

BLACKFRIARS

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Communications in regard to *Advertisements* should be addressed to The Rolls House Publishing Co., Ltd., 2 Breams Buildings, London, E.C.4. Telephone Holborn 5708, 5709, 0603. Telegrams 'Publimedi, London.'

Vol. XVI, No. 183

June 1935

EDITORIAL

THE CANONIZATION of May 19th was, not least of all, a tribute to the power and importance of objective truth, and a timely reminder for the Catholics of England to-day. There are problems in our path no less obscure and no less vital, perhaps, than that which St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More were called upon to solve. These two great Englishmen faced a cruel death, not carried along on a wave of burning enthusiasm but calmly, almost coldly, accepting it as the price to be paid for their inevitable adherence to the conclusion of a syllogism. To many of their educated fellow-countrymen the point at issue seemed to be of doubtful urgency and of little more than academic importance. It is difficult for us, maybe, after the event and possessed of more clear-cut and more definite teaching on Papal Supremacy, to appreciate the possible sincerity of that doubt. But even for Thomas More himself it had been for a decade of years a matter of some uncertainty. Yet its importance as an integral factor in objective truth (and therefore of Catholic and divine truth) was so compelling that neither could rest content until his mind was made up, until the given premises (divine and human) had yielded

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their certain conclusion. Once this conclusion was reached it was inevitable that two such true Catholics as these should adhere to it with calm tenacity even to the stroke of the headsman's axe. We have no reason to suppose that they realized all the tremendous issues involved in the failure of so many of their fellow-countrymen to resolve the common doubt; it may well be that they did not foresee the consequent severance of England from the Church Catholic which even the blood-witness of these two lovers of England did not succeed in averting. But this isolation of themselves and of the truth for which they died makes their martyrdom only the more glorious, their witness the more convincing, and their canonization in our days the more significant.

Its significance lies in this: Both these Saints were typically English, in the sense that they typified all that is best in the English character. This showed itself above all in their sane, well-balanced outlook, in their calm love of truth, and in their dogged but equable (even witty) persistence in the face of common opinion and regal tyranny. But it was not, of course, merely the bare possession and use of such qualities that made them martyrs in God's cause. Their heroic sanctity, which alone could give them such clarity of vision as well as the courage to die for the thing they saw, is to be sought in the supernatural quality and orientation of these qualities. They saw things in their true perspective; for them the supreme norm of good, and therefore of conduct, was divine truth and the appointed arbiter of conduct was conscience. We have said that they died in defence of the conclusion of a syllogism, but it was not merely a speculative syllogism, it was also a practical syllogism; and the conclusion of a practical syllogism is the voice of conscience, and therefore ultimately the voice of God. That is why we have said also that adherence to this conclusion, even in the face of death, was inevitable for them. Had they been content to doubt, they might have lived in peace and comfort; but seeking and finding truth, they had to die a felon's death; for it was God's truth, so that to obey the King were to deny God. In being true to Rome they were not being false to England; in their loyalty to the Vicegerent of the King of Kings they were not traitors to the King of England. Their fealty to God was the highest proof of their true fealty to the King; their devotion to the Kingdom of Heaven was

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the greatest service they could do to the Kingdom of England.

So different in much, priest and bishop the one, lawyer and family man the other, they were one in their singular devotion to divine truth and it seems a direct intervention of Providence (almost a warning) that, by their solemn Canonization, they should be given as patrons and models to Englishmen at a time when the same clarity of vision and high courage is again required. In almost every sphere of life, in religion, in morals, in social affairs, in business, in politics, in education, in the home, modern conditions are calculated to attack or obscure Catholic truth. Upon us, upon priest and layman alike, devolves the urgent duty of seeking this truth again, of maintaining it tenaciously against friend and foe, of suffering and (if needs be) of dying for it. Through the blood of the Martyrs God grant us vision and courage.

EDITOR.