

## BLACKFRIARS

TRADITION AND PROGRESS. By Ross Hoffman. (Geo. E. J. Coldwell; 8s. 6d.)

The author of this collection of twelve essays is a Catholic convert; already some admirable work has come from his pen, and we have here a precious example of it.

Life is perspective; only in the light of that tremendous vertical line which Revelation is can the meaning of life be captured. And the same is true of the tale of life—history; it is a matter of perspective. If it is to be understood, interpreted, it must be so because there is meaning in it, or if you like, a beginning in it and an end. Millions to whom no inkling of God's unfolding has come may continue their unthinking, almost deathlike, life. For them life is aimless, its story but a physical cycle. For Christians alone has existence its proper meaning, a greater more sublime symbol in so much as they have more fully submitted to the fascination of that message—itsself a Person—from above. The Very Many who have mistaken or not truly grasped the message, defect in varying degrees from the true grip, the fruitful love of life and history. It is the Catholic that alone has a conscience of history, as Mr. Belloc once explained, and that is the far-and-away most likely genuine philosopher—contemplator, analyser, evaluator—of history.

The Catholic too, is the custodian *par excellence* of tradition: "all historical knowledge, the whole body of remembered experience and wisdom that is given over (*traditus*) by one generation to another." He possesses the critical instrument, namely his connaturality with the Divine Life and the relation of creation to that Life, whereby experience is made golden.

Culture, too, receives its God-meant nobility. A more and more perfecting of the inherent nobility in creation, especially in man; a perfecting of man's knowledge of creation, a culture of the powers in creation for *man*—and all this for *God*, all under the guiding light of a deep appreciation of the highest spiritual values. Constructive, Creative, true Optimism, the road to Progress of every best kind; the consummation finally of all things in Christ.

Thoughts similar to these spontaneously mature on meditating Mr. Hoffman's book. The author is extremely well and critically read in those sciences underlying the main ideas in this book. These main ideas are culture, tradition and religion. He has clasped firmly what these words stand for and is thus in a position to pass judgment on present, social, educational, political and economic problems. He does this with *éclat* showing an enviable touch in the discernment of the weak points in modern thought, historical and social. And Mr. Hoffman's critique of these is sure, and invaluable. Yet it is gentle, lacking all animosity or

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aggressiveness. Behind it, infallible as it generally is, there lies no comfortableness, no complacency. In the very best sense the work is Catholic, though this fact is not in any way obtrusive. We want more work with such qualities—and could we have it in greater detail? If there is any weak point in these powerful essays it is one almost inevitable to their form. They are brief, and so somewhat facile, the judgments and historical statements showing at times austerity of outline.

The historian has a pit dug round him; not the least deep places in which are the two temptations: to interpret (1) without the most searching meditation on his facts, their respective probabilities, and (2) without due entertainment of the part unconscious and mass psychology play in the fabric of history. This psychological instrument has been sharpened to-day and we think Mr. Hoffman has not neglected the point. Some pitfalls are inevitable, but he is it seems determined not to be tempted into these two deeps. This is a pregnant sign for the future historical labours of the author.

PETER PAUL FEENY, O.P.

MONSEIGNEUR SIX, Premier Missionaire du Travail. Par J. Lamoot. (Editions Spes; 20 frs.)

The title given to Monseigneur Six in the naming of this book looks like an exaggerated claim. But it was given by Pius XI. And the book shows why.

In the 1870s, before *Rerum Novarum*, the Abbé Six, a young curate then, saw ahead that the industrial opportunity was to make an entirely new problem for the Church, and came to the conclusion that "a purely religious apostolate would not suffice in the new world which was arising under the extraordinary developments of the machine." He groped and grappled with the problem, following the work of Léon Harmel and La Tour du Pin. Then came *Rerum Novarum*, an echo and a canonisation of his half-formed convictions. From that time his life with little interruption was dedicated to the Apostolate of the Workers; study circles, retreats, "Militants' Days," schools, organisations, a Review, finally Director of the Social Action of Lille, a work making itself felt in the whole of the Christian Social Movement of the Nord.

And in all his work, as his biographer draws out, the Abbé Six preserved the difficult balance and kept clear the idea of the primacy of the supernatural aim of the Church and of his own Priesthood. Therefore his example is doubly valuable. There is always this danger in Catholic Social Action: that it turns the Faith into a "Philosophy," a panacea for social ills, and shifts the