended the men's mission: "listening twice a day to sermons ... and hearing Mass and kneeling at Benediction before the Christ Who was gradually revealing Himself to me".²

After the mission he asked to receive baptism soon. On the sixteenth of November, 1938, his desire was realized. Bob Lax, Seymour Freedgood, Ed Rice and Bob Gerdy assisted. Ed Rice became his godfather — all the others were Jews. Remembering his answered Credo to Father Moore's questions, he mused:

What mountains were falling from my shoulders.
What scales of dark night were peeling off my
intellect, to let in the inward vision of God and
His Truth!³

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 217.

2. Ibid., p. 217.

3. Ibid., p. 223.

5
Fourth Terrace

... I perceived
 Near me, as 'twere the waving of a wing,
 That fanned my face and whispered "Blessed they
 The peacemakers: they know not evil wrath".
 ... And waiting a short space,
 If aught should meet mine ear in that new round.
 Then to my guide I turned and said, "Lord, sire,
 Declare what guilt is in this circle purg'd".
 He thus to me: "The love of good, whate'er
 Wanted of just proportion, here fulfils,
 Here plies afresh the oar, that loiter'd ill."¹

The soul of Thomas Merton like Dante, was now reaching the higher levels of the hill of the seven terraces that symbolizes the moral purgatory of repentant sinners in this world, where man by penance and good works becomes free from the tyranny of vice, attaining to intellectual and moral freedom.²

After the great gift of baptism the grace of God became like eagle's wings to his soul and he mounted, thereafter, steadily and swiftly.

Even before his baptism Merton had talked to professor Dan Walsh about becoming a priest. Now, in September, the thought possessed him fully. At the Jesuit Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York, at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, it became clear to him that he must make

L. Dante, op. cit., Canto XVII, p. 180.

2. Cf. Charles A. Dinsmore, Aids to the Study of Dante, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1903, p. 305.

a decision. He prayed that God would make him a priest.¹

Again, the young convert sought advice from Professor Dan Walsh. Together they discussed various religious orders. Merton discovered from this conversation:

What I needed was the solitude to expand in breadth and depth and to be simplified out under the gaze of God more or less the way a plant spreads out its leaves in the sun. That meant that I needed a Rule that was almost entirely aimed at detaching me from the world and uniting me with God. But I did not find out all that in one day.²

The new convert was rather frightened at the thought of entering any monastery. He was filled with misgivings about fasting and enclosure and long prayers and community life and monastic obedience and poverty. When Professor Walsh talked of the Cistercians, Merton shared his admiration but had no desire to join that Order. The seed was sown, however, and the growth of his Cistercian vocation shows forth unerringly the admirable working of divine grace in a faithful soul.

Professor Walsh told his student of the Trappist Monastery, of the life of the monks, of their silence, of the canonical hours, of their work in the fields and of their fasting. Merton feared the rigour of Trappist life and the talk ended by Professor Walsh's giving him a note to Father

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 255.

2. Ibid., p. 260.

Edmund, A Franciscan at the Monastery of St. Francis of Assisi in New York.

With Father Edmund, Merton arranged to make application to the Franciscan novitiate for the following August. In the intervening year, he was advised to continue his studies for his doctorate, at Columbia, and to take a position teaching English there.

Now the new convert, a daily communicant and an aspirant to the novitiate of a religious order, was at peace and very happy. Each afternoon he went to Corpus Christi Church to pray and make the Way of the Cross. Now, too, he attempted to meditate. He went through the exercises of St. Ignatius, alone, and without direction, at his home. Over a period of a month he spent an hour a day in meditation.¹ Now he says he was at home at last:

But I was still new-born. I was living: I had an interior life, real, but feeble and precarious. And I was still nursed and fed with spiritual milk. The life of grace had at last, it seemed, become constant, permanent. Weak and without strength as I was, I was nevertheless walking in the way that was liberty and life ... my eyes were beginning to open to the powerful and constant light of heaven and my will was at last learning to give in to the subtle and gentle and loving guidance of that love which is life without end.²

Merton was preparing for the Franciscan novitiate with pleased excitement. His entrance seemed to involve no

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 268.

