

ally as our patron along with blessed Gregory and Augustine'. But perhaps Boniface's pleasantest epitaph had been written years before by a nun: 'Thou too at the resurrection, when the twelve Apostles are seated on their twelve seats, wilt have thy seat there; and over all those whom thou hast won by thy own labours, wilt thou their leader, heir to a golden crown, rejoice before the throne of the Eternal King'.



THE SYMBOL OF THE MOUNTAIN

D. D. C. POCHIN MOULD

THE collect for the feast of St Catherine of Alexandria, having recalled the legend of the saint's body carried to Mount Sinai by angels, asks that we, by her intercession, may come to the mountain which is Christ. It is a symbol presented with the suddenness of mist clearing from a rocky summit, a dramatic image that brings one back to a consideration of the immense richness of mountain symbolism in liturgy and scripture.

It may well be that the mountain is the easiest of the great symbols of the Church for us to understand today, easier than water or fire, for instance. The townsman is too used to think of water in terms of turning on the tap, of heat and light in terms of pressing switches, but with the hills, he returns to reality; in increasing numbers more and more people are discovering the fascination of mountaineering. It would be interesting to explore the ebb and flow of appreciation of mountain beauty, of the urge to seek out the solitude and silence of the heights, for though the modern sport of climbing is a new growth of the last hundred years or less, the love of the hills is very old indeed. To contrast the language of the psalms about the hills, the attitude of St Anthony in his mountain retreat in the desert, of that of the Celtic saints and of St Francis on Alvernia, with that of eighteenth-century English writers, Dr Johnson's 'hopeless sterility' of the Scottish Highland glens in the west, is to feel that here is more than a mere

change in fashion of outlook. It is a loss of the sense of reverence for things as God's creation, and it is a loss of the rich symbolism of the hills, coupled with a constant looking for commercial profit—the rocks grow no crops. The Reformation would appear to have been the origin of that outlook, for it goes far deeper than the natural reaction of a Lowlander coming into mountain country.

The holy mountain is a constant theme of man's religious ideas. It is natural to look up to heaven, and up to the hills, and see them as a kind of intermediary between the country of men and the country of the gods. They are mysterious, menacing as the mist swirls about their crests, dangerous; beautiful in the bright sunlight with blue sky and flashing cornice of snow. The ascent is hard, a leaving behind of comfort and security in order to attain the peril and splendour of the summit rocks. It comes almost instinctively to conceive of the spiritual life, of the attempt to reach God, as a climb, as an ascent, and of the heights as the natural place to select in which to pray and try to come close to heaven.

But it is more than mere symbolism. In reality, Moses climbed Sinai and Christ was transfigured on the mountain. In reality, Christ went out to pray alone on the hillside, and following his example, a multitude of Christian hermits.

Ireland shows a remarkable link between the old pagan hill myth, the mountain hermitages of the Celtic saints and modern Catholic devotion. Her hilltops are notable for the number of pre-historic burial cairns to be found placed on them, and one at least, in the Mourne mountains, was subsequently adapted to serve as cell and oratory by one of the Celtic saints. The early Irish saints had an acute appreciation of natural beauty linked up with a deep knowledge of the scriptures and sense of their symbolism: as they sought out the hilltops, the one would impinge on and enrich the other, the scriptural symbols taking a new depth and meaning set against the changing lights and shadows of the Irish hillsides. The mountain, the rocks, the springs, the mist and the clouds, the sparkling sea, must have brought them back to the verses in the psalms about these things, and sent them penetrating deeper into their meanings. In Ireland today the memory of these mountain retreats of the Celtic saints is still vivid, enormous crowds make the annual pilgrimage up Croagh Patrick, and some still climb up to the hermitage ruins upon Mount Brandon and Slieve League, but the love of mountain beauty, which was

so marked a feature of the Celtic saints, seems to be largely lost by the modern Irishman. For him, the penitential aspect dominates the climb and the sense of the vision from the summit is forgotten.

To follow in the track of the Celtic saints and search for explanations of the mountain symbols in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, is to discover a whole new country for exploration. For just as the aspect of the real mountain varies, sometimes terrible in storm, sometimes beautiful and attractive, so the symbolism of the mountain is differently explained in different contexts of scripture. It could stand for something evil and terrible, the swelling pride of individuals or of the devil; more often for something good, for Christ or for the Church (Mount Sion) or for the apostles and preachers. The mountain symbolizes the teacher—raised up from the common level, intermediary between earth and heaven.

The mountain too is the symbol of contemplation: of which the historical Moses on Sinai is the type; our own struggling attempts to climb up and God coming down to meet us, as it were half-way, and disclose something of himself to us. It is on the heights that we begin to penetrate the cloud of unknowing.

With that we may come to the striking use of the mountain as a symbol of Christ incarnate in the collect for St Catherine. Perhaps the basic idea is of a very high peak raised far above the lesser heights of prophets and apostles, but the symbol of the high mountain is charged too with the idea of beauty and purity and strength. Yet the image can take us further than that, to the whole Christian idea of the meaning of things.

To climb the mountain which is Christ, or to climb any mountain, means several things. There is the penitential aspect, the self-discipline, the determination to go on up against difficulties and dangers rather than take the easy way down again. And there is the leaving behind of the lush meadows of the lowland, of society, of warmth and security, the roof of the house between you and the storm without. The climber, in love with the beauty of the heights, leaves these things behind to face cold and storm and the traverse of bare rock.

But, as even the most agnostic climbers know, the very fact of scrambling up gives a whole new orientation to one's own affairs and to life in general. Just as the houses in the valley become smaller and smaller, so do one's personal worries set against the

immensity of the hills; the mountaineer gains health of mind as well as of body.

Something similar takes place in the ascent of the mountain of the Lord. In the valley, there is no general view of the pattern of life, we move from house to house, lane to lane, field to field and fail to grasp their essential relationship. Only from above, only from the heights, does the shape and design of reality begin to reveal itself. If then we come to the mountain which is Christ, we come too to an integrated view of the world below, not only climbing up to the heights of prayer but finding that here is the key position for the seeing and comprehending of all lesser things. From this Rock, the design of life and of history becomes apparent; the objects that appear irrelevant and jumbled to the man in the valley are seen in their correct relationships and proportions. It is in Christ and from Christ that the world takes meaning.



OUR APPROACH TO OTHER CHRISTIANS

MICHAEL RICHARDS

IT is a truism that a controversialist should know and understand his opponent's point of view; but where relations with non-Catholics are concerned, it may well be that the time of controversy is over and that knowledge of others is now to be regarded rather as essential material for the rebuilding of a native Catholicism than as a weapon for attack and defence. The missionary practice of the Church has always been not to destroy a people's beliefs and practices but to correct, supplement and direct them to their true end; and this applies particularly to work amongst other Christians, where we speak from faith to faith. The non-Catholic Christian already believes in and follows our Lord, although his understanding of him is incomplete; it is our task to remove from his mind those misconceptions which hinder the full realization of the truth, making it possible for him to see the Catholic faith as the complete expression of that which he now holds imperfectly. Applying this principle, we need to participate