

Library Signpost

A Great Lay Theologian

By Rev. Benedict Ekmann

I hope many people will come out next Sunday evening to hear Mr. Frank Sheed at Aquinas Institute. He, more than any living man, is the spearhead of the Catholic Revival in England. In my estimation, he holds the future hope of England and the English-speaking world far more representatively than its war-leaders.

Mr. Sheed, and the writers whom he is influencing, are the spanners to tomorrow's world. Alone among Englishmen, outside of the Communists, they know what they want for tomorrow and what they must do today to get it. Mr. Churchill is a bleater with words, alongside of Mr. Sheed and his little legion of Catholic thinkers.

The power of Mr. Sheed was hammered out during long years of apostolate in London's Hyde Park. If millions of Englishmen were living away from Christ, like the heathens that perish, well, then, one had to bring Christ to them, where they would listen. Hyde Park was the best place for that—out in the open air, where anyone is permitted to set up his "pitch" and attract whatever passers-by he can with a "sales-talk" on religion or philosophy or politics.

It's a tough mill to be ground down in, for the heckling is tough and merciless. I am sure this rough-and-tumble school has done more than anything to make Mr. Sheed the most able layman in religious repartee anywhere in the world.

I have been long wishing to give some samples of Mr. Sheed's writing to the readers of this column. This seems to be a good occasion for it. Some of you may be persuaded to come to his lecture; and those whose minds are already made up may come with keener appetite.

Sample 1. "In Hells a Poppin one of the clowns, commenting on the inexplicable behavior of another, scratches his head and says, 'One of us two is nuts and it can't be him he reads.' This notion that there is something intellectual about reading still strangely persists. For most of what gets read is mush, and if we read mush, our minds become mush. Yet it remains that without real reading, the mind does not grow.

"Now, if ever the Catholic mind must be built up by reading. The future is dark, no man living can foresee what it will be, but all history affirms the certainty that a heavy duty will lie upon the Catholic intellect to find the way of order in the coming chaos. We have the writers. It is for us to get all the light we can from them. Not a ray of it but will be needed. To neglect good reading now is a kind of treason.

Sample 2. "Divide and conquer is a very good rule for conquerors. But if a people has no desire to conquer but only to remain free, then that rule is of no use: it needs another—Understand or be conquered. But there is almost nothing a people will not do rather than make the study which will lead to understanding. It will spend any number of billions on defenses against the enemy and disrupt its national life to do it: if necessary it will die in the front line to keep the enemy out: no effort against the enemy is too great and no sacrifice—save the sacrifice of the time and the effort of the mind necessary to understand him. It is probably part of the general human rule that any effort is preferable to mental effort. No poet ever wrote a truer line than Pope's about 'the insupportable fatigue of thought.'

"Fatigue is indeed the key-word to the peril of the democracies against the dictatorships. We are weary—not from work, for many people work harder—but from aimlessness. As F. W. Forester says in his great book Europe and the German Question: 'Something whole-hearted has faced the half-hearted.' The half-hearted. U.S."

Sample 3. In Heaven "our soul will have laid hold on God. God is supreme truth, so that our intellect, with no barrier between itself and its supreme object, will be eternally enriched in eternal activity, for God is infinite and our intellect will never exhaust the truth which is its supreme beatitude. But God, too, is supreme goodness: so that our will equally will find no barrier between itself and its supreme object, and will come to realize eternal love. Not all souls will be equal in Heaven. The soul grows naturally by development of intellect and will. Supernaturally which is what matters here—it grows by the possession of the Supernatural Life. But this it must receive upon earth, or after death it cannot merit. Therefore, souls united with God have not all reached the same degree of development when they come to die. But, greater or smaller, all souls are functioning in heaven with intellect and will at their highest intensity upon their highest object, therefore every soul will know perfect happiness.

"The various qualities in the things of earth which cause us happiness are all caused by God, the creator of all things: they are therefore already present in Him, not in the shadowy and imperfect way in which we find them in created things. If complete and perfect in their highest form, holding Him, then, we find at an infinitely higher level all things whatsoever which have caused our happiness upon earth."

Note: The first two samples are taken from the Fall 1940 edition of This Fighting Business (a quarterly book bulletin written by Mr. Sheed), and the third one is from A Man of Life, pp. 141-142. This last is a 144-page summary of the Catholic Religion as admirable as anything you can find on the subject in English. You will find a copy at the Catholic Evidences Library, Columbus Civic Centre, 50 Chestnut St., Rochester, N. Y.; open every day except Saturday and Sunday, 4 to 6 and 7 to 9.

ST. STEPHEN

By Fred Mickey

His faith who was the first to die Was like a ray of light The first bright ray that must have flashed Through space's endless night.

It must have been a starry faith A sabre, golden tipped, Forged by a craftman of the skies And in white fire dipped.