2. Ibid., p. 277.

sacrifice and little inconvenience. Suddenly his peace was shattered when he considered who he was, what he had been and how much he had sinned.¹ He realized that neither Professor Walsh nor Father Edmund knew much of the life he had led before he entered the Church. Now he feared that, if they had, they would not consider him fit material for a novitiate. Filled with anguish he prayed, "My God, please take me into the monastery. But anyway, whatever You want: Your Will be done".²

The worried applicant explained his fears to Father Edmund, who considered that he was only a recent convert, not yet two years in the Church; that he had had an unsettled life; that his vocation was by no means sure; that he was upset with doubts and misgivings; and that the novitiate was full in any case. Father Edmund told Thomas to write the Provincial and withdraw his application.

Thomas describes his sentiments:

There was nothing I could say. I could only hang my head and look about me at the ruins of my vocation ... There seemed to me to be no question that I was now excluded from the priesthood forever.³

Stumbling out of the monastery, Merton groped his way dazed and numb, to the Church of the Capuchins.

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 296.

2. Ibid., p. 297.

3. Ibid., p. 297.

Confused and miserable, he tried to go to confession to a young monk. Merton describes his experience:

I couldn't explain myself properly and so he got my story all mixed up. Evidently he decided that I was only complaining and trying to get around the decision that had been made by some religious order that had fired me out of their novitiate, probably for some good reason. The whole thing was so hopeless that finally, in spite of myself, I began to choke and sob ... So the priest, probably judging that I was some emotional and unstable and stupid character, began to tell me in very strong terms that I certainly did not belong in the monastery, still less the priesthood, and, in fact, gave me to understand that I was simply wasting his time and insulting the Sacrament of Penance by indulging my self-pity in his confessional.¹

When he came out of the confessional, the boy was filled with a tremendous misery and the belief that he had no vocation to the cloister.

6

Fifth Terrace

... On the fifth circle when I stood at large
A race appear'd before me, on the ground
All downward lying prone and weeping sore,
"My soul hath cleaved to dust", I heard
With sighs so deep, they well nigh choak'd the words.
"O ye elect of God ...

direct

Towards the steep rising our uncertain way".
"If ye approach secure ...
And would urge your course with speed,
See that ye still to rightward keep the brink".²

As with Dante reaching the fifth terrace, so the young penitent received, in the midst of woe, the inspiration

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 298.

2. Dante, op. cit., p. 187.

not only to go on steadfastly upward, but to "keep to rightward", to the road which would eventually lead to contemplation.

Now he came to the resolve that if he could not enter a monastery he would live in the world as if he were a monk. He would join the Third Order, live as close as possible to the life he was not allowed to lead, live under the same roof as the Blessed Sacrament and teach in a Catholic College. He explains:

I knew that I wanted grace, and that I needed prayer and that I was helpless without God, and that I wanted to do everything that people did to keep close to Him.¹

He bought the four volumes of the Breviary and said it every day. This, he writes, was the most powerful and effective prayer he could have chosen,

since it is the prayer of the whole Church, and concentrates in itself all the power of the Church's impetration, centered around the infinitely mighty Sacrifice of the Mass, the jewel of which the rest of the liturgy is the setting, the soul which is the life of the whole liturgy and of all the Sacraments.²

Merton later realized that the inspiration to buy those books was a very great grace. Few things ever gave him more joy. Through the inspired pages, God was sending forth His Spirit, uttering His divine Word and binding the

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 301.

2. Ibid., p. 301.

young convert to Himself.¹

Teaching at St. Bonaventure's, Merton lived the life of an ascetic. He managed to free himself from his old habits and luxuries — no smoking — no movies — no worldly reading. He lived in quiet and seclusion.

