

## BLACKFRIARS

### EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

KULTUURLEVEN (published by *Geloofsverdediging*, Ploegstraat, Antwerp; 40 Belgian francs per annum) is the name of the new review of the Flemish Dominicans which has succeeded to the more modest and less comprehensive *Thomistische Tijdschrift*. The September number affords a good example of the thoroughness with which a great variety of topics are treated by experts. Cyriel Verschare publishes a Flemish translation of his lecture on *Flemish Mysticism* delivered at Aix-la-Chapelle last June: his own poetic gifts singularly qualify him to interpret the often puzzling symbolism of Ruysbroeck and the other mystical writers of Flanders. *The Notion of Being as a Pivot of Thomist Thought* is the subject of a study by Dr. Kremer, C.S.S.R. (well known for his studies of the English and American Neo-Realists), who has so mastered the matter as to bring to it unusual freshness and originality. Fr. M. C. Schroons, O.P., in the course of an article on *Morality and War*, shows how scriptural texts are misquoted by pacifists and militarists alike in complete disregard of the actual teaching of the New Testament. Fr. C. van Gestel, O.P. (a recent contributor to BLACKFRIARS), discusses, with his customary conciseness and fairness, the doctrines of Emile Van der Velde in one of a series of studies on contemporary Continental socialists. The arts are served in contributions on the famous *Adoration of the Lamb* triptych at Ghent, on *Literatuuroffensief in U.S.S.R.*, and by the film-chronicle of K. Luyten, who criticises the methods of the American Legion of Decency which he considers, with good reason, to compare unfavourably with the action taken in the matter by Catholics on the Continent.

THE DISTRIBUTISTS' WEEKLY. On October 11th appeared the five hundredth number of G.K.'s WEEKLY. Nobody acquainted with the difficulties which confront independent journalism at the present time, and the peculiar difficulties which G.K.'s has had to surmount, will hesitate to congratulate such longevity. G.K.'s is, of course, intended to be a provocative paper, and it has often been successful in making *Penguin* (among others) exceedingly provoked. Constitutionally incapable of sharing the attitude to life

## EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

of some of its contributors (and pitifully insensible to many of their jokes), he would not have his shortcomings obstruct recognition of their gallant maintenance of principles dear to all of us. *G.K.'s* stands, in its own distinctive way, for the ideal of personal liberty and its assurance by the equitable division of property. Some of us, in addition to temperamental differences, may find grounds for criticism in the orthodox *G.K.'s* programme, and even in the orthodox *G.K.'s* interpretation of the formula. Such secondary divergencies should not stand in the way of acknowledgment of far more fundamental agreements and sympathies. It is said that the truly great and humble G.K.C. was very reluctant to lend his initials to the title of the *Weekly*, but was persuaded to it against his own judgment by his advisers. There can be little doubt that G.K.C. was right and his advisers wrong. To some of us the *Weekly* seems too often to have compromised the vital principles of essential Distributism in the very personal tastes, views and prejudices—not always happily interpreted by his disciples—of its editor (who would be the last to wish to impose them as dogmas of faith necessary to national regeneration), and to have become impressed with a personal stamp which hinders it from becoming the great power for good that it should be. In offering congratulations and sincerest wishes for the further success of *G.K.'s Weekly*, *Penguin* ventures to express the hope that future policy may tend to base itself more and more on the broadest basis of essential Distributism, at the expense perhaps of accidentals, but without prejudice to the characteristics which always make *G.K.'s* stimulating reading. No longer could it be dismissed as merely the organ of a clever coterie, rather contemptuously aloof from the society into which it has, inscrutably, pleased God to call us, but might become an effective force within that society itself for its conversion to social and economic conditions permitting the full exercise of the rights and duties of the human person.

The Catholic Land Associations of England and Wales are, in a sense, the offspring of Distributism and are alone enough to justify its existence. These associations have now produced an organ of their own. *THE CROSS AND THE PLOUGH* (ed. quarterly from Weeford Cottage, Hill, Sutton Coldfield). The first number includes, for the delectation

## BLACKFRIARS

of suburbia, an inevitable stage-rustic turn by an inevitable 'Hodge,' but, in the main, the romantic appeal of the Land Movement is kept well in the background, and the new quarterly quite clearly means serious business. We wish every success to this effort to make better known and understood what the Pope has called 'the most praiseworthy enterprise' of 'restoring a sane and healthy life of the countryside' with its object of the 'diminution of unemployment through the development of the agricultural resources of the country to the fullest extent possible.'

