

grieve at the pitiful fewness of our Lord's words that we at best possess!

It is a hard fate that prevents one from agreeing more fully with a book whose fine qualities make its appearance an event all too rare in English Catholic life.

W. REES

ST THOMAS AQUINAS: PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS. Selected and Translated with Notes and an Introduction by Thomas Gilby. (Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press; 12s. 6d.)

From many standpoints the appearance of this book is something of an event. Perhaps only those who are acquainted with the peculiar genius of scholastic Latin (which, though once a living language in limited circles, was never either an elegant or a popular one), can appreciate Fr Gilby's achievement in rendering so much of it into a modern idiom, and sometimes into passages of rare beauty. The fact that his medium is so unpromising a language as English enhances the greatness (we use the word advisedly) of the achievement. It is no small event in the history of English literature, this rendering of an ancient academic tongue, which has hitherto proved for the most part untranslatable without subjecting the English language to a desiccation not unlike that to which the Schoolmen had subjected Latin. For that reason it is a still greater event in the history of English-speaking, and English-thinking, thomism.

We would not have it supposed that the translations are all of equal quality, nor all indisputable, nor even faultless from the standpoint either of accuracy or readableness. More detailed appreciation and criticism must be left for our more leisured and capacious sister-periodical, *Dominican Studies*. We would say, in general, that Fr Gilby's translations are usually best when they are most free and venturesome, and that, though sometimes confessedly paraphrases, they often afford a most illuminating interpretation of the text, which even those who prefer to read St Thomas in the original can ill afford to neglect. It is his more pedestrian and literal efforts that sometimes seem to us not only less readable, but more questionable in their accuracy.

Outstanding as is this book as translation, it is still more so as a compilation. With remarkable ingenuity, and a thorough knowledge of St Thomas's *omnia opera*, Fr Gilby has succeeded in putting together a book which could serve a variety of different readers in a variety of different ways. It could, not without profit, be opened at random in desultory fashion: it could be a bedside book, or a weekend book, or a book for odd moments. Or it could be a book for intensive and concentrated study—and for anything betwixt and between. Least of all can the expert connoisseur of St Thomas despise it. A brilliant juxta-

position of texts makes the book an illuminating contribution to the understanding of St Thomas's thought, and the fashion in which his mind worked. A fascinating network of cross-references establishes further connections of ideas. The fact that these are not always immediately obvious is an added attraction: the reader is left with plenty of puzzles to work out for himself, his own mind is stimulated to think rather than supplied with ready-made answers. A copious index ensures that the volume will serve as a handy work of reference as well.

A word of warning should however be added. We are afraid the book as a whole is open to serious misunderstanding and misuse, and so liable to become, all too easily, to the theologians a scandal and to the philosophers a stumbling-block. The fault will not be Fr Gilby's: his introduction should make it quite clear what he has set out to do, but introductions have a way of being neglected or forgotten. He has collected 'philosophical texts' (though he has in fact, and perhaps rather confusingly, by no means confined himself rigidly to these). Since St Thomas is first and foremost a theologian, this has inevitably meant that most of them are taken, not from works of disinterested philosophical speculation, but from theological works in which a somewhat summary philosophy is employed in its ancillary *ad hoc* service to the elucidation of revelation. This is inevitable, but unfortunate if it confirms the philosophical reader in his impression of a facile and largely uncritical thinker in pre-Kantian 'dogmatic slumber'. Less inevitably, but still with very good reasons, Fr Gilby has boldly cast these philosophical texts in the mould of the theological *Summa*, setting aside St Thomas's own ideas of the arrangement and order of the philosophical disciplines (which he nevertheless translates). 'It is possible', he explains, 'to perform an excision of the purely rational organs . . . and find oneself then faced with a prospectus of pure philosophy, coherent, consistent, and as complete as can be expected . . . of special, and even urgent, interest to those who find themselves alien to the official organisation of Christianity.' Fr Gilby's own work proves that it is not only possible, but fruitful and exciting. Yet it is important to stress that the excision is wholly the work of Fr Gilby, and that the resultant picture of a fairly complete, rational 'philosophy of life', analogous to the structure of the *Summa Theologica*, but into which 'grace keeps breaking in', is one that did not and could not have entered St Thomas's own head. It would be unfortunate if a contrary impression should confirm the misgivings of theologians to the effect that thomist theology is built, not on the Word of God, but on an almost complete human philosophy. (A careless phrase in the usually careful introduction might further strengthen the impression.)

These things are said, rather by way of caution to the general reader

than in criticism of Fr Gilby's book. Its very merits invite them, for the book is assured of being for many years to come the standard, for many perhaps the only, source in English-speaking countries for St Thomas's thought in his own words.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

ARISTOTLE'S *DE ANIMA*: WITH THE COMMENTARY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS. Translated by Fr Kenelm Foster, O.P., M.A., PH.D., and Fr Sylvester Humphries, O.P. With an Introduction by Fr Ivo Thomas, O.P., S.T.L., M.A. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; £2 2s.)

Perhaps the first thing that strikes anyone who is acquainted with the methods of work of later Greek and early medieval philosophers when he reads St Thomas's commentary on the *De Anima* is that it really is a commentary in the modern sense, a sober and scholarly exposition of the text. The combination of a living and developing tradition and great powers of original philosophical thinking with an exaggerated respect for authority very often led the later Greek philosophers and their successors to use the form of commentary on the great ancients, above all Plato and Aristotle, for the exposition of contemporary school doctrine or their own original thought. No doubt they were generally quite unconscious that they were doing more than drawing out the inner meanings of the words of the masters. But in general (with the exception of the great Alexandrian Platonist commentaries on Aristotle, notably those of Simplicius, which are much more genuinely scholarly and less speculative) one gains more understanding of the philosophy of the authors, and of their contemporaries and immediate predecessors in the school, than genuine help in understanding the text commented upon by reading late Greek and medieval commentaries. The extreme development of this method of speculative commentary is to be found in the medieval *Commentaries on the Sentences*, which are certainly not primarily means to the understanding of the jejune theological textbook on which they are based. But St Thomas in his Commentary on the *De Anima* is simply concerned to understand, and to make his readers and hearers understand, the text before him. And it is remarkable how close he keeps, in most places, to the genuine thought of Aristotle in spite of the far from diaphanous medium through which he was compelled to apprehend him, the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke. As Fr Ivo Thomas points out in his excellent introduction, St Thomas by his method of exposition makes Aristotle appear a good deal more systematic than he is in the original: and on some important points, notably where the 'active intellect' is concerned, he draws out conclusions which may be legitimate developments of Aristotle's thought but are certainly not stated in the text and which modern Aristotelian scholars, with their neces-