

## SAINT THOMAS PAYS US A VISIT

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HIS PAPER posits an imaginary situation—one similar to that of *Brother Petrarch's Return*. Suppose, if you will, Saint Thomas being permitted by the Omnipotent God to live again among men, not in the spirit as he actually does still, but just as he was several hundred years ago—truly a man among men.

Now that Brother Thomas is with us once again in the flesh, let us show him what has happened since he last walked and talked among the great and small of the thirteenth century. Due to the limits of this paper we must restrict our remarks and the Saint's comments to the field of Philosophy only.

Do you think our medieval Brother is surprised at 1943's human beings and their conduct? Not at all. Thomas knows too much of human nature, a nature that has always been and ever will be flexible and subject to innumerable influences. He is puzzled, however, at the number of conclusions men of science have drawn from principles they have spun from no more than fanciful dreams. Moreover, he is a bit irked at the causes of the wholesale ignorance, or rather denial, of elementary knowledge; the abortion of knowledge that was "horse-sense" even in those medieval days. Brother Thomas seems to take everything in a calm stride. Nothing philosophical is too big for him to analyze. Even after he has been driven in our newest type of "horse-less carriage" he does not express great wonderment. "New dress on ancient principles," he says, "but it is still the same old story of 'quidquid fit, causam habet.' Gas engines are strange causes, but still, causes."

About this time we take him to Camden, N. J. where he is shown the latest type of microscope. First, we explain, as best we can, all about the structure, function and real purpose of such mechanisms. At this he mentions how glad Master Albert would have been to examine and use similar equipment back in the "old days" at Cologne and Paris. Then the laboratory technicians take over the conversation to explain that the newest microscope, which is such only analogously, has a magnetic field for its lens, a vacuum medium, and the trick of the whole thing is turned by playing electrons upon a fluorescent screen. At this point one of the more enthusiastic men proudly

boasts that the device will soon give us the ultimate components of this little planet called Earth. "Why even now," he offered, "we can photograph such things as filterable viruses, which heretofore have escaped the grasp of the highest powered light-microscope."

Then, for some reason of his own, Aquinas turned the laboratory into an uproar with one word. "Stultissime," I think he said. When we asked him at least to apologize to the gentlemen, he calmly explained all about matter and form being the ultimate constituents of every created body. And since the *materia prima* is wholly potential, no microscope will ever be able to isolate the 'building-blocks' that God in His infinite Wisdom saw fit to use when He created the universe. Needless to say, the scientists were standing open-mouthed as we followed Brother Thomas out the door.

Our medieval visitor has been reading steadily these past few days. We have seen him at all community exercises but aside from these he is using every minute to pore over the philosophies that have sprouted up since his teaching days. The patience he shows towards both the insipid and the really vicious is remarkable. Today being "Gaudeamus," though, he relaxed a bit from his usual procedure. So several of the brethren took advantage of the opportunity to beseech the Saint to explain what some of the newer philosophies of the twentieth century were all about. The Schoolman merely grinned and shook his head. "Sorry," he ventured, "but some of the doctrines, in fact too many of them, are inexplicable. Why only last night I came across a definition of the 'world' by one of the modern physicists, a certain Dutch astronomer named de Sitter. According to him the world is a 'four-dimensional continuum of space and time, forming the surface of a sphere in five-dimensional coordinates.' In a footnote this eminent but over-imagining scientist naively confessed that such a sphere in those surroundings is absolutely incomprehensible."

"What shall we do to combat this type of inconsistency?" asked one of the more perplexed Brothers. The Medieval Doctor, answered, "What can you do in such a situation? Present that which is reasonable and objectively evident—nothing more than common-sense. Does not our Father McNabb say that Philosophy is just 'organized good sense'? Then, too, pray that your adversaries will pull their heads out of their idealistic clouds long enough to meet you on ground that is familiar to both of you."

The conversation continued for a time and the gist of Thomas' words was that we should never concede a fraction of an inch where Truth is concerned. "Your doctrines, our doctrines, Mother Church's doctrines, you know, cannot be tampered with. Preserve them intact

for they represent and are Eternal Truths." In this vein the Saint continued till time for Office.

After supper he seemed eager to resume the same trend of thought. "Look," he remarked, "at the misguided men who today style themselves psychologists. Take but two as examples. These I have in mind are known as Behaviorists, or Misbehaviorists as Mr. Wickham so acidly but nonetheless correctly labeled them. They are fairly representative of the 'soul-less' school of Psychology."

