

Tuesday, April 21st. 8.30 p.m.

THE GREAT RECOGNITION.

BY R. A. PENNETHORNE

(Organising Secretary, P.N.E.U.).

Two years ago I had the privilege of visiting the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. I was shown over the Chapel by a policeman, and having never seen the colours of the frescoes before, I was struck by the prevailing colours of green, white and red. The policeman remarked, 'The colours are a prophecy.' I felt that the whole building was a prophecy. Some of you will know the old Masonic idea that any building that is started under the inspiration of an absolutely true conception can never become a total ruin, and that idea is illustrated in the case of this Chapel, which has now been restored to its true purpose as a place of worship.

In Chapter XXV of *Parents and Children*, Charlotte Mason says that the Vaulted Book of S. Maria Novella in Florence shows all educators how to bring harmony into their efforts by recognition of the one divine source. Here we have typified the recognition of authority, the discernment of truth, and that self-giving which is first attention and then dedication of the personality. To be 'intellectually alive' is to participate in a true renaissance, a second birth, and it is the right of all children to partake of this.

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In the Spanish Chapel we have a complete conception of life: The Life of Inspiration (the descent of the Spirit); the Life of Sacrifice (the Crucifixion); the Life Militant on Earth and Triumphant in Heaven; the Life of Self-dedication shown by (a) the Virgin, (b) St. Peter Martyr. It was painted by Andrea Buonanti in the year 1366, a pupil of Giotto's, as Taddeo Gaddi was too busy mending the bridges over the Arno. There in that year, for a moment, it seemed as if Christendom reunited could give the world more than a secular League of Nations—common faith, hope and charity. That must remain our ideal, to be realised in our own time and in our own way.

Opposite the entrance door is the restored altar of this Chapter House, and behind it the Crucifixion—the life sacrificed. To the left, in the roof, is the descent of the Holy Spirit and the inspired Authorities who in every department of life and learning, religious and secular, are the inspiring heroes for Youth to follow.

(Here this wall was described and the slide shown.)

The central figure, St. Thomas Aquinas, sits with the enemies of right thinking beneath his feet—Sabellius, who in the third century in Northern Africa taught men only the divinity of our Lord and denied the humanity, so preventing the ordinary man from feeling that he too in his measure was a 'son of the Most Highest'; Arius, who in the fourth century taught the humanity and not the divinity of the Christ, thereby undermining all authority, which derives from God alone; and finally, turbaned in the centre, Averroes (Ibn Roshid), the great Arabian doctor, a Mohammedan heretic and a pessimist, who undermined man's sense of the supreme

worth of the gift of life, human and divine.

We of the present age, whether we be orthodox members of any creed or not, forget that we live in a civilization with fixed Christian values which *do* give right proportions and values to human life, and therefore it is hard for us to understand the supreme importance of the battles and victories of the past in the realm of thought. But St. Thomas knew, and he, 'the master of them that know,' has opened his book of wisdom at [p 457]

this sentence: 'I prayed and wisdom was given unto me, and I set her above kingdoms and thrones.' He showed that it is not the current fashionable phraseology and thinking of the moment, but eternal truth, which is alone supreme and broad enough to embrace all.

We who were trained at Ambleside are all familiar with the Captain figures of the education of the layman and woman who enter hand in hand through the gateway of Grammatica—the laws of the use of words. Do we really train our children to understand the vast opportunities and responsibilities of narration, or is loose speech—'I dunno' and 'sort of'—followed by loose thinking? Here thought, logic and rhetoric follow upon grammar, and then the thoughts which transcend words in music; then the music of the spheres transcended by astronomy, 'the army of unalterable law'; and then those laws brought into the sizes and shapes and numbers of our own world as geometry and arithmetic.

But the part of the *teacher* is not so well known. From left to right we have his progress: First, Civil Law, with Justinian as its type, the control of daily life; then Canon Law, the obedience of those who must learn to teach, with Clement IV, the great Pope; then the new Law of Liberty, the Gospels as preached by Peter Lombard; then the study of the Mind of God, Theology, with Dionysius the Areopagite; then the mind which can reach out towards and compare faith with faith, Speculative Theology with Boethius the philosopher: then the man whose visions transcend mundane knowledge, the Mystic, St. John the Damascene; and finally the man who can come back to earth and fight for his faith, Polemics, with the great St. Augustine, who knew this world so well that he was not afraid to dream of the City of God founded here and realised hereafter through every struggle and turmoil.

But this is a conception not only of the individual life but of the corporate life. On the right-hand wall we have the Church triumphant, 'the souls of the righteous in the hand of the Lord,' shepherded to Paradise by the Domini Canes; and we have that bright, brief glimpse of the Church militant, for the moment triumphant here on earth when Pope Urban V, per- [p 458]

suaded by Petrarch and Peter of Aragon, returned to Rome for a short time and was at peace with the Emperor, Charles IV. St. Brigid of Norway kneels there, her prayers answered; the great men of the day, statesmen, leaders of thought, stand there—Petrarch, Dante, Edmund le Despenser, the English Ambassador, Cardinal Albinoes the Spaniard, who had worked for this great day with his King—Christendom unified and at peace! The vision faded, but it had been seen.

(Here the slide was shown and described.)

Then we have the two pattern lives, for men and women, to show us that humanity *can* live the dedicated life, the inspired life, and attain to the final triumph. Charlotte Mason says

this must be the ideal of every parent for every child. Do we, in our day, ask *enough* of human nature?