The breaking of bonds was not easy. Although his soul was in harmony with itself and with God, he was still obsessed with the "sheer , brute difficulty of it" and the "crushing humiliation" of his former sins that hurt him all the time. Yet the peace of union with God was all-rewarding and he explains its great power in his soul:

Every day it brought me back to Christ's altars, and to my daily Bread that infinitely holy and mighty and secret wholesomeness that was cleansing and strengthening my sick being through and through and feeding with His infinite life my poor shredded sinew of morality.²

In February 1941, Merton conceived the idea of making a retreat during Holy Week at the Trappist Monastery about which Professor Walsh had told him. When he arrived at the monastery the silence and peace and holiness of the place enfolded him in love and safety. That silence spoke to him eloquently, telling him that this was the House of the Mother of God.³ He wonders how he ever got out of there

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 303.

2. Ibid., p. 305.

3. Ibid., p. 371.

back into the world, after tasting the sweetness and the kindness of the love with which he was welcomed there.

The many Masses said at the altars set around the church in cave-like apertures—Holy Communion in that atmosphere of intensified prayer—the conventual Mass in the superb dignity of its simplicity—the divine office chanted by voices whose beauty is reserved for that alone—the Lenten liturgy carried out with a splendour, intellectual and effective—all this dilated his heart to bursting. Before leaving Gethsemani to return to work, he asked for the grace of a vocation to the Cistercians if it were pleasing to God.¹

Back at St. Bonaventure's he prayed to a new friend, the Little Flower of Jesus: "Show me what to do ... If I get into the monastery I will be your monk".² He wrote to the Abbot of Gethsemani and asked to come to make a retreat at Christmas, suggesting that he might be coming as a postulant.

7
Sixth Terrace

Now we had left that angel, who had turn'd
To the sixth circle our ascending step
One gash from off my forehead raz'd while they,
Whose wishes tend to justice shouted forth:
"Blessed"! and ended with, "I thirst" and I,
More nimble than along the other straits

1. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 332.

2. Ibid., p. 364.

So journey'd that, without the sense of toil
I follow'd upward the swift-footed shades.¹

So now Thomas, like Dante, had reached his sixth terrace where life was to be all spiritual, where his swift steps mount unimpeded, where the song of his brethern is "Blessed"! and where man's material needs become less pressing till his one cry becomes: "I thirst for God and His love".

Thomas describes his entrance into Gethsemani Abbey: "So Brother Matthew locked the gate behind me and I was enclosed in the walls of my new freedom". He writes of his first night in the monastery:

When we began to chant the Magnificat I almost wept, but that was because I was new in the monastery ... I had reason to weep with thanksgiving and happiness ... in gratitude for my vocation, in gratitude that I was really there at last, really in the monastery, and chanting God's liturgy with His monks.²

Grace was working rapidly in the novice's soul. By Christmas, his first at Gethsemani, he could write:

I was at last beginning to realize the amazing paradox that God, Who is infinitely above me, was also within me ... But oh, if only we will let Him, He will give us, in His own time and according to the ways of His grace, new senses, spiritual senses and a spiritual understanding by which we shall truly have our whole desire, and shall see Him Who is invisible and possess Him and know Him, not merely as an abstract essence but in concreto; as

1. Dante, op. cit., Canto XXII, p. 196.

2. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 380.

the real, present, true God, ut haec essentia realized and as it were, owned by us.¹

With overflowing heart the young monk writes of that Christmas season with its lovely feasts when he tasted "the astounding happiness" of his new emancipation. He writes of his happiness in loving God and in knowing "to some degree" how much he was loved by Him. He calls this his introduction into the life of a Cistercian monk, into the "School of Charity". Yet this was six years before the publication of his biography, when the work of his sanctification was hardly begun. He felt, even then, that much had been done, not by himself—rather, he claims, in spite of himself, by the merciful grace of God.²

Frater Mary Louis concludes his biography by saying: "I am beginning to understand". Having climbed so far, he is "beginning to understand" and he says to his Lord: "You have taught me and have consoled me and I have begun again to hope and learn."³

8

Seventh Terrace

So day was sinking, when the angel of God
Appear'd before us. Joy was in his mien
Forth of the flame he stood up on the brink

1. Thomas Merton, "First Christmas at Gethsemani", Catholic World, v. 170 (Dec. 1949) p. 169.

2. Thomas Merton, ibid., p. 173.

3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 422.

