

BLACKFRIARS

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EDITORIAL

BEHOLD THE MAN, Epstein's latest sculpture, may be (as some think) a repellent monstrosity, or it may be (as others maintain) a work of genius; we do not pretend to decide. But in any case it is not so insipid as to be disregarded or taken for granted, and that may be counted to its author for praise. Even if the majority of Catholics instinctively shrink from this strange presentation of the Lamb of God, it would be unjust in them to regard it as a blasphemy. It may well be that a sentimental and comfortable view of the sweet gentleness of Our Lord's life has blinded them somewhat to the terrible reality of Our Saviour's death. No one could grow sentimental over Epstein's Christ, but some might well be shaken by it to a sense of the awful blasphemy of Christ the King crowned with thorns in mockery of His Kingship. In truth it is a one-sided view of the God-man, and one here seen through the eyes of a non-believer, but it attempts to express a side of His life, and therefore of ours, that we must not be allowed to lose sight of. If a pagan sculpture of a Christian subject, offered to a pagan world in which Christians live, thrusts that vision, however rudely, to the fore, let it be welcome.

Whether, from an aesthetic point of view, we like or dislike this latest example of the development of modern art, it is imperative at least that we should appreciate the significance of the subject which the artist has chosen. *Behold the Man*. Even as Adam stood for the whole of mankind in his sin, so stood the New Adam as the representative of all men in the drama of reparation. *Ecce Homo* has more than its literal meaning: *Behold the Man*; it has a mystical meaning (suggested indeed by the exact significance of the word *homo*): *Behold Mankind*. Kingship was His, even in His human nature; *Unto this am I come*. But to this awful mockery of His Kingship, also, had He come; to the Royal Progress of the Cross, to His throne on Calvary. It was the Eternal Father's design that all men should be drawn to Him thus, and these symbols of mockery are gloriously retained by the regnant Christ as the symbols of His triumph. In Him mankind has triumphed over the powers of evil, but yet no individual man can reap the fruits of this victory until he has been figuratively crowned with thorns, has carried his cross, and has been crucified. Epstein has produced perhaps, all unwitting, not the figure of a Man, but the symbolic figure of what all men should be.

The sculptor's conception fails, nevertheless. It is that of a majestic acceptance of an inevitable fate, but in this he is pathetically at fault, and it is true to say that he has missed the chief point of his subject. Even though the soul of the agonized Christ was sorrowful unto death, His acceptance of the will of His Father was wholehearted and free. He was more than a victim of sacrifice—He was a victim of self-sacrifice. It was not blind justice that demanded the Passion; it was Divine Love that asked it and Divine Love that responded to the last drop of blood. It would need a supreme artist to create a figure that would express this suffering strength suffused and transformed with this divine fire, the grandeur, love-softened, that bore the mockery of the crown and the reed. Epstein could not be expected to achieve it; perhaps no human artist could hew this masterpiece from stone; perhaps only the Divine Artist can fashion it again, and that again in flesh and blood.

EDITOR.