

TOWARD UNDERSTANDING ST THOMAS by Rev. M. D. Chenu, O.P., translated by Rev. Albert M. Landry, O.P., and Rev. Dominic Hughes, O.P. *Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, \$6.00.*

The English translation of Père Chenu's *Introduction à l'Etude de St Thomas d'Aquin*, which originally appeared in 1950, is a long-awaited and extremely welcome event. There can be very little need to add anything to the eulogies of this superb introduction; it should be read, and constantly consulted, by anyone who studies St Thomas, and it would be a very good thing if those who join in the fashionable hue and cry against Thomism and 'scholasticism' would take the pains of reading it too, before they raise their often sadly ill-informed clamour. There is the sheer sweep of the introductory chapter which sets St Thomas in his historical perspective; then the studies of his literary forms, his language, his procedures of documentation and of construction; and these are followed in the second part by detailed introductions to every group of work that he produced. Père Chenu is never an uncritical panegyrist either of St Thomas or of medieval scholasticism; he acknowledges the dangerous weaknesses, the historical limitations, the seed of future sterility; but he has also a deeply sympathetic awareness of the thirteenth century achievement against odds, and when he sees it as one moment in the whole movement of European renaissance stretching from the ninth to the sixteenth century he brings out its vitality and intellectual inquisitiveness that compares very well with the deader moment of passive imitation in the final episode. And the book is a mine of information, packed away in footnotes, the outcome of an incredibly wide reading and pondering.

When we turn to the translation it is pleasant to enumerate its qualities, the result of devoted

labours over what must have been a long period of maturation. In many respects the English volume is an improvement even on the original, and for this reason it will be an acquisition even to those who read and possess the French version. To begin with, the book is so much better printed and bound than its original; then, every reference has been carefully checked, and the references made more complete (the series in which the work appears named, the volume and page reference given) and in at least one place (p. 131, n. 3) the translators note that they have been unable to trace Chenu's reference, and offer an alternative one; a great deal of additional references to work that has been done since has been added, and some additional references to older work too – additions made by the translators are always clearly distinguished from the original. New indices have been made: one giving abbreviations used for Editions, Collections and Periodicals which in itself becomes a useful *instrument de travail*; another, entirely new, of all the passages in St Thomas referred to in the text; and a third, the most useful of all, an index, much fuller than in the original, of the Latin technical terms explained in the course of the work. All this is gain.

It is all the sadder therefore to have to say that the translation itself, from French to English, is shockingly bad, so bad that one can only hope the publishers will see their way to a complete revision of it at the earliest opportunity. It is puzzling to know what can have so seriously gone wrong in a book to which such evident care has been given. Admittedly Chenu's style must be the despair of any translator, and it was wise to un-

pack his rambling, allusive sentences into shorter ones, and to expand his more telegraphic utterances; it was inevitable that the English should have been, as a result longer than the French, though one wonders whether it need have exceeded its length, as it does, by one quarter again. But some of the English is nonsensical, as, for example, '... he is up against a prominent case wherein the language used is "scholastic" in the fullest meaning of the term, and wherein this same language characterizes at once a thought, a method, and means of expression. It is important, therefore, that this case of "scholastic" language be defined on the very grounds of that language which thus equates both method and thought' (p. 100–101). What Chenu actually says, properly translated, is '... The language is pre-eminently "scholastic" in the full sense of this word which thus characterizes thought, method, and means of expression. We must determine what it means at the level of language – a language corresponding

to the thought and method.'

Four pages before (p. 96) we read that the change from the medieval *quaestio* to the later scholastic *thesis* 'is in itself a denunciation of the heinous reversal . . . ' which means almost the opposite of 'bears witness to the heinous reversal' conveyed by the French 'dénonce le renversement . . . ' A page later (p. 103) we are told that 'With the word *pneuma*, we are at the extreme opposite of any religious connotation', where the French simply says that it is found in an opposite sense to its religious one in certain authors. These are egregious errors; lesser ones abound; I am willing to send the publishers a list of 31 mistakes of translation or interpretation in the course of these *seven* pages alone (p. 96–102). And these pages are fairly representative of the rest of the book. It should be said that all this does not make the book unusable; but it certainly cripples its usefulness.

Columba Ryan, O.P.

ST THOMAS AQUINAS: COMMENTARY ON THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS. Translated by C. I. Litzinger, O.P., 'Library of Living Catholic Thought', Henry Regnery Company, Chicago; 2 vols, n.p.

Aristotle's *Ethics* is still probably the best book ever written on natural virtue as the means to a goodness attainable (in theory at least) by a man who limits his aims to what he can do with his soul and body before death divides them. But the modern humanist who returns to this classic and basic text will find, of course, that Aquinas has been there first, patiently and conscientiously following every turn and nuance of his Greek master's thought. Yet, as in all St Thomas's Aristotelian commentaries, what impresses one most in the end is not so much the dogged persistence as sheer intelligence – the intelligence that triumphed so brilliantly with so meagre an equipment (by post-Renaissance standards) of scholarship.

The Latin version of Aristotle's text, attributed to William of Moerbeke, has been translated as well as the commentary; and both, presumably,

from the Cathala-Spiazzi edition, though this is only stated in respect of the version. Nor is it stated whether, or how far, the Cathala-Spiazzi text has been revised. A feature of the present work distinguishing it from the English versions, published during the past decade or so, of the commentaries on the *De Anima* and the *Physics* is that here an 'Analytical Outline' of each *lectio* is printed in a parallel column alongside the Aristotelian text about to be commented on. It is not obvious that much is gained by this added complication; but future students will be the best judges of this point. Meanwhile it is only just to welcome and warmly recommend a very honest and painstaking work of a Thomist scholarship. It reflects much credit not only on the translator himself but on the American Dominican Province of St Joseph as a whole.

Kenelm Foster, O.P.