And with a voice, whose lively clearness far
 Surpass'd our human, "Blessed are the pure
 In heart", he sang; then near him as we came,
 "Go ye not further, holy spirits"! he cried
 "Ere the fire pierce you: enter in; and list
 Attentive to the song ye hear from thence" ...¹

From the other side
 A voice, that sang, did guide us, and the voice
 Following, with heedful ear, we issued forth,
 There where the path led upward. "Come", we heard,
 "Come, blessed of my Father". Such were the sounds
 That hail'd us from within a light, which shone
 So radiant, I could not endure the view.²

Frater Mary Louis a professed religious priest has
 still, no doubt, to complete his purgation to "taste the
 true solitude" of anguish and poverty. He shall be led
 into the "high places" of God's joy only when he dies in
 Christ and finds all things in His mercy.³

Faint suggestions of the pain of this last cauteriz-
 ing of his soul come from Father Mary Louis's writings. In
 "September, 1949", he writes of the interior fighting he has
 been doing and still has to do, of spiritual joys that may be
 temptations, of the pain of deprivation of human love, of the
 troubles caused by his artist's temperament.⁴

There is joy abounding, however, in the peaceful

1. Dante, op. cit., p. 214.

2. Dante, op. cit., p. 216.

3. Thomas Merton, Seven Storey Mountain, p. 422.

4. Cf. Thomas Merton, "September 1949", The Month,
 v. 3 (Feb. '50) p. 107.

CONCLUSION

Amos Wilder, writing in Return to Poetry, discusses the role of the poet today. He holds that the poet must be the index or prophet who reminds us with insistence of the costs of social disorder and war. The author, says Wilder, must be preoccupied with the lot of the insecure, the impoverished, the unemployed, the migrant, the evicted, the refugee and the outcast. He must interpret and forecast the more subtle blights of fear, neurosis and bewilderment and "the trend to violence" and "the cults of sensationalism and primitivism",¹

The new mood of clairvoyance, claims Wilder, in its view of the false values of our social order is not new, perhaps, but is more general and more urgent.²

Thomas Merton has fulfilled this role of prophet-poet, analyzing the ills of society with clarity and depth of insight. He speaks with a first-hand knowledge of man's life; he speaks to men he knows, living a life he knows. He writes from his sure understanding of their lack and their need and their incredible ignorance of Christ's message brought to them through the Church.

1. Amos Nivin Wilder, "The Poet in the World Today" in Return to Poetry, John Brunini, Editor, New York, Declan McMullen, 1947, p. 247.

2. Ibid., p. 247.

It is the age-old message that stirred the men of Monte Cassino. It is the same message renewed and freshened in its presentation by the mendicant friars of the ^{13th} century.

Yet orthodox as is his message, Merton's writings have evoked a storm of protest over his thesis that man's ultimate and true fulfilment lies in the full Christian life which finds its perfection in contemplation. The significance of Merton's impact upon contemporary thought is suggested by the prestige of the writers who have entered the fray in his behalf. Controversial articles and replies ^{have been written} by such writers of distinction as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Clifton Fadiman, Dr. F. X. Connolly, Sister Mary Therese Lentfoehr, George McCauliffe, Father Gervase Toelle, O. Carm. James Theilen, Will Lissner and their peers.

The disturbing element in this is that the antagonists include not only non-catholics but informed Christians and even priests and religious.

It is the ancient quarrel of the monks renewed. Once more, Christian truth, as in the time of the friars, Dominic Guzman and Francis of Assissi, wanders "like sparks from a furnace hitherto contained, the furnace of the abnormal love of God".¹ But to Frater Mary Louis, as to

1. G. K. Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1944, page 84.

Dominic and Francis, this "flame of everlasting charity"¹ is rather a normal love of God, and separation from God is abnormal.

Today, as in the days of the foundation of the great mendicant orders, it is feared that this scattering of sparks of the flame of God indiscriminately, "will unbalance the common people with counsels of perfection".² William of St. Amour's Perils of the Latter Times, that urged the Pope to inquire into the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, would no doubt enjoy the popularity of a best seller if a reprint and translation were brought out today.

