

THE AQUINAS SOCIETY

IT is with unusual pleasure that we announce the welcome news, recently communicated to us, of the formation of The Aquinas Society. As our readers probably know, seven years ago, in 1921, the University Extension Board of the University of London added to its syllabus a course of lectures on the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. These lectures have been given with conspicuous success by Father Vincent McNabb, O.P. A group of his students have now banded themselves together to form a Society of St. Thomas, called The Aquinas Society. The Society aims at bringing together all who are interested in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, and who are anxious to study the principles of Thomistic Philosophy with a view to their application to the intellectual, social, and ethical problems of the day.

This is only a small beginning of what, it is to be hoped, will become a much bigger thing. The advance of St. Thomas's influence upon English thought during the last quarter of a century has been considerable, and all the more easily discernible because it has been neither speedy nor dazzlingly brilliant. There has been in England nothing to compare with the Thomistic revival in France and Italy. Still a revival there has been, though limited, scattered, and spasmodic. Eighteen years ago the translation of the *Summa Theologica* was valiantly commenced: and although it was considered at the time to be a venture more valiant than wise, its success (even as publishers reckon success) has more than justified the optimism of its promoters. The translation of the whole *Summa Theologica* has been completed, and also the *Summa contra Gentes*, only one book of which now remains to be published. This prodigious

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piece of work is almost entirely due to the unremitting industry and painstaking zeal of Father Laurence Shapcote, O.P., whose name—strangely enough—nowhere appears on the title page of the translation. This fairly wide circulation of St. Thomas's thought in English cannot but have led to some revival of interest in his philosophy and theology.

The celebration in 1923 of the centenary of St. Thomas's canonisation was the occasion of the publication of various books bearing on St. Thomas and Thomistic studies. Manchester University organised a special series of lectures, and the Cambridge Summer School devoted itself entirely to St. Thomas; and subsequently these lectures were published in book form. In 1924 Professor Bullough, of Cambridge, translated M. Gilson's study of Thomism under the title, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*.

In referring to books on St. Thomas one cannot omit the great work that was done by the late Dr. Philip Wicksteed in his book, *The Reactions between Dogma and Philosophy, illustrated from the works of St. Thomas Aquinas*. This book, published by Constable in 1926, was a re-edition of the Hibbert Lectures, which Dr. Wicksteed had given in Oxford and London in 1916. But perhaps a better-known work of Dr. Wicksteed's is his *Dante and Aquinas*, the very title of which suggests a whole stream of Thomistic influences that we do not always rightly consider when we are trying to weigh up how much of St. Thomas there is in contemporary English movements. First of all, Dr. Wicksteed was a man who gave his adherence to Unitarianism—in so far as anyone can give adherence to a system, the only fixed dogma of which is that there is no dogma. Yet he, with his vague religiosity, was impressed by the wholeness and the relentless consistency of St. Thomas's scheme, and it is important to remember

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that he came to St. Thomas through Dante. In Dante we have a fruitful source of Thomistic influence, and many of St. Thomas's ideas have been distilled into English thought and speech because those who have moulded our literature have been deeply imbued in Dante; but it is a slender strain, and the Thomistic tinge is scarcely perceptible in our current speech and rarely discernible in modern philosophy.

The return to St. Thomas, which is becoming more and more apparent, is especially opportune now that protestantism is dying, if not dead. The Catholic apologist is adopting a more positive and constructive method, and ceasing to be merely anti-protestant. St. Thomas never was an anti-protestant, because he had no protestants to oppose. He is in the main current of Catholic thought, and represents that tradition from which men have broken away more and more since the apostasy of the nations in the sixteenth century. The short cut back to truth and sanity will be in the speedy return to the wisdom of St. Thomas.

Thus, it is with rare joy that we hail the Aquinas Society as a sure sign of hope.

It may interest our readers to know that a very successful first meeting of this new Society was held on Monday, October 1st, 1928, in the Common Room, Middle Temple, kindly lent by the Middle Temple Benchers, and an address was given by Mr. Richard O'Sullivan on the Social Philosophy of St. Thomas.

On Monday, November 5th, 1928, the Society will meet again to hear Dr. G. Temple speak on 'Relativity and St. Thomas.'

If any readers of BLACKFRIARS are interested in The Aquinas Society, they are asked to communicate with the Honorary Secretary, Miss Dorothy Finlayson, 24 Primrose Hill Road, London, N.W.3.