

## THE VOLUME OF CAJETAN

GALE turned the luxurious pages of the tiny treatise with a sense of thrilled satisfaction. It was good to possess at last so capital a work as Cajetan's *De Nominum Analogia*, competently, exhaustively edited, printed in the best Italian tradition on paper of fine texture. He did not at once begin to read but enjoyed the sense of possession and of authority. So slight in size the corner piece of a now authoritative library. As he rose to find a place for the book on his shelves, a place that must be at once adequate and inevitable, he saw that the light had gone out of the summer evening. He forgot his shelves, leaving the book on the arm of a chair.

The rain came suddenly with a crash of thunder and a simultaneous flicker of lightning. The wonder of storms. From the window he could barely see the railings of the park, so fierce the fall of the rain. Immediate the stride of the storm. Here thundering at the door with its guns of water, and as suddenly would be gone and the world changed in a moment's bombardment. Somewhere at the back of his mind an uneasiness Cajetan would not solve. Sustained violence, an unthinkable thing. Natural causes, his mind told him, workaday, but powerful, tremendous.

The crash and assault of the rain beat the evergreens before his window, tore petals from the few flowers. Window panes aswim with switchback scenery. An early light wept lucidly, pools of yellow in the window frames. A man was standing, coat caught up to the chin, in the inadequate shelter of the grandiose pillared porch, gusts of rain sweeping his legs like impetuous brooms. Gale watched him slantwise through the blar panes. Trousers sodden: would run water soon. He thought of the bell; Thompson his servant; unfriendly? No, he would go to the door himself.

"Won't you come in out of this filthy evening?"

The man hardly turned, meeting him with the eyes only.

"The storm will be over soon; I was hoping you wouldn't mind my using your porch."

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Gale saw that the sodden clothes were awkward and ill kept; the face intelligent, reserved, challenging, like his own rather, but thinner, younger, more heavily lined; and the voice spoke English well, neither coarse nor mannered. He hesitated momentarily feeling a bit of an ass. A scurry of vigorous raindrops struck him on the face as he stood in the open doorway, and the man took the splash across the shoulders. Everywhere outside the helter skelter of the rain sent up a spray of splashed water to the level of a man's thigh.

"Come in, please," he said. "You must be drenched."

Harbour the shelterless. The self-consciousness of an act of charity laid swift snares for his tongue and with a slight deliberate effort he refused to utter the patronising commonplace.

"I'll get your things dried. Let's have your overcoat and hat. How about shoes?"

He shifted alternatives rapidly in his mind. Cloak room with a wooden chair and solitude: kitchen, warm, and that supercilious old fool Thompson: library. He risked it.

"Leave them on the chest. I'll tell Thompson to dry them."

He opened the library door and the man went in. In his wet shoes. Gale glimpsed them, broken, muddied by the roads. The leather had lost its proofing, dulled and sopped with muddy water. In a flash he knew his guest more fully. His mind went out gropingly to the clearer situation; uncertain still of his own capacity for tact. He felt his guest's response to hospitality, his reluctance and his thankfulness. He felt himself involved in a subtle conflict of courtesy; of humiliations this man would not betray and he must not inflict. Impossible to mention shoes again. His feet must be cold, dank. The sensation of chill shuddered his imagination. White mud-streaked corpsefeet. Mortified flesh. He tried not to see the little mud-sodden places on the carpet. Thompson would see them all right, but Thompson must not come in. He picked up the speaking tube.

"I have a gentleman with me. You'll find his wet clothes on the chest in the hall. Yes, on the chest, I said. No, don't come in. Oh, wait a bit."

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He looked up. His guest had found a book from a shelf near the window and was turning pages slowly. *Revue Thomiste*, his tidy mind told him.

"Yes, bring something to drink."

A strange excitement touched him at finding this perfect stranger among the works of his chosen philosophers. A sort of fatality; a challenge of the god. Extraordinarily like me. Keener: thinner. The appalling knowledge that this man has nothing on his feet but broken shoes. How do I prevent his knowing that I know?

The stranger put back the book.

"Foolish," he said. "Impossible to gather much in a few moments."