It flashed through Stephen's heart and mind Straight out of Heaven's blue, He could not flinch at things like stones

When it had pierced him through. His soul leaped up to link with Christ

So beautiful and gay. It passed a million other souls Who loitered on the way.

And Christ to God the Father said: "Behold in life anew The faith we fashioned in the skies Now coming back to you."

"So bright it was, so white, fair. We thought it could not be Made fairer, yet behold it is Through Earthborn ecstasy."

Motorist's Prayer

Grant me a steady hand and watchful eye, That no man shall be hurt when I pass by.

Thou gavest life, and I pray no act of mine May take away or mar that gift of thine.

Shelter those, dear Lord, who bear me company From the evils of fire and all calamity.

Teach me to use my car for others' need, Nor miss through love of speed The beauties of Thy world; that thus I may

With joy and courtesy go on my way.

Getting On In The World

THINGS TO FIGHT FOR

Three things I'll fight for, said the young man, my family, my Church and my country. Before Dec. 7, we used to fight about instead of for things.

The important, fundamental things now take precedence over the fanciful and accidental. No more does the little girl fancy heaven as a place with a million killyops and not a single atomachache. No, heaven is home with dad or brother Bill back from the wars, safe and sound.

No more does the worn working man ask for "my own business, my own salary, my own hours, and a whole gang to boss and I'll call it real heaven." Heaven is now reaching out from the distant future, casting its breath upon his family, his country, his Church—the things he is working to help our stricken present.

Eternal health, eternal youth, eternal freedom—these are no longer the desired of the sick, the aged, the persecuted. Health is offering itself now on the altar of sacrifice, youth is ready for premature aging, and freedom everywhere is curtailed for the greater freedom of the future, the heaven that is promised and real.

For family, Church and country—these to fight for on the long spiral staircase of merit that leads to heaven, these to work and pray for, these to preserve that heaven might be possible to men of other tomorrows.

SNICKERS

Boss: "Have you the firmness of character that enables a man to go on and do his duty in the face of ingratitude, criticism and ridicule?"

Applicant: "Well, I cooked for our camping party last summer."

Sursum Corda

Dispute or Enjoy?

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

Perhaps I have mentioned in this column that I am a collector of coincidences. Strictly speaking not a collector but an observer. You don't buy them in the open market as you buy rare stamps at the philatelists. You stumble upon them. They just happen.

Here is one of my palest not startling indeed but I hope, interesting. On a cross-continent railroad trip I stopped off to see a friend of mine, he is a Catholic, his wife, whom I was meeting for the first time, a pretty firmly fixed Protestant. The husband being eager to convert his wife perhaps a trifle over-eager, though his zeal is animated by affection—promptly directed the conversation into a channel of controversy. Before we were aware of what was happening we were plunged into a discussion of the relative merits of Catholicism and Protestantism. Afterwards I felt that it was hardly fair to the lady, for we were two to her one. Perhaps also it was bad mannered on my part to pass so swiftly from the amenities of a first meeting, "How do you do?" "Delighted to see you," and "What unusual weather," to a rather vigorous theological discussion. But it was all in good part and even in good fun. The husband is a scholar, a vivacious conversationalist, and the wife is charming, clever, witty and with a fine sense of humor. So the discussion was entirely good-natured.

But when I got on the train again and opened up a book—as it happened, my favorite Prohaszka these sentences leaped out of the text and smote me full in the face: "We dispute much for we cannot as yet enjoy the truth." (That was for the lady) "He who enjoys or rather lives deeply, does not dispute much." (That was for me) "Our soul needs air and sunshine. We will neither doubt nor dispute but live." (That was for both of us)

Judging from the Gospels, our Saviour did not dispute much. In one text we read that "something went out from Him." If something went out from us priests and from the enlightened Catholic laity, perhaps we should not have to argue. Isn't there a story about St. Francis of Assisi preaching a sermon by just walking through the city without speaking a word? And do we not often hear from the lips of a pretty stubborn Protestant who happens to meet a serene and joyous Catholic—say a Sister in a hospital—the exclamation, "I wish I could have the faith that makes that holy person so happy."

But the coincidence was not yet completed. It was a three-cornered one this time. Arrived at my destination I picked up a slight volume that I hadn't had in my hands for twenty-five years, G. K. Chesterton: a Criticisms, published anonymously but, as every one knows, written by his brother Cecil. And here is the passage that came apropos of my little theological disputation: "The weak point in Mr. Chesterton's argument with Mr. Blatchford (the atheist) was that he made no real attempt to defend the Christian philosophy at all... the independent freethinker might reply, 'you have scored off Mr. Blatchford, now prove your strange story of a Heavenly Father, of a God incarnate in flesh, of an eternal life beyond the grave—prove that incredible story to be true.'"

There it pops up again, the demand for disputation. "Prove, prove argue, argue!"

