

BLACKFRIARS

But soft, I hear some reader remind me of my recently-expressed admiration for René Clair and the French Realists. Oh, my jolly pedant, the film is an art embracing many things; by Heaven, you shall not nail me down to my Very Silly Symphony; some day I shall go sane again.

HUGH BERRY.

TRACKING DOWN THE BARON CORVO

THE essential interest of the 'Experiment in Biography' by means of which Mr. A. J. A. Symons tells us what his ingenious patience has pieced together about Frederic William Rolfe, the 'spoilt priest' who has definitely taken his place in Victorian letters, depends on the fact—presented by Mr. Symons with a mass of accumulated evidence—that he was a congenital Invert. Once this has been realized the course of his wasted life is comprehensible. Without this clue we might well ask ourselves what all the fuss was about.

Born in Victorian London, and received into the Catholic Church at twenty-six years of age, Rolfe presents all the ear-marks of his kind. 'Bright, attractive, a natural Catholic . . . interested in drawing, music, and the arts, not over given to sport,' as Mr. Symons says, he might have sublimated his Inversion under the spur and curb of Catholic asceticism to become a useful priest. Yet 'somehow' he met 'squalls' at Oscott, 'somehow' he was expelled from the Scots College, 'somehow' he lapsed into vicissitudes at Christchurch and Aberdeen, 'somehow' he failed to convince either Franciscans or Jesuits, until 'somehow' he became the man of 'many queer friendships' who never made a friend, and finished up by purchasing the favours

¹ *The Quest for Corvo. An Experiment in Biography.* By A. J. A. Symons. (Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1934.)

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of venal youths in the back alleys of Venice. The 'somehow' is not difficult to deduce. Living on the dream of aesthetic externals, and disgusted with the reality of commonplace or ugly externals, he never understood the ethos of Catholicism, and never conquered the temperament which drove him at last to offer to a nameless friend a share in the nameless satisfactions which borrowed money had bought for the 'haggard, shabby, shy, priestly visaged individual' whose sudden death caused a 'horrified Consul' to find 'letters, drawings, and note-books sufficient to cause a hundred scandals.' The conclusion is so clear that even he who skips may read.

The virtuous whom he admired so pathetically must long since have realized why they fascinated him and added to their theory of Moral Theology a practical demonstration of the ravages caused, in abnormal or in normal misconduct, by the wreck of the rake. True it is that the spur and curb may have been clumsily applied, and hurt where there was no need for them to touch. All that love of physical beauty might have been led up to the love and service of the Word made Flesh. In the 'big dirty parish' at which Mr. Vincent O'Sullivan sneers, he could have been a spiritual father to thousands of souls housed in bodies which share the disadvantages of corruptibility, and end in a common corruption. He chose to dream of Friants Wrestlers, of Boucher's Runners, of 'an olive-skinned, black-haired, cornflower-crowned Pancratius,' of Eros at the feet of a negligible Psyche, of divers in the clear of the moon, of young Sophokles as choregus, and of 'a neat boy's leg, long and singularly well-turned,' until the still attractive but affected young student shown in the first of Mr. Symons' illustrations became the Nowt of Holywell hoping for a hair-restorer, and the perky little young-old man of the second picture, touting for a job as second gondolier and dying on a hotel-bed in Venice.

Like another victim of theological tragedy (Fr. Tyrrell, S.J., appreciating Wilde's *De Profundis*), he may have hoped to the last that 'If I sink as low, I may rise as high.' Unfortunately, he never came to the surface, and the Nowt

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who despised 'Sewers End' was laid to rest in an island cemetery lapped by the murky waters which are the only sewers of the crowded island slums in which he starved to a moral and physical death.

If the dispassionate record which Mr. Symons has so carefully compiled can help the 'normal' to understand the 'abnormal,' it will have served a useful purpose. If it can help the abnormal to arrest the 'play' which ends as Proust says (*Sodome et Gontorrhé*) in 'the day of disgrace when the tamers of wild beasts are devoured by them,' it will be a God-send.

The Quest for Corvo is a serious presentation of a moral problem which is but too often discussed with contempt or ribaldry. We hope that two classes of readers who need enlightenment will not miss the point.

IFOR HAEL.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE POLITICS OF INDUSTRIALISM.

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

SIR,—Industrialism has reduced the majority of the workers to 'a sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility.' The phrase is Father Martin D'Arcy's. Such a state of things is intolerable to the Catholic Church.

Mr. P. D. Foster, writing in your March number, says that 'men will soon cease to occupy positions subordinate to machines, for as these become more competent and completely automatic, design, organization and control will be the human tasks.' There are about 1,400 millions of men and women in the world, about 40 millions in England and Wales. Take England and Wales alone and call it **five** million male workers. Is it possible to achieve such a perfecting of industrialism that every one of these five millions will be engaged in design, organization or control?

Sir, it's a giraffe!—I don't believe it.

Take, for example, the 'assembling' of mass-produced motor cars. You can imagine a completely automatic machine for