

DEMOCRACY : THE THREATENED FOUNDATIONS. By Reginald Lennard. (Cambridge University Press ; 3s. 6d.)

The worst that can happen to a high ideal is that it should become popularised by a catchword. When this happens, vague aspirations and illogical enthusiasms are inevitably substituted for reasoned thought by the masses whom the catch-word has attracted. When a nation is fighting for an ideal which it believes to be essential to its continued existence as a nation, this danger is increased beyond measure. We are told, and most of us believe, that the present war is primarily the battle of democracy against forms of government which seek to destroy the democratic ideal ; but how many of the millions whose enthusiasm is high on behalf of democracy really understand either the ideal for which they work and fight or its implications in their daily lives? Mr. Lennard provides an exposition in a hundred and twenty pages. The book is published in the Current Problems series, and, after reading it, one realises anew how complicated the problem of democracy is. For this book is no paean of unreasoned praise. The contradictions and inconsistencies of English democracy are not concealed or glossed over, and, although in the chapter on the growth of English democracy the author seems eager to show that the failings of our system are really its strength, it may be that he is only contrasting our system of progress by trial and error with the sudden superficial perfection imposed by totalitarian authority.

Perhaps the most important point emphasised by Mr. Lennard is the essential connection between democracy and true education. In an earlier chapter he seems to regard the extension of the franchise to its present limits as an unqualified blessing. But the masses are notoriously fickle and unreasoning in their moods. Without universal education—and real education at that—the universal franchise is more likely to be a curse than a blessing. The author hints at this in his chapter on education, but his fears seem to be based more on the assumption that the seeds of totalitarian education are already present in our own educational system than upon the inadequacies of our training for responsible citizenship. The foundations of democracy may be threatened, but the threat is not only one of attack from without, decay and inaction within the structure are equally dangerous—perhaps even more dangerous, since they prepare the way for the external enemy.

One may not always agree with Mr. Lennard, but he deserves every praise for having packed into such a small compass such a wealth of material for constructive thought. At a time when, as he points out, democracy has had to abandon its most cherished privileges in order to ensure its ultimate survival, each of us has the responsibility of working for a better and more genuine democracy when the tempering fires have died down.

CEDRIC BURTON, O.P.