

BLACKFRIARS

Through the reading of it many have been recalled to the practice of religion, to renewed apostolate, to more fervent charity. It shows how completely a life may be given to the service of God without forsaking the duties of the world or being cut off from it. Nothing that he did was alien to his apostolate, and yet all his charitable works were carried out through the channels provided by the Church. He thus exemplifies and illuminates the idea of Catholic Action set before us by the Holy Father, to which all are in some measure called, and holds up a light for all those who desire to serve God and the Church in and through their ordinary life in the world.

M. A. BOUSFIELD.

TWO FRIENDS

John Gray: André Raffalovich

I met them five years ago, during the yearly visit south; saw them on several occasions at Bath and Bristol; stayed with them at the *Bell* in Malmesbury; and for three years spent Christmas at Whitehouse Terrace. With others who knew them, I see in their death an epoch ended.

It was not merely that they had survived from the 'nineties, not even that they had been at the centre of that society. Each of them in his way had shaped himself to the new age; they read, made friends, and generally lived, with zest, while they kept without display those gifts which they did not see renewed around them—certain courtesies, a certain social sense, certain refinements of understatement. Hence their charm, hence their elusion of many who would have courted them had they taken a conventionally veteran air. When in 1931 Canon Gray published his *Poems*, the clerical reviews observed that a well-known parish priest had written a book of verse; the secular referred briefly to

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the modernisms of Mr. Gray. Amateurs of the *Yellow Book* period were still seeking copies of *Silverpoints*.

In private they did not discourse on the past, but there were allusions; most often to Beardsley and his sister, sometimes to Pater or Lionel Johnson. If one heard mass at St. Peter's early in January, one's prayers were asked for the soul of Paul Verlaine. A chance naming of Dowson permitted me a question on Cynara; it was well received. Yes, she was as Symons had described her; *très gentille*; no one saw her much, not Dowson himself. So far one might go; but any plot to elicit a narrative would have been delicately countered.

Shortly before his own death, Canon Gray wrote for *BLACKFRIARS* a memoir of his friend. To that I can add little. I remember particularly in André Raffalovich his amazing knowledge of European literature, the humility which accompanied it, and his punctual subordination of books to religious and friendly duties. His sense of the social background of every period was more remarkable than he ever guessed; and when a distinguished novelist confessed in his presence that he had heard for the first time of Madame de Lieven from Lytton Strachey's essay, he was quite simply taken aback. Though his opinion on any piece of English verse was always worth having, he denied himself the natural pleasure of dogmatizing about such things. 'But I do not know—I am not English' he would conclude; and he expected similar discretion in others. Some dictatorial American essays on our classics drew from him the remark, 'A foreigner's writings on English poetry read to me like a burglar's diary.' It would be impossible to suggest briefly the literature he read most eagerly; perhaps Goethe, Racine, Beckford, Mauriac, *Querschnitt* would be typical; and from any of them he would turn naturally at a given moment to his breviary or the *Imitation*. One other memory rises inevitably; ladies envied his exquisite disposition of flowers.

No formula gives the Canon. He graced elegant society; he worked for years among the poor. His love of visible

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things would have scandalized Manichaeans had they not been shamed by his knowledge of the invisible; for the Nicene Creed was one of the main sources of his devotion. Some of his writings suggest an aloofness of thought and expression, in a way truly. 'It represented the Deipara' is a sentence from *Park* which he might have used in conversation; but then one should also have heard his ten-minute sermons to children or his telephone conversation with a police constable who wished to use his church as a mortuary. His precise estimation of food and drink is expressed in that acid stanza of *The Long Road* which ends: 'The wine's name was Beaune.' But he delighted in simplicity also, and had a physical hardiness which drew him to long, often lonely walks in all weathers. I remember how, one biting December, he set off alone to one of the highest districts in Scotland; and how his telegram reached us by the fireside at Whitehouse Terrace: 'Conditions delightful. Snow.'

It was characteristic of him to have bought the first Persian rugs which reached Edinburgh, and to have used them for the sanctuary at St. Peter's. There, unforgettably, he said Mass, speaking with audible dignity and moving like an *amplissimo porporato*. There was a gravity of bearing which never quite left him; tempered in certain surroundings but not disturbed by them. Coming once on a feast day to a religious house, he surprised a group of novices dancing a 'ring of roses.' Pertly or ingenuously, they asked him to join them; he accepted; and the rustic round took on a Handelian amplitude.

His work as a writer was individual. Reading his poems studiously and with memories of the man, one sees that his words were, for himself, always exact; but his allusions often move too far from the reader to be persuasive. Yet his best poems—those on flowers, for instance—are so exquisite that I imagine they may stand in anthologies of the future when the verse of now applauded names has returned to its original dust. His story *Park* seems to me more remarkable in its kind than the poems in theirs.

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Obviously it will never be a popular book, for it has the dryness of a patrician wine. But it has the life of imagination and wit, and its prose is pure in a century of decay.

I end with three stanzas from *The Long Road*, of a vivid simplicity. The things he speaks of would be seen whole by him; the symbolic beauty of cup and towel, the punctual magnificence of the salute.

The son Israel
passed dryfoot through the cloven sea;
again, the wise mysterious three
were guided by a star to Thee.
May we journey well.

If thus things may be,
grant us, dispensed from all alarm,
protected from conspicuous harm,
to stretch at evening, fed and warm,
and drink merrily;

worn, resolute,
to enter once, nor over late,
in easy trim and blest estate,
by that desired, eternal gate,
where proffered cup and towel wait,
And winged guards salute.

W. H. SHEWRING