

It is interesting to note that if it were to be applied first to his distinction between the entertainment and the enactment of a project and then to his analysis of the specification of the will, the two main sections of his book would dovetail instead of lying parallel. For if Mr. Farrer is not a metaphysician with whom Cajetan could have agreed, he is one with whom Cajetan could have argued. Perhaps the first point that he would have wished to clarify is the theory of 'inescapable demonstration' attributed to Thomists in the preface. An 'inescapable demonstration' is an essentially Anselmian concept. No Thomist would admit that the validity of a demonstration is affected by its rejection or its acceptance by individual thinkers, grouped either quantitatively or qualitatively. The fundamental distinction between intelligible *in se* and *quoad nos* is illustrated by Mr. Farrer's own writing; if it will not always be intelligible to all it is because it is so intelligible in itself. It is precisely the close texture of his thought and the consistent absence of any unnecessary wording that makes it at times hard reading, but the thinking is always intelligible in itself, precisely because it is never unreal. Perhaps the most immediate impression given by *Finite and Infinite* is the complete absence of the bogus or of the superficial and the presence of a very considerable and at times sardonic wit.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF THE LAW OF NATURE. By Joseph Dalby, B.D. (S.P.C.K.; 2s. 6d.)

'If any excuse be needed for publishing what was originally written as a thesis for a divinity degree, it must be that very little has been published on a subject which is attracting increasing attention to-day,' writes Mr. Dalby in his Foreword. Indeed, if excuses be needed for his rather slight work of condensation and popularisation it is rather to his examiners than to the general public that they might have been directed. It is a work without pretensions either to distinguished scholarship or to original thought, but the need for a small and readable book for popular consumption which would explain the history and meaning of 'Natural Law' is too obvious to require an apology for any attempt to meet it. It has hitherto been almost impossible to direct inquirers to any source of information on this much invoked and little-understood subject apart from technical tomes and textbooks in dead and foreign tongues. Mr. Dalby deserves unqualified thanks for his brave and largely successful effort to meet an urgent need. He has essayed to cover the history of the whole subject from the Stoics to the present day in fifty-four pages, and to include a summary of the whole teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas concerning it, as well as to draw conclusions regarding its relevance to our present needs. It is astonishing that he has succeeded in including so much in so little space.

Yet, notwithstanding many excellencies of detail, it is to be feared

that in one important respect Mr. Dalby's picture of the history of the theory of Natural Law in Christian tradition is a distorted and misleading one. An initial failure to define terms presents us with a picture which is not that of a homogeneous development of teaching from the earliest Fathers to St. Thomas, but contrariwise of an almost complete inversion of patristic teaching on the part of Aquinas.

A very different picture would have emerged had Mr. Dalby not neglected to observe the different meanings of the words 'nature' and 'natural' which Aristotle had already sorted out (e.g. in *Metaph.* V, iv) and of which St. Thomas was fully aware and made full use (e.g. in *Summa* III, ii, 1 and 12). There are many traps for the unwary reader of the early Fathers who too hastily assumes that by 'nature' they understand 'that which is signified by the definition' rather than 'that which is begotten or generated.' For them, as for many Christian writers since, the 'natural man' by no means signifies the 'merely human' or 'graceless' man, but contrariwise man precisely under the dominion and influence of grace as he was generated or created by God. It was in this sense that they conceived man-in-grace to be precisely the original 'natural man,' and his fallen graceless condition to be precisely 'unnatural.' Mr. Dalby seems to have missed this in his interpretation of their teaching (and seemingly in that of St. Augustine also), and to assume that they conceived the primitive (and in *that* sense 'natural') state of man to have been a graceless one (or of purely natural and non-supernatural law), rather than one of unfallen nature as perfected and integrated by grace.

A similar misunderstanding has prevented him from presenting even a coherent picture of St. Thomas's teaching on the matter, and from seeing its continuity with that of the Fathers. He oscillates uncertainly between two incompatible pictures of St. Thomas's doctrine. In the one (which Mr. Dalby seems to prefer) the law of nature is 'set over against' the law of grace (p. 3), is 'autonomous' . . . 'given its own territory in which it reigns supreme' (p. 34). In the other (seemingly more grudgingly recognised) 'it is impossible to understand fully what St. Thomas means by the law of nature without consideration of his doctrine of grace' for 'natural life is dependent upon grace' (p. 51). Elsewhere he confesses that he finds that 'the conception of the relation of nature to grace in St. Thomas is a very subtle one' (p. 35). This subtlety would surely vanish once we decline to read into St. Thomas the quite unthomistic assumption of a distinct 'territory' of 'autonomous' nature outside the sphere of Divine positive Law or of Divine Grace. St. Thomas knows nothing of (indeed he repudiates) any historical and factual condition of human 'nature' (even when 'nature' is understood as 'essence') other than that which is intended by God to be finalised and wholly permeated by grace, and whose perfection and integration is to be achieved by grace and by grace alone.

Hence, although Mr. Dalby quite accurately summarises what St. Thomas has to say on the intrinsic inadequacies of any merely natural law, on its deformations in our fallen condition, on our difficulties in ascertaining and applying it, on our impotence to implement it even when ascertained, on its inability to provide either adequate sanction or final motivation for action, on the necessity for its being supplemented by Divine-positive law even in its own limited sphere—he has failed to see the implications of all this when he comes to draw his own conclusions. St. Thomas's teaching, even on Natural Law itself, taken in its entirety, will certainly not warrant any undue optimism as to its competence to put even the secular order to rights without the constant aid of Divine commandments and Divine grace.

If we have in this review stressed what seems to us a certain blurring of the picture as Mr. Dalby presents it, it is not at all that we would overlook the many merits of his book which we have failed to mention. But it seems particularly needful at the present time to allay the misgivings, deeply felt by the evangelically-minded both within and without the Church, that the Catholic conception of Natural Law can be presented as any substitute for the Gospel even within the secular sphere. It is even being said (however unfairly) that modern Catholic publicists distort St. Paul to the extent of making the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, into the words of moral philosophers and sociologists; and an offer of 'collaboration' on the basis of an autonomous rational ethic is justly resented by those who understand the all-embracingness of Christ's redemptive work as the only ground for genuinely Christian thought and action. The integral Catholic conception of Grace and Nature must be as resolutely opposed to any claims for an exclusive and autonomous domain of nature and purely natural law as it must to the Protestant 'neo-orthodoxy' for which nature is impervious to grace and for which natural law (if it be admitted at all) is *nothing* but a convincer of sin which summons to repentance. (It is to be noted that in the only scriptural passages which Mr. Dalby can allege for the existence of a Natural Law it is *also* that, as it is for St. Thomas—a fact whose significance passes unremarked.) For the extremes of optimism and pessimism regarding nature here meet in a common dualism of Grace and Nature which the Catholic affirmation of *gratia perficit naturam* must uncompromisingly repudiate. Mr. Dalby indeed escapes the extremes of natural autonomism and optimism, but he has not wholly escaped the dualism. If we stress this defect rather than the many merits of his book, it is only because we can ill afford any one-sidedness in the best brief treatment of the subject which we know of in English.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.