

BLACKFRIARS

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Communications in regard to *Advertisements* should be addressed to The Rolls House Publishing Co., Ltd., 2 Breems Buildings, London, E.C.4. Telephone Holborn 5708, 5709, 0603. Telegrams 'Publimedi, London.'

Vol. XVII, No. 192

March 1936

EDITORIAL

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, whose Feastday is celebrated during this month, is apt to be regarded, even by some of his admirers, as just a mediæval theorist who excogitated a brilliant logical synthesis consonant with the knowledge and circumstances of his age. This is to miss entirely the true greatness of the Angelic Doctor, for in his essential doctrine he is neither mediæval nor a theorist. He is concerned only with the real and with the eternal principles which constitute and govern the real. He has no use for, nor interest in, speculation for its own sake, nor are the principles he propounds bound by the incomplete and sometimes inaccurate scientific conclusions of his own day. He does not consider a conclusion or a thesis or a system to be true because it happens to fit the circumstances or because it hangs together logically. For him truth is not merely a thing of the mind or of the moment; it is the correspondence of the mind to that which is outside the mind, to the real, to that which *is*, and truth is not a thing of time but of eternity because of the necessary relation of the real to the eternal mind of Him Who created it, which is the basis of all truth. Things are vastly more important than thought, unless thought is the outcome of contact with things, in which case thought becomes valu-

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able because it is true. But truth itself is of value only when it is used in the pursuit of wisdom, and wisdom consists not only in the knowledge of the first cause but also in the effort to reach the last end; and the First Cause and Last End is God. That is the importance of truth and the value of reality for St. Thomas; and that is the guarantee of the realness and timelessness of the principles he expounds.

The unfortunate tendency of our times is to formulate a hypothesis, based upon accidentals without regard for essential principles, and then to accept it as proved fact. A case in point is the commonly accepted theory of the evolution of species. It has always struck us as curious that there should be such a widespread appeal in the argument that, because in a given group of species similar qualities are found in progressive degrees of development, therefore the more perfect have evolved from the less perfect and all from the most imperfect. It seems to show such a notable lack of native common sense, and is certainly far removed from that critical balance which characterizes the doctrine of St. Thomas. In the light of both these latter observations, BLACKFRIARS thought it worth while to send a representative to a meeting of the Evolution Protest Movement held in London last month. The general trend of the speeches delivered there was to show that evolution is not as yet a proved fact, that it can be challenged even as a valid hypothesis, and that, as taught in schools and proclaimed in the press, it is inimical to religion and morals. At the conclusion of the meeting a resolution was passed unanimously to the effect that evolution should not be taught to the uneducated as though it were a scientific fact. In the judgment of our representative, many distinctions and precisions would be called for in an attempt to estimate the scientific value of this Society's work; but its main plank seems to us very sound. It is, perhaps, not without significance that this Movement allies itself explicitly with another, whose pamphlets were distributed at the above meeting, namely the Liberty Restoration League. This latter, supported by some Catholic clergy and laymen, has for its avowed object the upholding of moral and social freedom, the family, and other fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine. Our immediate interest in these Societies, however, is the indication they seem to give of a revival of the common-sense spirit of St. Thomas. It helps us to

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believe that the manifest interest in Thomism amongst the *intelligenti* may become something more than a mere passing intellectual fashion.

There is this to be said for the humanism and realism of to-day: they recognize the value of real things, at any rate of those that are immediately perceptible. Their perniciousness lies in this, however, that they do not recognize the limitations of these realities nor the further and much more important realities which those limitations imply. It is not sufficient to say: "God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good," and then confine oneself to a few material things and pronounce them good in an absolute sense. Perhaps the most important word in that quotation from Genesis is the word "all"; for the true perfection of created things is appreciated only when they are seen in their relation to one another and in their hierarchic subordination to Him Who made them. For those, on the other hand, who are interested in the sciences, and especially the supreme sciences of theology and philosophy, the temptation is to err in a contrary sense. Because intellectual knowledge comes through the medium of abstract essences, they may tend to become enclosed in a world of thought and ideas which they do not relate to reality and life. Between these two extremes the true Thomism persists serenely, offering to the modern man and to men of all times a comprehensive, convincing, and intelligible analysis and synthesis of all reality, based upon the solid basis of experimental fact and guaranteed at every point by the objective truth of immutable principles, in which a welcome place is to be found for the discoveries, circumstances, and problems of every age. The sooner this chaotic civilization of ours re-discovers Thomism for itself, the sooner will it regain its sanity and a true appreciation of the *veritas rerum*. But it is not sufficient, for this, to re-discover a mere system of thought. As that great Thomist, M. Jacques Maritain, has said, "if we wish to find the true sense of Thomism, we must penetrate beyond the philosophical theses which in their close texture constitute its teaching, to the spirit and the very soul of St. Thomas." We shall find there one who *lived* the truth which he discovered, who discovered it because he was willing to live it, who was a philosopher, as he was a theologian and a poet, because he was a Saint.

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