

with criticism from a Dominican theologian. A perusal of the contents will show that the Archbishop's request for such *Reflections* has been answered in the fruitful spirit of discussion as opposed to the blighting influence of controversy. There has, of course, been no thought of the latter in the preparation of this number.

The respect and gratitude of BLACKFRIARS is therefore extended to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the succeeding article by Fr. White is the first concrete expression of that gratitude. It is hoped that such concrete expression will continue fruitfully for the years to come.

Gratitude is also due to the President and Secretary of the Aquinas Society whose generosity and co-operation have made this important contribution to thomism possible, and also to Mr. Richard O'Sullivan, K.C., a former President, for introducing the London Aquinas Society and thus placing the discussion in its proper setting.

THE EDITOR.

---

---

## THE AQUINAS SOCIETY OF LONDON

THE Aquinas Society of London came into existence naturally and, so to say, *insensiblement* among a little group of students who had been attending the pioneer lectures on the *Summa Theologica* that were given some twenty years ago by Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., at St. Peter's Hut, Westminster, under the auspices of the University Extension Board.

Soon after the last war Father Vincent had conceived the idea of making the doctrine of Aquinas available to ordinary lay men and women. It was an immense and individual act of charity on the part of a poor friar who endeavoured in this way to share his intellectual riches and the special inheritance of his Order with lay folk for whom no other means of Catholic intellectual formation existed at the time. The success of these lectures on the *Summa* led in a short while to an expansion of the work, and in a few years three series of lectures on Theology and Ethics, and the

History of Medieval Philosophy and a series on the Scriptures were being given by the Dominican Fathers at St. Peter's Hut. Among the students who attended these courses of lectures were some who were destined in the course of years to occupy office and authority in the State. Who shall tell the full story of the influence these courses had on the lives of individuals and on the public life of the community?

One fine evening in the year 1928 a few of the students of the *Summa* announced their intention of forming a Society which they proposed to call the Aquinas Society, in order to study more closely the principles of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas with a view to their application to the intellectual, moral and social problems of the day. It was decided that all persons, Catholic or non-Catholic, who were sincerely interested in the study of Thomism, should be eligible for membership of the Society. In order to make sure that the Society should remain in the true tradition of St. Thomas, the constitution provided that at least one seat on the Executive Committee should be filled by a member of the Dominican Order. By an act that was to be of happy augury for the future of the Society, the first representative of the Dominican Order on the Executive Committee proposed at the first meeting of the Committee that a certain distinguished representative of the Society of Jesus should be invited to join the Executive. The invitation was readily accepted and the Society has thus had the great good fortune from the beginning of having the good will and the co-operation of members of the Order of St. Dominic and of the Society of Jesus.

The first lecture to the new Aquinas Society on the Social Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas was given in October, 1928. The next talk on St. Thomas and Relativity was given by a young Professor of Science who has lately become a Fellow of the Royal Society.<sup>1</sup> During the year 1929-30 the programme included lectures by scholars and philosophers of Russian and German and American race or origin. Meantime, by the courtesy of Monsieur Jacques Maritain, representatives of the Aquinas Society had been invited in 1929 to attend the annual series of spiritual conferences which were given at Meudon near Paris by R. P. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.; an invitation which was renewed and gratefully accepted each year down to the outbreak of war in 1939.<sup>2</sup> In the brilliant circle that

---

<sup>1</sup> It is not without interest to note that of the three Presidents the Society has had to date, two have been Fellows of the Royal Society.

<sup>2</sup> On two occasions, in 1935 and 1937, R. P. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., did the Aquinas Society the honour of journeying to England and giving a series of spiritual conferences at Oxford and in London respectively.