Just as in the case of the Friars, intellectual men and even members of the Church's hierarchy were "profoundly shocked at such loosening of wild popular preachers among the people"³ so today even religious question the "exaggerations" of Frater Mary Louis' preaching. Prudent and conservative Catholics wonder if this young monk will persevere in his lofty vocation and what will be thought of these writings if he fails to do so.

No man living is confirmed in grace. Original sin and its effects are strong within us. When a man elects to

1. Ordinary of the Mass.

2. G. K. Chesterton, op. cit., p. 84.

3. Ibid., p. 49.

live above nature there is constant peril from the weakness of his human frailty. Yet the imprimatur, imprimi potest nihil obstat, of the Cistercian censors, of Merton's religious superiors, Abbot Dominic Nogues and Dom Frederick Dunne, of the diocesan censor librorum, and finally of His Excellency, John Alexander Floerssh, Archbishop of Louisville and His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, will remain as seals upon those published works. These will testify to the soundness of doctrine, regardless of whatever future tragedy might disfigure this writer's future work.¹ The early works of Origen are still quoted as solid Catholic doctrine. His later defection has not lessened their value in the eyes of the church.

And so the old "mystic nursery rhyme" which suggested the atmosphere of the crisis provoked by the preaching of Dominic and Francis and the writings of Aquinas and Bonaventure may be sung again over the Merton controversy: "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, the Beggars are coming to town."² Still the Beggars sang louder their Canticle to the Sun and the Dominicanes, Hounds of Heaven, bayed louder than ever of the call of the all-sufficing God. Today it is re-echoed

1. Cf. Waters of Siloe, Seven Storey Mountain, Seeds of Contemplation.

2. G. K. Chesterton, op. cit., p. 50.

with conviction and joy and with as startling an impact by such writers as Frater Mary Louis Merton.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Prose Books by Thomas Merton

Exile Ends in Glory, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1948, XII - 311 pages

Seven Storey Mountain, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1948,
429 pages.

Seeds of Contemplation, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions,
200 pages.

Waters of Siloe, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1949, XXIX,
377 pages.

Poetry and the Contemplative Life, included in Figures for
an Apocalypse, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1947.

What is Contemplation, (Pamphlet) Indiana, St. Mary's
College, 1948, 25 pages.

Cistercian Contemplatives, (Pamphlet) Kentucky, Our Lady of
Gethsemani Abbey, 1948, 62 pages.

What are these Wounds, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1950 XII, 311 pgs.

The Columbian, Columbia University Year Book, 1937, Thomas
Merton, Editor, Columbia University Press, 212 pgs.

Poetry Books — Thomas Merton

Thirty Poems, (out of print) New Directions.

A Man in the Divided Sea, (including Thirty Poems) New
York, New Directions, 1946, 155 pages.

Figures for an Apocalypse, New York, New Directions, 1947.

The Tears of the Blind Lion, New York, New Directions, 1950.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles by Thomas Merton

- Active and Contemplative Orders", Commonweal, 47,
Dec. 5, 1947, p. 192-196.
- A Trappist Speaks on People, Priests and Prayer, American
Messenger of the Sacred Heart, 83, April 1948, p.58.
- Christian Devotion, Commonweal, 47, Dec. 26, 1947, p. 270-272.
- Contemplative in a Rocking Chair, Integrity, 2, Aug. 1948,
page 15.
- Death of a Trappist, Integrity, 2, Nov. 1947, p. 3.
- First Christmas at Gethsemani, Catholic World, Vol. 170,
Dec. 1949, page 169.
- Huxley's Pantheon, Catholic World, 152, Nov. 1940, p. 206.
- Is Mysticism Normal, Commonweal, 51, Nov. 4, 1949, p. 94.
- I will be your Monk, (Unpublished portion of Seven Storey
Mountain, Catholic World, Vol. 171, Sept. 1950, p.420
September 1949, The Month, Vol. 3, Feb. 1950, p. 107.
- Todo y Nada, Renascence, Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1950, p. 100.

