BLACKFRIARS

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EDITORIAL

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON, the beloved "G.K.," is dead. We heard it with stunned incredulity. We are left not only with a sense of personal loss but also with a sense of insecurity, even of fear. He was a big brother who would not only laugh and play with us, not only guide and instruct us, but would champion and defend us in an hour of need. For forty years the wheels of that great mind had turned, as in a winnowing machine, fed continually by the vast harvesting of his five wits, separating the good grain of truth and blowing away the chaff with great gusts of laughter. During all those years men have known that a great mind was still labouring, to use a simile of his own, like a great mill in the midst of them. It seemed impossible that such a mind should be stilled. "But there must have been a moment" (we again use words of his own written of St. Thomas Aquinas) "when men knew that the thunderous mill of thought had stopped suddenly; and that after the shock of stillness that wheel would shake the world no more." At this nearness of time, still more in these brief lines, it is impossible to estimate the true greatness of this splendid intelligence, of this great-souled Catholic. But perhaps it cannot be better hinted at than in his affinity with the mind of St.

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Thomas—St. Thomas Aquinas, we mean, though many will rightly and more easily see his likeness to St. Thomas More. Of all his many remarkable writings we have been inclined to believe that the most remarkable, and at the same time the most revealing, is his *St. Thomas Aquinas*. This book made "no pretence to be anything but a popular sketch of a great historical character who ought to be more popular," but its author arrives unerringly at the very essence of Thomism. It was not that he was a learned Thomist, but he appreciated the point of Thomism and St. Thomas better than many learned Thomists. We feel that it was a knowledge arising from a community of outlook, from the essential oneness of kindred souls loving the same things because they were themselves the same. Let us quote: "This does seem to me the simplest truth about St. Thomas the philosopher. He is one, so to speak, who is faithful to his first love; and it is love at first sight. I mean that he immediately recognized a real quality in things; and afterwards resisted all the disintegrating doubts arising from the nature of those things. . . . St. Thomas could as truly say, of having seen merely a stick or a stone, what St. Paul said of having seen the rending of the secret heavens, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' " Again, having spoken of St. Thomas as "my hero," he writes: "It will be understood that in these matters I speak . . . as a man in the street. . . . Thomist philosophy is nearer than most philosophies to the mind of the man in the street. . . . The philosophy of St. Thomas stands founded on the universal common conviction that eggs are eggs . . . things attested by the Authority of the Sense, which is from God." Surely Chesterton understood that so well because it was Chesterton, too, as well as St. Thomas.

We cannot here recount his marvellous analysis of the essence of Thomism; our purpose is to point to a natural affinity between Gilbert Chesterton and St. Thomas, arising from their "primary idea of a central common sense that is nourished by the five senses," guided and motived by a truly Catholic spirit. He was not received into the Church until comparatively late in life, yet, to borrow his own appreciation of St. Thomas, "he had from the first that full and final test of truly orthodox Catholicity; the impetuous, impatient, intolerant passion for the poor; and even that readiness to be

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rather a nuisance to the rich, out of a hunger to feed the hungry.'' He was a realist in the best and truest sense of that much-abused word, and supernatural reality was at least as vivid for him as the natural; he was therefore always in touch with and concerned about objective truth; he saw all things as they are in reality, and for him it was anything but a sober reality; and having seen, he, too, ''was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'' It made him lovable, strong, courageous; it made him a poet, a humourist, a philosopher; it made him a lover of freedom, a lover of his fellow men, a lover of God. It made it inevitable, under God, that he should become a Catholic; it made it certain that he would hail with joy the *philosophia perennis* of St. Thomas once he had become acquainted with it. Already, in the religious and secular press, great men have praised this great man; but we believe that his true greatness will appear when the years allow us to stand away from this gigantic mind and see the hierarchy of his achievements. He will be remembered for his humour, for his spacious lovableness, for his poetry, for his distributism, for all the splendid qualities of his magnanimous soul; but we believe that he will find immortality as a magnificent exponent in word and deed of the Catholic philosophy of Common Sense.

Meantime, while his figure, his laughter, and even his lovableness swell into a legend, while the spirit of his true greatness is being distilled drop by drop, the influence of his apologetic, already begun in his lifetime, will become more and more apparent in that Catholic literary movement that is so marked a characteristic of our time. Much of his technique was personal to his prose style, but the quality of his assurance, the buoyant acceptance of the natural, and the delighted recognition of the ludicrous, all combined with a childlike Faith, formed a fresh note in controversy that can be traced in a still wider circle than that of his disciples. There is so much in the roots of his success that is in some fashion imitable. His achievements were rendered possible by a bounding vitality canalized rather than restrained by an acute sense of proportion. This sense of proportion led inevitably to a desire for Justice, his vitality made that desire a passion. It is the union of these two qualities that best explains the sudden upsurges of his humour, the acuteness of his literary criticism, his exasperated and sometimes

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uproarious impatience with the artificial and the esoteric, and his almost romantic recognition of the Average Man. English Dominicans owe much to him; his articles in BLACKFRIARS in its early years are merely a symbol. It is our greatest debt to Gilbert Chesterton that he was a precursor, if not an originator, of the English Thomist revival.

EDITOR.

We desire to call attention to the Retreat, arranged by the London Aquinas Society, to be given September 5th—7th by the Very Rev. Fr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., Professor of Theology at the Angelico, Rome. Though it is being given for members of the Aquinas Society, non-members will be welcomed. The conferences will be delivered in French in the Chapel of the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, 11 *Cavendish Square, London, W.*1. *There will be a Conference morning and evening on each of the three days. There will be no fee for the Conferences, but a collection will be made towards an offering for the preacher. All information can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary of the Aquinas Society, Miss D. Borton,* 2 *Marloes Road, London, W.*8.

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