

ST. DOMINIC TO-DAY

AUGUST 4th is the Feast of St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers. It is therefore fitting to dedicate this August number of BLACKFRIARS to the memory of one who in modern times and in England most closely approached the life and ideal of this founder. St. Thomas saw this ideal as in itself the noblest in the Church, for St. Dominic designed a life that was to be wholly contemplative and to have the further aim of drawing the flood-gates of his union with God so that the over-fulness of contemplation might inundate the human soil thirsty for the Word of God. The ideal is a life of action flowing directly from the super-abundance of contemplation, without ever ceasing to be contemplative. Many have recognised the justice of St. Thomas's contention on this question which was yet so personal to himself. Often, however, they will declare it too high for practice. For example: 'The achievement in practice of this ideal must necessarily be rare. Contemplation is itself *de facto* exceptional enough; how much more so an activity which proceeds from it, not as a dissipation of spirit, but *per modum additionis*. The intensity of charity which this implies must presuppose all but heroic sanctity' (*The Love of God* by Aelred Graham, O.S.B., p. 184).

But in defence of the ideal of St. Dominic it may now be insisted that when practised it is not easily acknowledged by modern activist standards. Father Vincent McNabb was often regarded as fanatical, eccentric and living entirely in the dust and ashes of the Middle Ages. One will acclaim his work among the Jews or his sympathetic efforts for reunion in Christendom, but will condemn his social teaching on the land or handicraft as unbalanced. Another will follow him 'back to the land' but be amazed that he should give his full support to an apostolate of Christ the Worker which would, among other things, sanctify the factory worker at his machine or the clerk on his stool. Each will find some characteristic overwhelmingly admirable while much remains at best enigmatic, often even foolish.

But only those who can accept the man as a piece, whole and complete, will be able to see the reincarnation of St. Dominic, the contemplative preacher. The external manifestation of the Dominican life, the fearless wearing of his habit, the bare poverty of his cell, the booted trudging of the London streets, the careful sweeping and tending of the library, his dramatic acts of humiliation, and in general the regularity of his life within the cloister, all this together with his zeal for the Land, the Jews, Union of Christendom, the Papal Encyclicals, all flowed from the union of his soul with God, that

union which became more intimate with every Mass when he was daily fed by Christ's Body. His piety towards our Lady and the Saints gave Father Vincent the air of a child always happily exploring the house of the Lord where he lived. He was a simple man despite the multiplicity and variety of his works, and his simplicity came from his prayer and union with God, his charity and faith in his Mother, the Church. Since his life flowered thus from one single foundation, the simplicity of holiness, it would be a distortion to select one feature as authentic Christian living and another as fanatical or eccentric. Diversity of stress and, occasionally, over-emphasis was bound to occur as in all things human. But the wisdom of the Spirit came to dominate and keep the balance more as his life lengthened.

The wit of the street corner orator leapt from the same quick mind that gave advice and spiritual counsel with a penetration that attracted hundreds to his confessional at St. Dominic's Priory. A simple man will see things simply—if thy eye be single thy whole body will be lightsome—a simple man who has the simplicity of holiness sees all things from one single eminence, the simplicity of God, the centre of the circle of creation. The diversity of the tributes contained in this number of BLACKFRIARS may help to reveal the simplicity of Father Vincent in his manifold works and relationships. In all his activities he never ceased to be the contemplative, and those who here write his praises have drunk of the overfullness of that contemplation, flowing out in many streams from the single spring.

The recent transference of the relics of St. Dominic at Bologna, unhappily necessitated by the war, has happily revealed the integrity of the Saint's physical remains. The X-ray examination of the tomb is reported to have shown the energetic Preacher who travelled the length and breadth of Europe, always on foot, to have been a short man, only a few inches more than five feet, and the hands that so frequently held the consecrated Host in the Mass that was the centre of his contemplation were of exceptional length, expressive of the giver of God's word and grace. Those physical remains are of a man who lived and worked out his ideal in the thirteenth century; the heroic death of his son, Father Vincent McNabb, in June, 1943, has shown that the spirit remains alive, fed not fettered by a medieval rule of life and a medieval habit. Fr. Vincent has shown that St. Dominic is up to date. The true contemplative is always contemporary. The contemplative preacher applies eternity to his own times.

EDITOR.