Chapters by Thomas Merton

- St. Augustine, The City of God, New York, The Modern Library
1950. Introduction by Thomas Merton.
- O'Brien, J.A., (Rev.) Where I found Christ, New York,
Doubleday, 1950. "White Pebbles", by Thomas Merton,
p. 225.

Poems Published in Periodicals — Thomas Merton

- Anniversary of My Baptism, Commonweal, 43 April 18, 1946, p.640
- Canticle for the Blessed Virgin, Commonweal, 46, Aug. 1947,
p.395.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poems Published in Periodicals — Thomas Merton

- Clairvaux Prison, Catholic Worker, 15, Jan. 1948, p. 5.
- Death, Catholic Art Quarterly, 8, 1945, p. 15.
- Duns Scotus, Commonweal, 45, Jan. 31, 1947, p. 397.
- Evening of Zero Weather, Spirit, 14, Nov. 1947, p. 126.
- Flight into Egypt, Spirit, 8, Nov. 1941, p. 148.
- For My Brother, Catholic Art Quarterly, 8, 1945, p. 29.
- In the Ruins of New York, Commonweal, 46, Jan. 6, 1947, p. 182.
- Landscape, Commonweal, 45, Feb. 21, 1947, p. 463.
- Letters to America, Commonweal, 45, Feb. 7, 1947, p. 419.
- Natural History, Commonweal, 45, Dec. 1946, p. 283.
- Quickening of St. John the Baptist, Spirit, 15, May 1948,
page 48-50.
- St. Jerome, Spirit, 14, Jan. 1948, p. 159.
- Sponge Full of Vinegar, Spirit, 8, July 1941, p. 80.
- Theory of Prayer, Commonweal, 47, Oct. 24, 1947, p. 40.
- To the Immaculate Virgin on a Winter Night, Commonweal, 48,
Aug. 6, 1948, p. 398.
- Trappist Abbey: Matins, Spirit, 8, Sept. 1941, p. 111.
- Two States of Prayer.
- Vine, Catholic Art Quarterly, 8, 1945, p. 28.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THOMAS MERTON'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO COLUMBIA JESTER

- Freshman's Guide - 1936
Cover
They Grow in September -
Article, p. 12.
Cartoon - p. 18
Cartoon - p. 21
Cartoon - p. 26
Cartoon - p. 27
- Campaign Issue - 1936
Cartoon - p. 11
Cartoon - p. 18
Did the Reds Get Evander Crotch?
Article, p. 28
Cartoon - p. 29
Cartoon - p. 32
Cartoon - p. 33
- Little-Troubles Issue
- 1936 -
Cartoon - p. 7
Cartoon - p. 10
Cartoon - p. 13
Latins are Lousy Pornographers
Article, p. 14.
Cartoon - p. 14
Concerning Tennyson McGap,
Article, p. 18
Cartoon - p. 20
Cartoon - p. 26
Cartoon - p. 27
Cartoon - p. 30
- December - 1936
Cartoon - p. 21
How Time Goes, Article, p. 26
Your Night to Howl, Article by
Merton and Coit, p. 32.
Cartoon - p. 33
- Medieval Issue - 1937
Cartoon - p. 26
- Varsity Show Issue - 1937
Cartoon - p. 9
Cartoon - p. 39
Cartoon - p. 41
- April - 1937
Cartoon - p. 11
- Fudge (Omnibus Issue
- 1937 -
Cartoon - p. 12
Cartoon - p. 14
Cartoon - p. 25

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THOMAS MERTON'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO COLUMBIA JESTER

- Aftermath - 1939 Cartoon - p. 9
Fable of Heriger - Art., p. 11.
- Varsity Show - 1939 Concerning Tennyson McGap,
Article, p. 7.
- September - 1939 The Question of the Beard,
Article, p. 10.
Cartoons by Tom Merton and Bob
Lax - p. 10-11
Sketch - p. 27.
- October - 1939 Masque of Melancholy, by
Thomas Merton and John
Ford - p. 20-21
- November - 1939 Cartoon - p. 15.
- December - 1939 Carton - p. 22
Cartoon - p. 24
Cartoon - p. 28
- January - 1940 Sketch - p. 7
Cartoons - p. 11
- February - 1940 Cartoon - p. 3
Bearded Ladies - Cartoons,
p. 12-13
Cartoons - p. 18
Cartoons - p. 19
- June - 1940 Cartoon - p. 22.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reviews of A Man in the Divided Sea

Connolly, F.X., Spirit, Vol. 13, Issue of Nov. 1946, p. 150.