Gale was aware that his own face showed gratitude for this alleviation of his embarrassment. "Sit down," he said, and switched on two panels of an electric fire. "Are you interested in the scholastics?" He chose a chair slightly behind his guest's, offering him a leather armchair nearer the fire.

"I am a bit of a scholastic myself, I suppose," said the stranger. "A kind of kinship. I have that type of mind." He sat down. It was the chair Gale had vacated attracted by the spectacle of the storm. The volume of Cajetan was still on the arm of it. He picked it up nervously, automatically.

"Cajetan!" He smiled. "Invitatus . . . a . . . flebili profundarum litterarum penuria . . ." He read Latin well; liturgically; and he had a gesture, putting the hand to the back of the head as if searching for words there. "Sure of himself. So certain of the lordship of metaphysics." The comment was uttered as a query, a kind of challenge.

Gale smiled in response.

"It was good to be certain of that."

The stranger looked up slightly, weighing the signs of the intellectual character of his host. Oxford. He felt sure of that. Agnosticism and a load of scholarship? Not so sure. What was the secret of the Oxford tradition? He wished he could have known it from the inside.

"You mean good just then, in that moment of history?"

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“Not only then; it would be a good thing now.”

The stranger put the book down. His feet were warming through and little wisps of steam rising from his shoes. Covering the movement by turning to his host he withdrew them from the fire and tucked them under his chair. The rough folds of his mud-wet trousers clung to his legs offending the flesh. His clothes frayed, grimed, ill fitting, patched with wet where the overcoat had weighed upon his body, were hidden from the sight of his host by the continuous curve of the back and side of his chair. Relieved, he allowed the warm shaft of the fire to dispel his comfort. He was aware of the tidiness of clean carpets and upholstery soiled by his presence. The haste and confusion of a vague apology was checked on his lips by the subtlety more clearly felt than known of the relationship between them. Feeling an approach to the other man's mind he said:

“A pity, perhaps, to be quite so certain,” and was immediately disappointed with the vagueness of the remark. Then he watched the other man's face, wondering what he would say.

Feeling the gentle provocation of this man's mind Gale made no reply. At this point in a conversation his instinct told him by a certain procedure to establish social contact, evading the intellectual issue. A something exhilarating in the present situation lifted him to a more courageous contact. He defended himself.

“It was not an easy certainty; not slack.”

“Or even arrogant?” suggested the stranger.

“Is that quite fair on Cajetan? There *was* a lamentable dearth of profound literature.” Gale protested readily, sensing the nominalist attack. Then he regretted at once his ready protest. The man escaped his classifications.

“Flebilis—he keeps the better word,” the stranger reminded him. He paused, and his next remark skipped a mental process. “Compare the prodigious humility of Saint Thomas. It was that which held his philosophy together.”

“Most people would have said that it was the cohesion of a metaphysical principle.” Gale spoke slowly and with complete conviction.

The stranger looked up sharply. The learning of this man stood over against him, a bulk laid in his way. The goad of his own mind stung him. Impulsively he rose, took a cigar and lit it, inhaling the sweet smoke deeply. He stood in the awkwardness of his own harsh clothes and the sense of unforeseen hospitality returned to him, soothing his impatience, filling his mind with humility. And the wealth of this man's mind dismayed him, a stark and searching soul unclothed in traditional scholarship, as the graciousness of his hospitality dismayed him while studiously putting him at ease. An aftermath of his violent gesture, a moment of recollection. His mind struck out from his opprobrious body to be received into a house full of riches. He said:

"What exactly is the position of a man in relation to truth? It happens that truth is a person, not an idea."

"You were saying a moment ago," said Gale smiling, "that it is a pity to be certain."

Check.

The stranger made a nervous movement of the arm.

"I wonder why you study Saint Thomas."

A frontal attack.

"To study Hegel only reveals the necessity of studying Kant, Kant of Descartes, Descartes of the Thomists, the Thomists of Saint Thomas. Not a source absolutely as the Greeks are but in the sense that a river begins where many streams have joined."