CATACOMBS, LIBERALISM—OR CATHOLIC ACTION? While we would not endorse his every word nor admit the justice of all his criticisms, there are some excellent and vitally important points in a letter which Mr. John Quinlan (contributor of one of the most discussed articles in our 'Catholic Action Number') has sent to THE CATHOLIC HERALD (Oct. 6) in reply to some observations which had appeared in an earlier issue of that paper. He writes:

Very few would disagree with you that it is difficult to discover from BLACKFRIARS what Catholic Action will be like in England. But the reason for this should be sufficiently clear. It is not the function of any periodical or person to particularize in this matter as yet: it is the function of the Bishops. The national board has only recently been constituted; so far it has issued no programme. It is a matter not merely of courtesy but of obedience (a vital constituent of Catholic Action) not to discuss formally what particular things will be done or how they will be done . . . .

You also consider it an objection that Catholic Action may create a self-conscious Catholic body which will be inclined to keep much to itself, to be exclusive (you say 'sectarian'). Setting aside your semi-Fascist appellation of 'Black Front,' let us pray that it will . . . .

Mr. Quinlan then criticizes (surely irrelevantly so far as the *Catholic Herald* is concerned) the contrary policy, in which he scents a recrudescence 'liberalism':

It is theoretically true that a Catholic laity working like a leaven should permeate its milieu and turn it into its own colour; but unhappily it more commonly happens that it is the opposite process which is successful; it is the world which has taken possession of the Catholics . . . The wholesale defection

## EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

of the Continental workers and our own 'leakage' problem are results of the excess of the merging, 'unconscious' policy. But Mr. Quinlan is no advocate of the 'flight to the catacombs' programme (as commonly understood), although:

Circumstances are tending to push the Church into the position she occupied in the pre-Constantine era. We are gradually becoming moral and social outlaws. In that era Catholic Action flourished: there was a definite organization of lay apostles. But though they contacted with the world, they came from and returned to a well-guarded fold in which they were nourished and protected.

We think Mr. Quinlan has put his finger on the fundamental dilemma which lies, often unsuspected, at the root of many of the differences between thinking Catholics at the present time. What is more, he has detected the *solution* of the dilemma—Catholic Action, whose 'effect will be to make the individual acutely, if necessary painfully, conscious of the demands of his faith.' In pointing out how Catholic Action surmounts the evils of 'unconscious merging' on the one side and of isolation with its concomitant neglect of our apostolic obligations on the other, Mr. Quinlan has rendered a valuable service to the understanding of what Catholic Action really means.

**CATHOLIC ACTION AND 'SECTARIANISM.'** The charge of Liberalism is, in this context, a grave one, and is, we are sure, misdirected. But the words which prompted Mr. Quinlan's letter are indeed perplexing. The writer (*Catholic Herald*, Sept. 15) scented:

the danger that Catholic Action will induce an unhealthy self-consciousness of Catholics forming a separated body and fighting together on a kind of 'black front.' BLACKFRIARS itself has in the past stood out so strongly against this sectarian conception of Catholicity that we look to it for guidance on the matter.

Pending some fuller explanation of the writer's difficulty, we cannot, we fear, be very helpful. We would only remark that, although BLACKFRIARS has consistently repudiated anything which would tend to make the Church an isolated denomination, although it has always maintained that Catholicity is the fullness of natural and supernatural life, and that consequently Catholics as such should not divorce

## BLACKFRIARS

their 'secular' from their 'religious' activities, never has it denied (what is indeed a corollary of this) that the Church is a distinct and distinctive, a compact and indeed a rigorously exclusive body in, but not of, the world. It was so in Galilee, and it must always be so, for real comprehensiveness postulates exclusiveness. To repudiate this would be to repudiate its Divine mission in the world, the sole justification for its existence.