Spirit, Vol. 13, Issue of Nov. 1946, p. 150 - 153.

Commonweal, Vol. 45, Issue of Dec. 27, 1946, p. 283.

Dominicana, Vol. 32, Issue of June 1947, p. 29 - 30.

Reviews of Figures for an Apocalypse.

Catholic Worker, Vol. 14, Issue of April 1948, p. 11.

McCauliffe, G., Spirit, Vol. 15, Issue of June 1948, p. 88.

Sweeney, Francis, America, Vol. 79, Issue of June 1948, p. 272.

Reviews of Waters of Siloe

Kennedy, John S., The Catholic Transcript, No Vol., Issue of Sept. 27, 1949, no page.

Markle, Louis A., The Ensign, No Vol., Issue of Oct. 1, 1949, no page.

Mulhorn, Joseph, America, Vol. 16, Issue of Sept. 17, 1949, page 646.

O'Rielly, John B., Canadian Messenger of the Sacred Heart, no Vol., Issue of July 1950, no page.

Review of Tears of the Blind Lions

Carter, Emmett, Ph.D., The Ensign of Canada, Vol. 2, Issue of May 21, 1949, p. 10.

Crane, Milton, New York Times, Issue of Nov. 27, 1949.

Genge, Miles, Commonweal, Vol. 44, Issue of Oct. 15, 1948, page 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Review of Tears of the Blind Lions

- Hart, Hubert, America, Vol. 80, Issue of Oct. 16, 1948, p.47
- Knauber, Charles Francis, Renascence, Vol. 2, No. 2,
Issue of Spring 1950, p. 158.
- Toelle, Gervase, O.Carm., Spirit, Vol. 16, Issue of Jan.
1950, p. 195.

Reviews of Exile Ends in Glory

- Duff, Edward, America, Vol. 80, Issue of Nov. 13, 1948,
page xviv.
- Greernan, Margaret, Catholic World, Vol. 178, Issue of Oct.
1948, page 87.
- Harvey, Arthur, Ave Maria, (no Vol., no No.) Issue of Dec.
25, 1948, page 827.
- Maynard, Theodore, Commonweal, Vol. 48, Issue of Aug. 13,
1948, page 432.
- McDonald, Olga, The Ensign of Canada, Issue of Aug. 13, 1948
Vol. 1, page 7.

Reviews of Seeds of Contemplation

- Bulman, David, The Sign, Vol. 28, Issue of Mar. 1949, p. 61.
- Carter, Emmett, The Ensign, Vol. 2, Issue of May 21, 1949,
page 10.
- Mary Therese, Sister, Renascence, Vol. 1, No. 2, Issue of
Spring 1949, pages 68 - 70.

Reviews of Thirty Poems

- Morton, Paul, Spirit, Vol. 12, Issue of Mar. 1945, p. 26.
- The Sign, Vol. 24, Issue of Mar. 1945, p. 446.
- America, Vol. 76, Issue of April 21, 1945, p. 60.
- Commonweal, Vol. 42, Issue of June 22, 1945, p. 240.
- Blackfriars, Vol. 26, Issue of July 1945, p. 270.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reviews of Thirty Poems

Thought, Vol. 20, Issue of Sept. 1945, page 543.

Reviews of Seven Storey Mountain

Barrett, E.J., American Messenger of the Sacred Heart,
Vol. 84, Issue of April 1949, page 65.

Bregy, Katherine, The Sign, Vol. 28, Issue of Nov. 1948,
Page 59.

F.X. Connolly, Catholic World, Vol. 158, Issue of Nov. 1948,
Page 146 - 167.

