

BLACKFRIARS

A MONTHLY REVIEW

Edited by the English Dominicans

Published at Blackfriars, St Giles, Oxford

Vol. XXX

MAY 1949

No. 350

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AN OLD STRUGGLE REVIVED

WE have the honour to publish in this number of BLACKFRIARS the personal manifesto of the Editor of *The Tablet*, which includes also some interesting glimpses of the inner construction of that powerful and well respected contemporary of ours. The article, addressed partly to us personally and partly to our readers, has been called forth by Dom Aelred Graham's discussion of the place English Catholics take in modern politics; while Mr Woodruff also takes exception to some remarks of our own which he regards as being directed almost exclusively against his well-informed and stimulating weekly journal. (Cf. BLACKFRIARS, March.)

We naturally regret that Mr Woodruff has taken our editorial and Dom Aelred's article so personally. It was clear, however, that we had a wider view and that we were considering the trend of English Catholic journalism in general. It was with reason that we quoted the opinion of the visiting foreigner who found English Catholics vocally so right wing, for the foreigner's view is more likely to be objective and impersonal. Despite Mr Woodruff's high ideals it is difficult for those who are immersed in these pressing current events to stand back and consider the whole tenor of their comments upon the trend of affairs; but others looking from afar can see for instance the almost undivided support given in the past by English Catholic journalism to the totalitarian regimes of

Italy and Spain. *The Tablet* was no exception in those days, and it was only after the Editor had visited Italy a month or so before Mussolini plunged her into the war that a note of hesitation appeared in its pages. People still ask us why it is that totalitarian regimes flourish in Catholic countries, and the fact that the modern form of totalitarianism seems to be predominantly a Communist and anti-Catholic one cannot wholly reassure these enquirers. Mr Woodruff indeed points out that he and his colleagues are engaged in 'the most immediate contemporary question, whether and how Europe can be saved' as well as looking constructively to the future. This certainly is a just claim and we together with all English Catholics owe the Editor of *The Tablet* in particular a great debt of gratitude for his energy and single-minded devotedness to the Catholic cause. But the point we were making in general was that it is of doubtful value for Catholics to concern themselves with these pressing modern dilemmas in terms of political outlooks and divisions which are so profoundly changing their character that the terms have ceased to mean anything. The old division between right and left, between the totalitarianism of the fascist and that of the communist, has proved to be almost irrelevant. The divisions and definitions are not as they were yesterday, and we shall miss our great opportunity as Christians if we act and plan as though they were. If we judge the present universal crisis in terms of yesterday's 'right' and 'left', we are in danger of taking sides in a struggle in which both sides are un-Christian.

Certainly the distributism which Mr Woodruff now vigorously supports falls outside that division, and certainly, too, every right minded Catholic will retain his enthusiasm for the vision of the great Catholics of the generation just passed. But as Mr Woodruff himself points out those theoretical principles play no part either in the Conservative or in the Labour programmes. If *The Tablet* is to adopt the attitude of the 'mucker-out', to return to a word used in a former discussion for such desert tactics, then it should be made clear that the journal is neither right nor left, that it withdraws from the outmoded divisions and contentions of Labour and Conservative. It should be made clear to all, even to the visiting foreigner so that Raymond Jouve would have had no occasion to write in *Etudes* (July 1946) of the 'décalage' which seemed to exist between the spirit of the Catholic public and its journals. 'Five sixths of the English Catholics', he wrote, 'belong to the working class and to the "Labour Party"'. But the Catholic press does not reflect in any way the workers' point of view. Therein lies an anomaly which is very difficult for the foreigner to understand.'

Mr Woodruff combats this foreign point of view by suggesting that Catholic Labour does not vote Labour from Catholic principles. And herein lies one of the greatest problems, for neither does the Conservative or the Liberal vote from Catholic principles. In the existing state of this country a Catholic could support no party since not one of them is root and branch Christian and in each the Christian point of view is swallowed up in a welter of opportunist remedies and rather desperate make-shifts mixed with more or less high-faluting ideals. The Christian is entitled to try to draw out of this situation in certain circumstances when faith or morals are immediately implicated. But in the main all Catholics are encouraged to do their best however small to mould the molten mass of political thought and experiment and turn it towards Christian ends and ideals. Dom Aelred's article made a most compelling plea for a truly realist tackling of the modern political problem on these lines. And however true may be Mr Woodruff's contention that the Catholic Labour vote was predominantly Irish with Irish rather than Catholic motives it should not be forgotten that an Irish vote of a hundred years ago achieved considerable advantages for Catholics in this country. The challenge as to motives in voting is perhaps not very fair and could be used equally in every vote. But the fact that so many Catholics are also 'workers' invites a powerful drive to introduce Catholic ideas into policies as is at last being done with considerable success in the Trade Union movement.

We are back to the old problem of whether we should 'muck-in' or 'muck-out', which was tackled energetically by our predecessors in the pages of *BLACKFRIARS*. If Mr Woodruff disagrees so heartily with Dom Aelred it would be desirable for him to pick up the threads unfortunately laid down by the Editor of *The Cross and the Plough*, who has been compelled to cease the publication of his call to repentance in the desert. Perhaps *The Tablet* may yet play the Messiah to the John the Baptist of *The Cross and the Plough*. But in the meantime we may all endeavour to become more Christian in our attitude to the present problem. Mr Woodruff regards the appeal to Christian truth and Christian charity as being impracticable. He relies still on the mailed fist which in the past won crusades and saved Christendom. But things have changed; the mail on the fist is made of new material and it strikes with a different punch. It would be more profitable and more practicable to return once more to the Gospels and seek the standard from Christ himself. The Christian is concerned rather with the conversion than with the defeat of his opponent; and in this the 'semi-literate voter' may be as successful as the most highly educated journalist.

THE EDITOR