"I will tell you," said the stranger, "that I came upon the scholastics by accident much as I came into this room." It was impossible, he knew, to say what was in his mind. "Ipsa veritas Christi. A knowledge that the Incarnation is not an outrage; that supernature is a nature, not a contradiction." He paused, gathering courage. "Truth—a person, not only a relation of the mind. I admire the insatiable mind that is restless in certainty. I admire the mind that will not be appeased with a system. I find it quite impossible to say what I mean."

His host was silent, offering little assistance.

"As systems go," said Gale at length, "you will find none so complete or so coherent as the Thomist."

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"That's perfectly true," said the stranger. Then he regretted his concession. "If you mean closed when you say complete I shall disagree with you."

"Oh no," said Gale, "not closed. His doctrine on half a hundred matters is only hinted."

Not what he meant at all. The stranger sat down and crossed his legs.

"I think Saint Thomas was more concerned with things than with concepts and systems. That's what I meant by his prodigious humility. He perfected a conceptual framework as subtle and united as any system that has ever been made. But this was the means, not the end, of his mind's desire. He did not worship the theology but the theos. Truth is a person, the end of the mind's desire.

"I am afraid," concluded the stranger, "that it is very difficult to be explicit. Would Saint Thomas have made an ordered metaphysic if there were not an ordered universe?"

Gale poured out more drinks.

"The question turns," he said, "on the nature of knowledge."

Their two minds engaged.

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"I shall leave the key in the door and ask you to lock it. I don't want Thompson to disturb you in the morning but shall come in myself to rouse you when breakfast is ready."

His host went out, closing the door. The stranger sat by the extinguished fire with the volume of Cajetan on his knees. He read.

At last weariness overcame his curiosity. The room was cold now at the end of the summer night. The cloth of his trouser legs, improperly dried, had grown chill as he sat. He shivered with the sensation of gooseflesh. He glanced at the neat pile of blankets his host had laid on the divan beside him, then crossed the room and drew the curtains. The grey sky was lightening slightly. He knew the atmosphere of daybreak. Silent. He shivered again. Then he put out the light and opened the door. He fumbled for a

switch outside. Across the hall the front door was bolted and locked. The stillness of the hour admonished him. He returned to the twilight library. The window opened noiselessly to his touch. He climbed through and closed it after him. The railings of the level park stood over against him, grey, unreal. He could tell from a distance the feel of them, moist with little pools of condensed mist, hard and sharply cold. Mist wreaths hung, a dim garment, over the uncertain distant hawthorns. Above, the dawnstar, an eye enlarged with tears, shone brightly in a liquid sky. "The world looks as if God had washed it to be ready for the sunlight." He remembered the man who had said that, in a Dominican habit, starting the engine of a car at five o'clock on a September morning, and blessed him in his mind. He walked stiffly, sensitive to hardness and the myriad bodily wounds of living. Unrested, but washed and renewed by the morning air, his mind stretched on one tense string, resilient, sharp and fine. Greatest of the stars of the morning the star in the east lessened, a defined point in the paling blue. He remembered "aurora in diluculo," title of the Mother of God, and his heart leaped out to beauty like a fish from the river. Then fixing the atmosphere of the morning he added, "Stella in solitudine." He thought of Duns Scotus. The perilous freshness of a seeking mind. He prayed.

Permit, Mother, that I speak to him already called blessed. Master, my mind is on the edges of the world. Gather me to the bosom where you lie. Pierce the dawn star and the day star, lover of doctrine, reach to me doctrine from the bosom of the beloved.

He remembered that he had heard stars are visible at noonday in deep wells, catching the knowledge up into his heart.

*Luculens in animae profunditate stella doctrinae Christi;  
fulgens in meridie secreto stella amoris.*

Beyond in the lucid ways, come, lean into our mind. Come like a thread piercing desirable beads. Bring into our eyes beauty striking through joy with the sign of the cross. Deliver meaning that we may read the beauty of the world.

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The lilt of creation. Resting on this we lean further, weeping, rejoicing, upon the mind of Christ.

Anima Christi. He thought of his host of last evening. A mind fecund with learning, cautious, prudent, just. A scandal that there should be found univocacy of God and the creature.

