

## BLACKFRIARS

perienced; the soul, with every one of its faculties, memory, intellect, sentiment, though all of them subordinate to one great spiritual impulse, and all of them inadequate to its fulfilment.

It is a search in which, as St. John of the Cross would have it, the wanderer is driven forth into the dark night, urged by an instinct which is compounded of love and anguish. He is seeking for that which he knows, and, still more, knows not; which he hopes to find and knows he cannot find.

And besides being a search, it is also an escape, like every spiritual quest. It is an escape from the dreary round of material existence; from the feebleness of the understanding and the impotence of the will; from the disappointments of love and friendship, and the humiliation of being nothing better than one is; escape from 'the servitude of corruption into the liberty of the children of God.'

M. D. PETRE.

### A NOTE ON POETRY AND INTELLIGIBILITY

The search for a formula which would give poetry a 'recognition of mystery without repudiation of meaning' has for some time interested a student of St. Thomas who has had the good fortune to read Miss Petre's important essay in manuscript. Having been led by other masters to similar conclusions, he would, at the risk of bathos, if not of impertinence, add a post-script of his own.

The late Abbé Bremond's thesis that all art, including poetry, aspires to the condition of prayer is one of the most illuminating contributions to the subject that has been made. Yet it has seemed to the present writer that the Abbé's presentation of his thesis needed just some such correction as Miss Petre brings to it: a correction which would allow for a glimmering, at least, of light which brings poetry (and, indeed, prayer) within the range of intellect and dispenses with the special and esoteric faculty which has been invented for it. Poetic experience, not less than philosophical thought, protests that the age-long conflict of *Anima* and *Animus* is an intolerable one; that there should be no such conflict, still less the victory of one or of the

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other. It may be readily admitted that the search for the realization of the abstract ideal of a *poésie pure* (like the cognate cult of pure form in the visual arts) has stimulated valuable discoveries and fruitful experiments. Yet these experiments have confirmed in their own way the conviction forced upon us by experience of the masterpieces of the past that not shadow and mystery alone, but some ingredient of light and meaning is of the very essence of poetry.

Rightly, I believe, has Miss Petre sought for the answer to the riddle of poetry in the struggle of the finite to express the Infinite; a struggle which, even in its moments of highest achievement, must yet fall infinitely short of complete success. Here indeed is an adequate explanation of the 'luminous shadow and dusky light.' But the struggle itself calls for explanation. I believe that in St. Thomas is found a more satisfying, a more scientific and a less equivocal statement of the explanation which Lamennais sought.

That grave temptation, so apt to beset the 'conscious dweller in immensity,' to merge—however delicately and with whatever qualifications—the Infinite and the finite was one to which St. Thomas could never succumb. Their utter otherness is absolute and admits of not the slightest qualification. Yet St. Thomas saw that the finite, precisely because finite, has a necessary aspiration or yearning for the Infinite—an 'innate desire' which is the *raison d'être* of every change, progress and endeavour in created things. In man this desire is conscious. Man is not infinite; but in every man, because finite, is implanted that yearning to attain to the Infinite. (Though conscious it may never be reflected upon; seldom indeed is it understood; often misunderstood and degraded: it is a vain groping for the Unknown, unless the Infinite bring knowledge through Self-revelation and power through grace.) Herein lies the motive of every human act and endeavour. But above all, it would seem, of those highest of purely human achievements whereby man struggles deliberately to express in matter the visions and yearnings of his spirit—be the matter stone, wood, canvas, sounds or above all, words.

The contention needs and, I think, deserves further development and elucidation than is here possible. This Note would only suggest that an older philosophy would fully support Miss Petre's view while avoiding the objections to which some details of the philosophy of Lamennais lend themselves.

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