

Comment by the Editor

TWO BY THE ABBEY BELL

Few people of their own accord arise with the sun, and fewer still retire at dusk. "To bed with the chickens" is a phrase of contempt; while the crowing cock is a discredited morning alarm. The hands of "Big Ben" instead of the sunbeam on the counterpane indicate the time for rising. It seems to be one of the perversities of human beings to prolong the night into the day and extend the day beyond nightfall. Only the inexorable necessities of life are sufficiently powerful to compel a person to face the toil of a new day. The dreadful experience is postponed until the last minute. Even an act of Congress proved unavailing, so the daylight saving law was repealed.

For nearly three quarters of a century the Trappist monks at New Melleray have been setting a steadfast example of daylight saving. No doubt they prefer God's light to human substitutes, but they outdo the sun in early rising. They reverse the usual custom and burn their candles in the morning.

On Sundays the Trappists arise at one instead of two — another reversal of common practice. There is an element of logic in this, however, when viewed philosophically. If one rises early on Sunday he may sleep late the rest of the week.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

The asceticism of the silent monks at New Melleray does not appeal to American youth. Religious zeal is not a prominent trait of the times. Monastic life in Iowa seems to be an anachronism. Seclusion is a characteristic of by-gone ages: now, one half of the world is determined to know how the other half lives. Communication between the ends of the earth is almost instantaneous, motoring across a continent is an epidemic, distance is well nigh abolished in fact as in theory, and the whole world is becoming cosmopolitan. When life is so full of adventure and knowledge is not all found in books, who wants to shut himself up in an abbey?

Yet monasticism has its advantages. Pledged to perpetual silence, to unremitting toil, to absolute poverty, to lifelong seclusion, and to intense religious devotion, the Trappist brothers probably experience a peace of mind impossible in the hurly-burly of the outer world. The attainment of spiritual aspirations, they are convinced, rewards the soul far more than the gratification of the natural instincts of an ephemeral life. While the nation is in the throes of war, while the politicians are puzzled with political problems, while laborers strike, while social customs come and go, there at New Melleray the disciples of St. Benedict remain, year after year — calm, devout, abiding. They are free from the turmoil of a nervous world.

TRAPPISTS AND JESUITS

There are manifold methods of expressing spiritual fervor. Even among the monks there are several orders, each with its own set of vows and each with a different mode of living. Some, like the Trappists, are content with being good; while others, like the Jesuits, seek salvation in doing good. The former are chiefly concerned with themselves; the latter are pledged to carry the gospel to others.

As the annals of New Melleray Abbey are a part of the history of this State, so also the work of the Jesuits has a prominent place in the chronicles of Iowa. First came Father Marquette to explore the Mississippi and to preach to the Indians. He is the "Black-Robe chief, the Prophet" in the "Song of Hiawatha". That was in the reign of Louis XIV — in the glorious days of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Many were the black robed priests who followed their brother into the Great Valley, suffering the hardships of long and hazardous voyages with only their consciences to guide them and the sign of the cross for protection. Around their names are woven the adventures and achievements of the first white men in Iowa. The story of their exploits in New France is as picturesque as the D'Artagnan romances across the sea.

J. E. B.