

BLACKFRIARS

(With which is incorporated *The Catholic Review*.)

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NOTES ON THE MONTH

IMMEDIATE ACTION. The state of affairs twenty years hence is difficult to conjecture. Those who foresee the break-up of Industrialism are preparing quite logically to go back to the land. Under the circumstances it is beside the point to criticise the smallness of their beginnings or to ask how townsmen can possibly be turned into successful farmers. But a general crash is far from being the only possibility. The centre of gravity is shifting from the congested industrial town, but whether it will move into the country or stop in the outer suburb is another matter. After all, there are various schemes which claim to be able to save our present system of production, although they would completely overhaul the financial system. For this reason, Mr. Foster's suggestion in the present number of **BLACKFRIARS** for Catholic housing associations deserves the most serious consideration.

AN ECONOMIC STAFF. The Army has specialist officers whose function is to adjust fighting power to the economic situation. The Church, too, has its specialists; but, very naturally, they are mostly concerned with principles and diagnosis of conditions. There is room for a more immediate and utilitarian effort. Local government affects our lives more than Parliament does, and although priests are often closely in touch with local developments, there seems to be a place for a council which would inform and

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advise diocesan authorities on such things as future town planning, the movement of industry, the possibility of a Catholic housing scheme at some strategic point. This is work for laymen, a form of Catholic action which did things, instead of debating social theory. For the times are too urgent to wait for many theoretical conclusions; the centre of Catholic life is a church, and what is a church unless the Catholics are grouped around it?

HITLERISM. The rant and bullying apart, it is possible to discern an emphasis on the spiritual value of a nation's life, free from the materialism of Marx and Finance. And if it is the old Prussianism again, if Hitlerism belongs to the Oder and the Elbe, what is to blame if not the anti-clericalism of Versailles, which weakened the Catholic and European strength of the Germanies along the Danube and Rhine?

POGROMS. The Jews looked to Rome when they were expelled from Spain; the centre of Christendom has always opposed the excesses they have been subjected to in outlying parts; the hostility of Catholics to them can usually be explained in terms sub-religious. Naturally we condemn the anti-Jewish reign of terror in Germany. Apart from motives of ordinary humanity, there is the feeling that we are in the same boat. For Hitlerism must attack Catholics, indeed it already has, and for motives largely the same. It cannot tolerate any group that draws some of its life from outside the State. The Pope has energetically condemned the subjection of everything to the State; he has deplored exaggerated nationalism. For no Catholic is merely a German or a Frenchman. Neither is a Jew. And both may be the better citizens for that, contributing to the life of the nation and serving it, without being entirely committed.

DETACHMENT. Time is a sort of decayed eternity, and the State a sort of shadow of the City of God. Now eternal life is not a future life, it is present and all about us. Only by setting ourselves on invisible things do visible things remain valuable. Often the Christian saint is the great historical figure, the organiser of policy, of groups, of living

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ideas. Lasting effect, indeed, seems to be in direct ratio to detachment. And the Christian effort is weakened, even on a worldly level, when it succumbs to the attraction of merely local and temporal forces. The current number of *Esprit* speaks of the double conformity which has threatened the effect of Catholic Action in France—the *Action Française*, a justified attack on parliamentarianism, but compromised by attachment to a pagan conception of civil authority; the *Sillon* and the *Jeune République*, a generous effort to widen social action, but compromised by an attachment to an expiring liberalism. Catholic Action in England, is it weakened by an over-attachment to things of the past, the Wage System for some, a peasantry for others? *Quadragesimo Anno* commits a Catholic to neither.

AN AMERICAN DICTATOR. The enthusiasm for government of the people and by the people is pretty generally on the wane. The inadequacy of democratic institutions in the face of emergencies has made dictatorial government increasingly popular. During the last administration in America when the need for drastic action was evident to all, every movement for effective remedial legislation was frustrated by the clumsiness of the heterogeneous machine of government. In the session before Christmas, Congress spent days splitting dialectic hairs as to what fraction added to three or four per cent. of alcoholic content would make beer intoxicating. The concentration of power in the hands of President Roosevelt opens up the possibility of decisive action. It is early yet to estimate the success of the Bank Bill. It is probably no more than the first step of a long and weary climb. But it is something to have power and behind it the unqualified support of the American people.

JACOBIN.