

BLACKFRIARS

A MONTHLY REVIEW

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EDITORIAL

ONE day in March Lord Elton made a plea in the House of Lords for more paper for books. He said that after the war there would be urgent need of British books for 'that intellectual no-man's-land' which Europe will be. This seems to suggest that Europe has no mind of its own, but lies at the mercy of the intellectual shooting which sweeps across her from the surrounding big powers, Russia, England and America. Should we approach the peace with the intellectual snobbery this suggests, determined to sow British ideas in the waste land of French, Italian, Belgian, German minds, we shall only add to the present confusion. It should be remembered that the years of German occupation have been the seed time for many new ideas. This intellectual resurgence indeed provides a no-man's-land in the sense that the battle of ideas becomes more clearly defined and probably of greater violence, while physical force could only be used with difficulty. Defeat, disaster, long imprisonment, these evils, while they have a deadening effect on the minds of very many, leaving great tracts of dazed and numbed humanity, serve to stimulate more active minds. Insecurity and destitution

lead the few who breast these waves to great heights of vision. The vision may be distorted; but at least it is not superficial, it is not content with the catchphrase and the jingoistic platform. Conflict of ideologies is likely then to be more rather than less intense as the results of the enforced 'contemplation' make themselves felt.

The superiority in arms and military talent signified by victory does not necessarily imply a superiority in the things of the mind. The victorious allies would do well to approach with a certain humility, ready to learn from those whom tragedy and prison have taught profound lessons not only about the errors of the past but about the hopes for the future. They should be prepared to find an arsenal of spiritual weapons and indeed a spiritual army concealed in this apparently waste land, and a great part of this force will surely be ready to assist the army of liberation in the deeper things of human liberty.

The folly of regarding Europe as an intellectually neutral zone is emphasised by the cloud of witnesses that has been blowing over from France and Belgium to tell of the intense activity aroused and unwittingly encouraged by the German occupation of those countries. In this issue we publish an account of the reflections of one of the spiritual leaders of France as he lay in a prisoners' camp. Here we would cite, as an example of what has been achieved, a small fraction of the work done by the Dominican Fathers and their collaborators while under the German heel. The regular journals such as *La Vie Intellectuelle* and *La Vie Spirituelle* were suspended by the Gestapo, and so it was determined to produce brochures on specially important subjects. These were composed of series of articles by experts, put together after the committee of *La Vie Intellectuelle* had gathered a meeting of those most experienced and learned in the subject. These meetings were held regularly, were very well attended, and the papers and discussions they elicited provided the ground-work for the *Rencontres* as these brochures were called. The problems were naturally considered in terms of France, but as the Gestapo would prevent any very specific practical issue, the greatest energy was put into the elaboration of basic principles. It is in these that the great value of the *Rencontres* lies for the world in general.

Thus the first problem is to bring the Church back to the people in order to re-establish the true order of society. But the present ecclesiastical organisation depends too much on the obsolete idea of a Europe converted to Christianity. The Church in order to maintain the social life of the Mystical Body must be always turning outwards, preaching the gospel to the unconverted. Diocese and

Parish, where the faithful are ministered to, are only cells; the Church is universal and must be preached to all. That is why this is the time of Catholic Action, which is not another sodality to provide a study circle and social events for the people of St. Michael's or SS. Peter and Paul's, but an organisation of the Church universal to give scope for the full responsibility of each member of the Church in this function of spreading the Word. The parish and the diocese have too often tended to become introverted. In France particularly, of course, the tradition of being a Catholic country has left relatively few clergy to set about the conversion of literally millions of neo-pagans or indifferent Christians, and the assistance of the laity is sometimes hampered by a rather tyrannous clericalism. One *Rencontre* therefore is devoted to the missionary ideal of the Church, *La France, pays de Missions?* and the principles it invokes are by no means restricted in their application to France alone. The authors of this volume are in particular concerned with the J.O.C. which made such tremendous strides that, in spite of German opposition, the organisers were able to run a *Université Populaire* undetected for two years. This College, which is planned for considerable development after the war, drew young workers from all over Paris and the neighbourhood, irrespective of parish or diocese, to attend regular week-end courses of university standard. Up to a point this would certainly supply for the lack of priests, and give a depth and power to the Catholic Action of the young workers.

But the parish is not supplanted or by-passed: 'Catholic Action should not be suppressed in the parochial *milieu*; on the contrary, it must be intensified and adapted . . . that it may be the leaven in this paste which is the parochial *milieu*.' The Jocist's methods should prevent its degenerating into a preaching to or—which is still more futile—an entertaining of, the converted of the parish. The authors of this volume insist that there must be two distinct organisations of Catholic Action, the parochial one being specially formulated for the apostolic needs of the parish as such.

The Church is living in the world in order to sanctify it, and therefore she must take into account the whole human environment in which the people of to-day have to live. Guilds and societies attached to the parish church are apt to become cut off from the daily problems of work and wages, family and freedom. The life of man in society must be made human in order that Christ may live in it, for the incarnation is the assumption of a *human* nature into hypostatic union with the divine. The continuation of the incarnation in the Mystical Body is not fulfilled by laying a veneer of religiosity

to cover an inhuman social order beneath. True, faith is the only ultimate power capable of bringing order out of the present social disorder, but this does not mean that the natural, social institutions are bad, nor indeed that what is bad in these institutions is to be regarded as outside the sphere of Christian concern. No, these social institutions are often good, or contain good elements, and that goodness is to be sought, and once found it should be raised by the help of grace into the sphere where divine power lends efficiency to human endeavour. In this way alone can man learn to dominate modern technical progress instead of being dominated by it.

It would be impossible to over-estimate the volumes of *Rencontres* which were devoted to this ideal. *L'Economie sans Abondance*, *Travail et Salaire*, *Responsabilités de L'Ecole*, leading on to *Jeux et Poésie* and *Spiritualité de la Famille*—all these contain contributions of such importance that it is imperative they should be translated and widely circulated. The group that has produced this excellent series aims at becoming more acquainted with the thought, the education and culture of other nations, and in reverse order one of the aims of people in this country, particularly Catholics, should be to learn from these French thinkers and to abandon the foolish dream that Britain has sufficient intellectual vigour to solve the problem of restoring Europe.

Perhaps the triumph of this series of brochures is manifest in their inception, for the first of the series of *Rencontres* bears the simple title *Contemplation*, introducing a theme which is sustained until almost the final volume called *Chercher Dieu*, showing in the natural and the supernatural order how the true Christian is the one who has found God. The recall to the contemplative ideal may have been inevitable at a time when the country was suffering the paralysis of occupation, but it was providential. No other background could have provided the profundity and the sureness of touch which characterises the whole series.

It is indeed good news that the writers who organised and produced these *Rencontres* have already begun once again to publish *La Vie Intellectuelle* with the same aim and inspiration. The first issue appeared in February. It has a larger format, and contains 160 pages from the pens of such men as Étienne Gilson, François Mauriac, Guy Thorel, Georges Duhamel. 'Christianus' introduces the issue by showing how the editors hope to apply the Christian standards to every aspect of life, particularly of life in France. The greater liberty in applying these general principles should bear abundant fruit in this review, the reappearance of which is a notable landmark in the revival of France. From this it is clear that the in-