Duff, Edward, America, Vol. 80, Issue of Nov. 13, 1948,
Page xxiv.

Gardiner, Harold C., "Poetry, Criticism, Memoirs and Shorter
Fiction", America, Vol. 80, Issue of Nov. 13, 1948,
Page xxv, "Balancing the Books - May-November", 1948,
Sec. 2.

Shaw, J. G. Ensign, Issue of Nov. 6, 1948, page 18.

Unsigned, China, Vol. 29, issue of Nov. 1948, page 23.

BOOK NOTICES

Seven Storey Mountain, "Current 'Best Sellers' at Champion
Book Shop", The Ensign, Issue of Feb. 19, 1949, p. 11.

"Season's Books", Commonweal, Issue of Dec. 3, 1948, p. 209.

"The Catholic Readers' Club". The Ensign, Issue of Oct. 30,
1948, page 32.

Thirty Poems, A Man in the Divided Sea, Figures for an
Apocalypse, in Spirit Poets, Sept. 8, Nov. CPSA
Bulletin, New York, Vol. 5, No. 24, Dec. 1947.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS ON RELATIVE SUBJECTS

The Bible,

Gilson, Etienne, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, (Downes, A.N.C., Translator) New York, Scribner's, 1936.

Sheed, F.J., Theology and Sanity, London, Sheed and Ward, 1948, 344 pages.

Sheed, F.J., "Poetry as a Communication and as a Doctrine", Poetry and Life, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1943.

DeJaeger, Paul, S.J., One with Jesus, Westminster, Md., Newman Bookshop Press, 1941, 58 pages.

Gilson, Etienne, Dante the Philosopher, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1949, David More - Translator.

Gilson, Etienne, The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard, New York, Scribner's.

Maritain, Raissa, Adventures in Grace, New York, Longman's Green, 1945, viii, 262 pages.

Saint Augustine, The City of God, New York, The Modern Library, Random House, 1950, xv, 892 pages, Marcus Dods - Translator.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, New York, Benziger, 1948, 3 volumes, 3970 pages. First Complete American Edition.

Sedgwick, Henry Dwight, Dante, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1920.

Walsh, James J., The Thirteenth, the Greatest of Centuries, Catholic Summer School Press, New York, 1924, 29, 490 pages.

Walsh, Wm. Thomas, St. Teresa of Avila, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1944.

Dante Alighieri, Purgatory, The Rev. H.F. Cary - Translator, New York, Wurtele Lovele, 1881, Vol. 8, 452 pages.

Dinsmore, Charles, Aids to the Study of Dante, New York, Haughton Mifflin, 1903.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS ON RELATIVE SUBJECTS

- Leen, James, By Jacob's Well, New York, P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1940, 419 pages. Rev. Edward Leen - Translator.
- Leen, Edward, In the Likeness of Christ, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1944, 362 pages.
- St. Therese of Lisieux, Autobiography, London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1936, 456 pages.
- Plus, Raoul, S.J., In Christ Jesus, Peter Addison - Translator, Newman Bookshop Press, Westminster, Md., 1948, 207 pages.

ARTICLES ON RELATED SUBJECTS

- Parr, Isabel Harriss, "The Proving-Ground of Poetry", Spirit, Vol. 8, Sept. 1941, p. 126.
- Paulding, Gouverneur, "Reason in Poetry", Spirit, Vol. 9, May, 1942, p. 58.
- Middleton, J. S. "The Poet's Prayer", Spirit, Vol. 11, July 1944, p. 84.
- Anger, Pierre, S.J., "The Aesthetics of Paul Claudel", Spirit, Vol. 15, May 1947, p. 50.
- Villa, Jose Garcia, "On a Celebration for Edith Sitwell", Spirit, no Vol., June 1949, p. 177.
- Calvert, Jean, "France - The Answer", The Catholic Digest, Vol. 13, No. 12, October 1949, p. 53.
- Roche, Stephen, "France", The Catholic Digest, Vol. 13, No. 12, October 1949, p. 49.
- Webster, J.C., "Cubism", Collier's Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, 1950.