

EVE AND THE GRYPHON. By Gerald Vann, O.P. (Blackfriars; 6s.)

On the Aristotelian physiology and Mediterranean economy preachers have buzzed in a fashion offensive to feminists at any rate, and difficult for others to take seriously. However, St Thomas is inclined to think that approximately as many girls as boys would have been born had there never been a fall, and, to leave such occasional remarks, these four wise and gracious conferences show a thorough assimilation of his doctrine. They observe the differences of the contrasts between male and female, man and woman, lover and lover, husband and wife; they neither jam nor dislocate the eugenic and personal purposes of sex; and consequently, unlike some religious treatments of the topic, they avoid barbarity on the one hand and sentimentality on the other.

Not that they deal with sex in the narrow sense of the word, but with the theology of the feminine virtues in which all should share: stability, patience in face of childishness without any air of patronage, the bringing to God of those we love. They are mainly about an ideal woman; the author notes with humour that man enters as he usually is rather than as he ought to be. One strength of his discourses is that the special vocation of women is not taken in isolation, but integrated with the general law of divine charity. There is no inclination towards Jansenism, and the healthy inclination towards humanism is pushed beyond itself to the first and uncompromising object of our entire love and service. No technicalities obtrude, but between the lines the Thomist conception of the concurrence of two total causalities is engaged, and one senses throughout the impressive operation of a trained theological mind allowing urgent human interests to speak for themselves. The bones of scholasticism do not show through, but they are here to give shape; there is a firmness about kinds and types of action, which belongs to the very structure of moral science, combined with a delicate appreciation of individual variety, which is a condition of its application.

The note is struck from the beginning: seek ye first the kingdom, and the rest shall be added. The last phrase does not introduce an ulterior motive, but rather a confident reassurance that can be promptly forgotten. God is not praised by blackguarding creatures, says St Thomas; and he is called zealous, says Dionysius, because he cherishes what he makes. The Thomist balance is no less noble than a stark unearthliness, and rather more difficult to achieve. The argument mounts to the parable of the *Purgatorio* when Dante meets his lover, *ben son, ben son Beatrice*, but she bids him gaze on Christ. Perhaps the grown woman may sometimes smile gently at what may be called the innocence of some of the reflections and exhortations, and a touch of irony here and there might have served true reverence better than the solemnity expected of the spoken word in religious conferences. High theology and great literature have no need to consult the respectabilities. The tragic and the comic, how close they are in humility; the symmetry and surprise; the recompense and gift.