New Blackfriars

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Comment: *Our Centenary*

Revamped with effect from October 1964 as New Blackfriars, integrating Life of the Spirit, which required unsustainable subsidy, this journal first appeared in April 1920. It was not 'new' then but The Catholic Review, 'revived and renamed', a quarterly that Fr Bede Jarrett (1881-1934), then Prior Provincial, bought in 1919 for £40, on behalf of the English Dominican Province. Fr Bernard Delany (1890-1959), just back from two years as an army chaplain, was appointed Editor. Fr Bede wanted a review which 'was not to be learned or theological, nor of a specifically ecclesiastical character'.

Initially, the board considered having the journal printed on a hand press by Dominican lay brothers. A local Hampstead firm was employed instead. The cover was designed by Eric Gill (1882-1940). The yearly subscription was fourteen shillings. The first issue ran to 62 pages, including advertisements, of which there were four: Hearne & Co. Ltd. of Waterford, offering the best value in the United Kingdom (sic) in serges, nuns veilings, sheetings, calicoes and linens; Louis Sandy, Gordon Mills, Stafford, offering habits, materials and veilings in a large variety of widths and qualities; Colwyn Bay Imperial Station Hotel, and 'Belmont', a Boarding Establishment in Brighton, guaranteed excellent cuisine, separate tables, electric light and two bathrooms, terms from £26 per week, week end £20.

The first article is by Fr Vincent McNabb OP (1868-1943), explaining 'Our aim of truth' — the attitude towards truth that the journal would seek to maintain. He was completely confident in the Thomism as he had learnt at Louvain, inclined neither to rigid neoscholasticism nor intimidated by fears of betraying 'Modernist' tendencies.

After this exordium, we are treated to Fr C.C. Martindale SJ (1879-1963), already a well known retreat-giver, on 'The Movies': a highly entertaining refutation of people who deplored the novel practice of 'going to the pictures', leading up to considering the possibility of 'Catholic films': 'England really lost the faith when her imagination was corrupted, and not till then'.

Joseph Clayton (1868-1943), a freelance journalist, with leftwing sympathies, comes next. He had published studies of Robert Owen, Wat Tyler, Jack Cade, and Robert Kett, as well as Votes for Women, a pamphlet on behalf of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society. His thesis is clear: 'This capitalism is but a thing of a few hundred years' growth; begotten in the break-up of European society at the Reformation; born in the pride that contemned as foolishness authority

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claiming inspired supremacy on earth; nourished on the ethics and philosophy of Protestant individualism; achieving its full stature in the hideous, heedless sacrifice of child-life in cotton factories at home, and the exploitation of countless aboriginal tribes in the dark corners of the earth'; and much in the same vein.

The fourth article is by Shane Leslie (1885-1971), an Anglo-Irish aristocrat, arguing that 'England' must learn to make her 'final concession to Ireland' — under 'the economic pressure she is beginning to feel from the United States'. Scornfully sweeping aside the 'gush' about Americans coming into the War to help their English kinsfolk (etc.), Leslie sees no 'special relationship'. On the contrary, such talk only 'riles the Irish-Americans'. Indeed, 'the Irish cause', and the urgent need to support Sinn Fein, is 'the one vital, virescent and violent cause which came out of the War in the American mind'. Moreover, the United States is determined to keep Britain financially dependent, and to dislodge the hegemony of the Royal Navy. In brief, it is 'very mighty economical influences' that will bring about the departure of Ireland from the British Empire.

Osbert Burdett (1885-1936), an independent man of letters, who had published studies of Beardsley, the Brownings, Patmore, the Carlyles and others, considers the effect on handwriting of the newfangled typewriter.

Then there is a two page poem by Theodore Maynard (1890-1956), about to publish A Tankard of Ale: an anthology of drinking songs. Later he moved to the United States where he became a prolific writer, successful with The Story of American Catholicism (1941, often reissued).

The sixth article returns to anti-Protestantism. Leslie Toke (born 1871, date of death untraced) deals with 'The English medieval gilds (sic)'. He regrets that 'the modern English people' have 'lost all sense of historic time', as of 'most of its popular traditions' — 'ultimately as a result of that orgy of destructive licence which is called the Reformation, and immediately as a mental effect of the unstable and irrational social conditions which have grown out of that revolt'.

The seventh and last of the articles is by Dorothea E. Brennell, in which she distinguishes 'patriotism' from 'jingoism' — she gives it a Catholic twist: the true patriots in the sixteenth century were the English martyrs.

How much the journal has changed over the century! On the other hand, capitalism remains problematic, Ireland still has trouble with Britain; film is nothing to be feared, whatever about television; and no doubt computers have ruined our handwriting.

Fergus Kerr OP

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