met at Meudon the members of the London Society caught the inspiration of French and Dominican (and Carmelite) scholarship and spirituality. In the year 1930, at the instance of some members of the Aquinas Society, Professor Jacques Maritain was in turn invited to lecture at King's College, London University. The arrangement of this lecture was due to the interest and foresight of the late Dr. Edwin Deller. The Chair was taken by the Rev. Dr. Matthews, now Dean of St. Paul's, and a packed audience (which included among other personalities the late Bishop Gore) surprised Monsieur Maritain by the warmth of their welcome. It is proper in passing to acknowledge the courtesy and good will that the Colleges of London University uniformly showed on many occasions to the distinguished Catholic figures who, during the course of the next decade, on the introduction of the Aquinas Society, were invited or permitted to give public lectures at King's College, and at University College, London. Nor must one fail to recall the generous courtesy of the Master Treasurer and the Masters of the Bench of the Honourable Society of Lincolns Inn, who put the Old Hall with its memories of St. Thomas More at the disposal of the Aquinas Society for a reception given by Lord and Lady Russell of Killowen, at which Monsieur Maritain delivered a memorable address on '*La Philosophie du Droit*'.<sup>3</sup> A like measure of courtesy and good will was extended from time to time by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, which invited Professor Maritain and the Most Rev. M. Gillet, O.P., Master General, and Mgr. Léon Noël, President of the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie of Louvain, to give addresses at Chatham House. One recalls in particular the exclamation of Professor Zimmern after Mgr. Noël had given his address on Peace and International Order: '*This is life-giving; we need a whole seminar of lectures from Mgr. Noël.*' It was true.

The lapse of years and the fortunes of war have not dimmed the memory or the gratitude of the members of the Aquinas Society to those who made long journeys during these years in order to share their learning and their inspiration with the simple lay men and women who formed the bulk of the audience at the meetings of the Society. In addition to the names that have been given, one remembers with gratitude, among many other names: Professor Jacques Chevalier, R.P. Congar, O.P., Father Thomas Divine, S.J.,

---

<sup>3</sup> A most popular feature of the Society's programme was a revival of the Medieval Disputation, conducted in the traditional manner by two fathers of the Dominican Order, in rooms kindly lent for the occasion by the Masters of the Bench of the Middle and Inner Temple.

Mgr. d'Herbigny, S.J., Monsieur Stanislaus Fumet (now alas! in prison under the Nazis), the Very Rev. Dr. Robert Gannon, S.J. (President of Fordham University), the Very Rev. Father James, O.F.M.Cap., the Very Rev. Father Bede Jarrett, O.P., R.P. Peillaube (of the *Revue de Philosophie*), R.P. Sertillanges, O.P., Frau Doktor Sommer von Seckendorff, R.P. Gabriel Théry, O.P., Dr. Beryl Smalley, and Professor Edward Bullough.

Non-Catholics also lent their aid and shared their light and their learning with the members of the young Society. Professor Cock (of St. John's College, York) and Dr. Curtis (of Leeds University) and Dr. Raymond Klibansky (now of Oriel College, Oxford) and Professor J. A. Smith, lately Grote Professor of Metaphysics in the University of Oxford.

The stimulus and the example (as one may suppose) of the London Society, and the aspiration and the appetite of lay men and women throughout England for instruction in Catholic philosophy and theology, coupled with the charity of many of the clergy, secular and regular, led to the institution of sister societies in many parts of England; at Birmingham and at Bradford, at Leicester and at Manchester and elsewhere. And let it be acknowledged at once that some of the best studies in the practical application of Thomist principles to the moral and social problems of the day were done by members of these societies in the provinces.

In the years before the war one might fairly suppose and reasonably hope that the activities of the several Aquinas Societies in England were merely at the beginning and that the future held (as one trusts it may still hold) good promise of great fulfilment.

The outbreak of war put an end to these activities for a time. In the course of the year 1941 the London Society resumed its work with a series of Conferences in London and Oxford; and since 1942 regular meetings of the Society have been held at the old venue in Burlington House, Piccadilly, in rooms kindly lent by the Linnean Society.

In view of the size of the audience which was expected to attend, and which did attend, the address of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury was given at the Caxton Hall. It was a memorable occasion and the words spoken by His Grace of Canterbury (and the short contribution of Rev. Eric Mascall, author of *He Who Is*) may be said in a sense to mark the confluence and reunion of the Anglican and the Catholic philosophical tradition; and to reflect the prevailing spirit of collaboration among Christians and of co-operation in all charity.

RICHARD O'SULLIVAN.