

CORRESPONDENCE

BARON VON HÜGEL

Sir,—Baron von Hügel was not a professional theologian. He was devoted to the philosophy of religion and to theology because he was a Christian and a Catholic, but he was profoundly more than a theologian because he was an integral Catholic.

To ask whether he was centrally Catholic and to examine his theological credentials alone is not enough. A religious personality can be psychologically heterodox under a number of aspects, of which the two more important are the theological and spiritual. A man can be theologically immaculate and spiritually lop-sided, in which case he is not centrally, i.e., integrally, Christian. I do not intend to add the slick correlative that a man may be spiritually impregnable and theologically nebulous, because both speculation and history prove that this is not true. But a mind which is mistaken on single propositions in a time of crisis may most emphatically possess spiritual grandeur of an outstanding kind. Moreover, even the greatest Saints are not normally without sin and moral wavering until after the biographers have plastered up the chinks, and some of the noblest religious personalities in history have value for us precisely because of their bearing in face of their own moral contractions and mistakes. Baron von Hügel is for some the greatest example of this that our age has known, and his spiritual message would carry infinitely less meaning for us were there none of these contractions and subsequent gigantic renunciations of his life. Von Hügel's soul is first and foremost a synthesis of opposed moral forces: a neurotic, violent, easily jarred character constantly transformed and driven into massive unity by divine love. The momentary suggestions of wavering are themselves a testimony to that supernatural possession in virtue of the strength and beauty of his sorrow (the story of his daughter Gertrud reads like a Euripidean tragedy), and the grandeur of his later years proves its victory.

I venture to offer these few thoughts, because I feel that the effect of the contributions to *BLACKFRIARS* during the past year has been somehow to thin out a rich and great personality. Moreover, although I have been unable to see Miss Petre's book, the quotations supplied by Father White present von Hügel in an unsavoury light which is not fully dispelled by the subsequent argument. However unintentional, such a presentation is mendacious, and have suggested causes of this false impression. Theology is an integral part of a thinking Christian life, but it is not the integral whole. Most souls—even saints—are lop-sided

in some respect, whether spiritual or intellectual, and the estimation of a total personality can only be made by taking an average. Where this falls heavily on the side of greatness, it is worthwhile to ask what bearing, if any, the moments of shrunken vision and crabbed action may have upon the whole. If this had been noted, the contributors to BLACKFRIARS would have seen that unornamented expressions like "the Baron's imprudence" and "inconsiderate importunity" were quite unfortunately rough, and that mere allusions to his saintliness change a living spirit into a biographical puzzle. The life story of a man like von Hügel is not a discontinuous jumble of pedestrian anecdotes and attitudes, but a constant growth where one event overlaps another and all are evaluated in terms of the whole. Here every moral contraction has its subsequent new expansion, whose specific tone and timbre are largely conditioned by the former. An objective statement must indicate this for every important incident. For each one is a dramatic and tragic unity in itself, in virtue of both the light and the shadow and the shadow shrinking before the light.

I am, Sir,

Yours, etc.,

NORBERT DREWITT, O.P.

"WORKERS' OWNERSHIP"

SIR,—Mr. Eric Gill's letter in the November 1937 number of BLACKFRIARS has evidently been misunderstood—so I have found through conversations with various people. It seems that, unless what he expressed is made quite clear, he will again be at the mercy of opponents who will accuse him of being an out-and-out Communist. To quote Mr. Gill's letter, he says: "If it is good for me to own my own workshop, why shouldn't it be good for Railwaymen to own a Railway?" He did not say that they do own the Railway—"At present it (G.W.R.) is the legal possession of the shareholders"—but he said that the workers should own it. Why? Because they—the workers—do the work, and they are responsible for any hitch, technical and otherwise—"And their demand is entirely in line with what I've always said—that the man who does the work should be responsible for it and there can be no responsibility where there is no ownership." . . .

This is not of Communist origin. It was held as far back as the days when Artificers' Guilds were existing.

Mr. Gill points out that the shareholders are only impersonal beings, as such, "drawing dividends, if any," when any industrial enterprise is floated. It is the workers from the managers downwards who are personally doing the specified work. They