That was written away back in 1908. Chesterton did indeed produce many a brilliant piece of argumentation after that. In fact his best work came close upon the heels of his brother's challenge. The very next year, if I remember rightly, appeared his second best masterpiece, Orthodoxy (if you count The Everlasting Man his topmost work. And of course both G. K. C. and Cecil came into the Catholic Church.)

But it is probably true to say that G. K.'s enormous influence on his generation arose not so much from the power of his logic as from the exuberant joyousness which he manifested more and more as he got nearer to the heart of the faith. He came into the Church more by the method of St. Augustine "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee," than by the method of St. Thomas Aquinas. After all St. Thomas was not a convert, and it may be doubted that he could have been converted by his own massive and majestic Summa Theologica. But any man could be converted by St. Thomas' joyous mystical poem, "Pange Lingua Gloriosi"

Yes, Bishop Prohaszka is right. What we need is not more disputation but more joyousness. We dispute much because we do not enjoy. He who enjoys does not dispute much.

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Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Mar. 11, 1937, Edition

In view of growing hostility everywhere in Germany against the Church, the Episcopal Committee named by the German Hierarchy urged Chancellor Hitler to take immediate steps about the application of Germany's Concordat with the Holy See as strong and formal protest was made.

Announcement was made that the Rev. J. H. O'Loane, C.S.B., would be in charge of Aquinas Institute when the Basilian Fathers took over administration of the Catholic boys' high school in September.

Considered a threat to rights of parents and as giving Congress control of youth, the ratification of the so-called Child Labor Amendment in New York State was defeated by the Assembly, 102 to 42.

That they defeat Communism by revealing its unfulfilled promises was advocated by the Rev. Frederick Nastvogel, C.S.S.R., in addressing the First District Commandery, Knights of St. John, at Rochester Regiment's Headquarters, St. Joseph's Church hall.

Feast Days

- Sunday, Mar. 15.—ST. ZACHARY.
Monday, Mar. 16.—ST. ARKHAM.
Tuesday, Mar. 17.—ST. PATRICK, BISHOP AND APOSTLE OF IRELAND.
Wednesday, Mar. 18.—ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM.
Thursday, Mar. 19.—ST. JOSEPH.
Friday, Mar. 20.—ST. CUTHBERT.
Saturday, Mar. 21.—ST. BENEDICT.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 18)

Every Saint lives eternally with God! The trials and sufferings of a short earthly career become to them only a happy memory. The ages of eternity are theirs, their names are written bright on the scrolls of Heaven.

But their memory may fade from the minds of men, their earthly fame may pass away. To many a man, the Saint in the Litany or on the altar is only a name: a Saint famous in one part of the world, is unknown in another.

Not so with St. Patrick! In every nation, among every people, Patrick stands forth in ever-renewed vitality as a living, active, glorious, Man-of-God. Into every nation have his sons gone, into every part of the world they have carried the Faith he preached to them. Years can not dim the splendor of the mission he so faithfully fulfilled for God and His Vicar on Earth. Years can not bury under the spiritual influence of his Patron Saint of Ireland.

May his intercession be with us as we observe his Feast in 1942! May his prayers for Ireland and her sons and daughters, include also their millions of co-religionists from every country under Heaven. May his love for mankind bring peace to our troubled world!

WHEN THEY HAD SEEN

Our eyes and ears and sense of touch tell us of the world outside. Messages pass over them constantly. They are the beginning of our knowledge of the world, of the men in the world; they are the beginning of our knowledge of God, Who made the world.

But they are not the end of it! Our soul interprets the messages of the senses, spiritualizes these messages, uses the knowledge it so acquires for the present and for the future. Our contacts with the works of God in Nature lead us to reason back to God, their Author. Our hearing of the Word of God, through the revelation of Jesus Christ, leads us to the supernatural knowledge of God the Father, of His Son, Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit. We know Jesus and His life through the historical record of the Gospels, the record of eyewitnesses of the miracles of Jesus, the record of those who heard His words.

"When they had seen!" Those 5000 men who followed Jesus into the wilderness, who suffered hunger, whose hunger was appeased by the multiplication of five barley loaves and two fishes which Jesus placed before them; those 5000 men were in full possession of their senses. They knew what had happened; they saw five loaves and two fishes; they saw those loaves, those fishes, multiplied and placed before them till all were satisfied.

These men went farther than seeing, went farther than eating. Their senses were active, their appetites were in use; but their souls, their minds were also active. They knew divine power had produced a miracle; they knew the finger of God was present with them.

Thinking men today behold the world and all its wonders. They know these are ordinary things, but no less wonderful because ordinary. They see God's hand working in all, guiding sun and moon and stars in their courses, upholding the earth by the power of His hand, feeding the men and women of today not by miraculous acts, but by the constant act of His divine Providence, causing the earth to bring forth her fruit in season.

We have seen God's power in the world; we have known God's glory in the world. Let us add to the things our senses tell us of God, our determination to serve Him as His most dear children!