"The first of them defines instinct as 'an inherited or innate psycho-physical disposition which determines its possessor to perceive, and to pay attention to, objects of a certain class, to experience an emotional excitement of a particular quality upon perceiving such an object, and to act in regard to it in a particular manner, or, at least to experience an impulse to such an action.' Needless to say, Mr. McDougall is a bit cautious. He foresees objections from the start so he acts like a crab, shuffling backward, all the time encasing his concept of instinct with words and phrases, with more words and more phrases. The heart of the definition is lost in a maze of ravelings such as is that thing called the core in a golf ball. Would it not be far more simple and clear to say, just as all Scholastics maintain, that an instinct is a sensory power by which brutes know what is good for the individual and the species without repeated experience?"

"Your contemporary," the Saint went on, "G. K. C. you called him, 'hit the nail on the head' in his criticism of many present-day psychologists. This type of scientist, your English convert said, 'can go on talking and inventing terms for hours on end with hardly a movement of the grey matter inside his skull.' It seems to me," the Saint further elaborated, "that what you need in such matters touching on brevity and clarity are more men like Chesterton and Mr. Belloc. Wasn't it the latter who very tersely wrote that 'Two came from the left, and two came from the right—making four in all'?"

Time really flies when we talk with the Saint—the first bell for Office sounded just as he finished Mr. Belloc's condemnation of long-winded nonsense. So, all we could do, as we walked towards the *De Profundis* corridor, was to console ourselves by looking forward to the next discussion on 'soul-less' Psychology.

Because it was raining, this discussion took place in the Library where the brethren have been accustomed to gather after the community exercises when the weather does not permit of outside activities. "As was mentioned before," Brother Thomas began, "defini-

tions are not what they used to be. But along with that particular abuse even terms are now stretched beyond recognition. In this regard the second 'psychologist' is a most flagrant 'stretcher'. Perhaps it is understandable to some degree since he caters to men's emotions and the sordid side of their imaginations alone rather than to their intellects. The man in question, a Mr. Freud, though he denies the existence of such a thing as a psychic process, off-handedly proceeds to speak of them: 'When I termed one of the psychic processes the primary process in the psychic apparatus, I did so . . . insofar as it is only a theoretic fiction.' With that kind of terminology as a foundation he constructed his whole 'science'!

Foolish isn't it?—you will have to look long and closely to find even a morsel of true wisdom in that fellow's writings. Regarding most of his 'popular works' it seems as though Freud is spinning words and definitions from his own erotic imagination, just as a spider constructs its web. In the latter's case, though, the result is a work of art worthy of admiration."

As Brother Thomas finished his remarks dealing with the Austrian Doctor he became silent. Shortly, however, he resumed speaking: "Do not misunderstand me, Brothers, we have always to remember Christian charity even in philosophical controversies. I am not condemning these fellows themselves so much as the vicious doctrines they preach. Too, your adversaries' tenets contain germs of truth—and 'Truth . . . is divine.' Moreover, the Church accumulated THE PHILOSOPHY not from Herself, nor by a blind and stupid eclecticism. Rather, Her's was and still is a two-fold plan: assimilation of the wholesome, and rejection of the erroneous."

Having finished telling us how the Church gathered Truth from all sides, Saint Thomas unexpectedly rose. "Brothers," he said slowly, "my visit with you, in the flesh, is about over. As Our Lord once said, 'I have to be about My Father's business'; so I, too, have other duties that now call me from your companionship. But till we meet once again I would like to enumerate a few points of philosophy that have been in existence from the time when Almighty God first breathed His Likeness into a lump of earth. These doctrines are simple—so simple that every average man and woman accepts them fully. On the other hand, they have proved stumbling blocks to men of pride and false learning. These doctrines, handed down (at least implicitly) from the time of our First Parents, are only a few in number. Despite their brevity, they are extremely profound. Further, they will serve you immeasurably in any and all philosophical studies.

You must believe them, Brothers, or else you have no reason for existing as rational beings."

As he was yet speaking, Thomas walked to the blackboard where he wrote the following:

"Every man and woman must accept:

'The fact that there is a God;  
The existence of an external world;  
The validity of our external senses;  
The validity of our intellectual processes;  
The principle of causality;  
The principle of free-will;  
The existence of spiritual, . . . immaterial beings;  
The doctrine of personality;  
The principle of substance and accidents;  
The principle of the goodness of beings;  
The principle of the brotherhood of man.'"

Finishing the last sentence, Saint Thomas turned to the group and said, "Remember these rules and the ship that is your rationality will never be broken on philosophical rocks.

"Speaking of rules of guidance reminds me that there remains one point more to be stressed. Never forget the importance of prayer in your studies! Not only because the human intellect is pitifully weak, do I emphasize this need, but also because the simple fact of the matter is that 'to serve God is to reign' (even as Philosophers). To neglect the Omniscient is to run the risk of being thrown in the same boat with the fool who said 'There is no God.' I see no reason to develop this any further since you know only too well what happened to him." With these final words the Saint started for the stairway. But before he could leave the room, the brethren asked for his blessing. This he humbly gave—a last gesture as he left the room.

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