

The Catholic Weekly Review.

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Reddite quæ sunt Cæsaris, Cæsari; et quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt. 22: 21

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FATHER TOM BURKE IN THE PULPIT.

YOUNG Burke was, in the innocent sense of the word, a wild boy, given to practical jokes and little hair-brained escapades, but as versatile as quicksilver; pure as snow. From his earliest youth, literature, and the best literature, was devoured by him with an insatiable appetite, beginning with the little catechism patronized in the diocese of Galway, ascending on one line to the *Summa* of St. Thomas, on the other to Gibbon, Tennyson, and Shakespeare. His earliest ambition was to sway the reasons and affections of his fellowmen from the Christian pulpit. When only about seventeen years of age he entered the Dominican Noviciate at Perugia. The tall and somewhat ungainly lad, with his sun-stained face and quick flashing eye, attracted the notice and esteem of Father Jandel, the General of his Order. The study of Aquinas naturally occupied a very high position in the seminary presided over by one who afterwards became known to Christendom as Cardinal Pecci and Pope Leo XIII., whose very first encyclical on the Feast of St. Thomas was devoted to an assertion of the claims upon Christian thought of the system of the greatest of the schoolmen. Burke assimilated Aquinas not only with extraordinary rapidity, but with extraordinary relish. Before his enraptured eye Christianity rose in its colossal unity from the strong majestic conception embodied in the first pages of the *Summa* "*De Salvatore et Salvatione Præquam de salvatione de Salvatore ipso consideranda veniunt.*" To Burke those interangled concatenations of propositions, those apparently interminable doubts and solutions were traversed by lanes of light with depths of golden sky beyond. To Rabelais the *Summa* appeared as a vast territory of sandy desert, furrowed with incessant toil by ploughs drawn by oxen. Burke, like Zebulun of old, could "suck of treasures hid in the sand." The novice startled the master by saying that, "when one read the *Summa* one's faith was gone." But surprise and apprehension were exchanged for pleasure as the lad explained his meaning—when the intellect once fairly grasped the argument—when it stood out *distinct* as articulated in its constituent portions, and *clear* as a con-

sistent whole—when the minds' eye could take in the apt disposition of a vast number of topics capable of reference to a common centre; mystery was changed into translucent certitude, and faith was almost lost in sight. When Burke was twenty-one the General of the Dominican Order appointed the young sub-deacon to be master of the English novices at Woodchester. Burke took unspeakable pains with his English style. At first, every word, every *and* and *but*, every particle, was rigorously committed to memory. Those who, in 1851-52, saw the sensitive lad, trembling in every limb with nervous excitement, speaking with eyes shut, might well be astonished at the magnificent success when the long agony of the years of preparation was over. A very competent judge thus describes the result eight or ten years later:—

"The fitting moment for the sermon had arrived, when a tall figure rose from its kneeling posture before the altar, and strode with quiet majesty to its appointed place on the platform. The figure was draped in the white and black of the Dominican habit. The sanctuary was filled with a dim religious light, which just revealed a tonsured head fringed by a ring of thick black locks that surmounted a dark and sun-stained face, with features that were eloquent of strength and power, and with eyes that kindled into flame as their gaze seemed to centre on the glories of an unseen world. The preacher spoke. The subject of his discourse was the religious life. The chapel was small, and his voice never rose above a whisper, but every whisper thrilled the nerves of his hearers. All were fascinated. He spoke of the beauty and purity and perfection of the religious life; he showed how it tended to raise man, even in the life below, almost to a level with the angels; he expounded, with marvellous lucidity, the meaning of the vows religious take, and explained their bearing on the holy state; and with a fervid peroration that carried his hearers away from earthly things, left them in earnest contemplation of a glorious future. It was no mere effort of polished rhetoric; no skilful weaving of brilliant phrases into rounded sentences, such as may gratify the ear without ever reaching the heart. It was the full flow of an apostolic soul that came down on the congregation then assembled, and swept everything away on its irresistible tide. There were worldly men present, but the worldliest among them went along in silence, pondering upon the nothingness of his own pursuits. It was a sermon to make a scoffer stand self-condemned. It was a discourse that, being heard, must be embedded in memory for a lifetime."

At the age of thirty-four Burke was made Prior of San Clemente at Rome, but after a few years found his way back to Ireland. The annals of the post-Apostolic Church contain, we suppose, few instances of sacred oratory so continuous, and, judged at least by material tests, so successful. When the new Cathedral of Armagh was opened Father Burke preached. The offertory was £8,000! During 1871-2 he delivered in eight months four hundred lectures, besides sermons, and collected *eighty thousand pounds*. After a most painful internal disease had set in, he preached without intermission, and sought his best anodyne in a noble self-forgetfulness, full of passionate appeal to the souls of sinners. He was too brave to be in bodily anguish, too tensely strung up to sink on the