The sadness and the patience of philosophy. He stood beside his own thoughts shamed and spiritually naked. For me it is always joy or intolerable weariness. Is this the meaning of the cross then, sadness and patience, interminable frustration? I believe that the dawn star and the rising sun coming through my eyes conform my mind to the mind of Christ. By my God, mysterious word before all words, the wonders of the morning are worded. Come to me on feet of ivory, Thou God whom I have desired. Be life of his learning. Entering, possess his mind.

Now that his prayer had included a petition for his host the pressure of his mind eased. He was aware of his own exhaustion. His trouser pocket contained threepence. He bought a cup of hot coffee at a stall by a road junction. In searching for the coin he found in the pocket of his overcoat the volume of the opuscula of Cajetan, *De analogia nominum, De conceptu entis*. Subtle, flexible doctrine leaning on the breast of the real. His own words returned to him, "the prodigious humility of Saint Thomas." He felt the flexion and the stress of two traditions of the intellect adoring one God only, incarnate and pierced with nails. Ad sythesim. It happens that the synthesis of these two is in the mind of Christ and nowhere else perfectly. *Celsitudo*—this is the kind of God you are.

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Gale opened the door and found the room empty. He did not realize until this moment that this was what he had expected when he had left the key in the hands of the stranger. Finished then. It was just as well. Breakfast would have been an embarrassing meal, a false familiarity. He sat down in a chair, his mind quite blank. A patch of dry mud on the carpet near his feet angled his attention.



Thompson had missed it. His mind stirred uneasily. The wall of books at his back elbowed solidly into the corner of his eye. He got up and walked away. His slippers foot hit the electric fire sharply. He winced, halted, then for no particular reason moved the fire into a corner of the room. It was out. The stranger had turned it out himself; that was at about eleven o'clock. What time had he got to bed last night? Must have been nearly three.

At the window a cloudy day. The stranger must have left early for the rugs he had brought in were folded as he had left them. Where did he go, what did he do thinking those thoughts of his? Wake up, he said to himself. Heavily he parted mental bedclothes, warm slothful resistances. He stood by the open window facing the chill day. Unexpectedly, moving in an older habit, he prayed in his mind.

My God, what has my mind been doing? (What is the ocean doing?—caustic undertow of reminiscence.) An impasse. The ancient mariner must have been tired after all those days, standing up in a trance and hearing the angels in the rigging. Gale felt as if within himself the wizened flesh of the ancient mariner in contact at all points with the elements of the air. Immediacy. For the seventh time he endeavoured the effort of waking.

What precisely is the relation between a man and truth? It happens that truth is a person, not an idea.

His thoughts began to flow freely and in words. Immediacy of contact. A relation between man and truth cutting crosswise athwart the circuit of concepts. Concepts, shining tools of the mind, like knives. He remembered the substance of a note from the diary of Gerard Hopkins, and it fitted his thought. Concepts linked, continuous, bright and strong like the edge of a blade. A razor blade pressed to the finger. Press it. You feel the hairline ridge, a sharp resistance. But cutting across suddenly, a sideways movement, the immediacy of existence; the blade cuts the skin. There is cut and cutting edge swift and sharp married in act. Truth is a person and you are face to face, not sometimes, all the time. That's what I mean, the humility of Saint Thomas. There is a kind of knowledge which precedes love. Confused,

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mysterious, a knowledge by immensity. Immensitas. The connotations of the word sharpened in his mind schooled in Thomist theology. God. More intimate to each created thing than that thing is to itself. Grapple. The locking of two minds. Words ceased to come.

Since this is the kind of God you are—— You have caught me so close I cannot move for books and you are everywhere out of the window.

Fatuous ass, he said to himself, you are talking to your God. Wake up, man, wake up.

The postman came up to the door with a parcel. He took it from the window and paid fourpence postage due. Opening it he found pencilled across a corner of his Cajetan, "Sorry about the stamp."

He went into a corner of the room and knelt down. For some time he felt awkward, then he said:

"O my God, tell me what I am to do."

He continued kneeling though no words came.

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