A very kindly and complimentary comment on our September number in *THE CLERGY REVIEW* contains a passage which we find scarcely less perplexing:

*The great advantage of Catholic Action, it seems to us, is that there will be some chance of forestalling the activities of an earnest layman who has, perhaps, only an elementary sense of his limitations.*

The italics indeed are ours, and the negative advantages which should follow the establishment of Catholic Action are not negligible. But if no greater advantage is to be sought in Catholic Action than its utility as an instrument for the repression of indiscreet zealots, not only the September *BLACKFRIARS*, but the entire collection of Papal instructions regarding Catholic Action would seem to have been written in vain.

'INFILTRATION.' The programme of 'infiltration' suggested by Fr. Thomas Gilby in *Catholics and the National Consciousness* and *Laxton Week-End* (in the June and October numbers of *BLACKFRIARS* respectively) has aroused widespread and sympathetic interest both at home and abroad. The latest comment is that of *LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE* (October 10th), which, after a thorough and careful analysis of Fr. Gilby's first article, concludes:

Fr. Gilby's description does not therefore envisage the manner in which Catholic Action itself should develop in England, but rather the indispensable preliminaries to that Catholic Action. In England even less than in other countries can the official, organized lay-apostolate afford to dispense with this moral preparation of public opinion, which is usually the result of humble individual efforts, each of which functions in its own particular sphere in a Christian spirit of fraternal charity and general helpfulness. Moreover, it will seem to some observers, and not without reason, that there is need for a fundamental

## EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

change in the whole *mentality* of the majority of English Catholics, both clerical and lay, in this matter of their individual relationships—Catholics, Anglicans and Nonconformists have not lived together for centuries without coming to understand and appreciate one another. In the past the Catholics of England have had *excuse* for their isolation; now they must have their *victory*.

It need hardly be pointed out that this policy of 'infiltration,' while definitely 'unsectarian,' has nothing in common with the liberalist spirit of compromise. Here is no question of 'unconscious merging'; it is, if we understand it aright, the conscious and deliberate taking of uncompromising (but not necessarily arrogant) Catholicism into everyday life.

COLOSSEUM AND ESPRIT. There is rather less rending of the Lions by the Christians in THE COLOSSEUM Number Three (a presumably useful, but to us a somewhat repulsive, spectacle). Though still definitely 'Not a Polite Review,' and indeed in more than one sense a somewhat rude one, *The Colosseum* promises to settle down to become a permanent, indispensable and serious addition to periodical literature. Christopher Dawson's *The Real Issue* on the social mission of the Church is of course the best thing in the number. François Mauriac seems to have mistaken his visitor's identity in *An Evening with Greta Garbo* (could it have been Zasu Pitts?). The first instalment of Bernard Wall's *Marxism and Man* contains many good points. Laurence Oliver is characteristically caustic about Bernard Shaw, but needs, even more than some others of the team, to learn that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. A very heterogeneous series of short articles seeks to define the review's policy regarding the arts. Although the contributors are agreed in stressing (perhaps over-stressing) that the art of a period reflects its social conditions, no very clear or uniform programme or outlook emerges from the symposium. It compares unfavourably with the more considered and exhaustive treatment of the same subject in the October ESPRIT, a special number devoted to *L'Art et la Révolution spirituelle*. Unified by a leading article of Emmanuel Mounier on *Une réhabilitation de l'Art et des Artistes*, contributions consist of an excellent series of *Préfaces*

## BLACKFRIARS

to a new Literature, Poetry, Theatre, Painting, Architecture, Music, and Cinema.

MISCELLANEA. The next *Essay in Order* will arouse interest in Theodor Haecker. A good study of his life and work will be found in the September HOCHLAND together with a profound essay of his own, *Analogia Trinitatis*.—Interesting memoirs of Father Bede Jarrett have appeared in PAX (August) and MEMORIE DOMENICANE (July-August: Convento S. Maria Novella, Firenze), by Mrs. Plunket Greene and Fr. Daniel Callus, O.P., respectively.—A valuable article on the delicate question of the relation of Catholic Action to politics by Colonel André Rouillet appears in LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE of September 25th.—A pungent criticism by Fr. Gerald Vann, O.P., in THE MONTH, of *Our Unreasonable Services*, resuscitates the question of the scandalous unworthiness of some 'English' renderings of 'popular' prayers and hymns.

PENGUIN.