

## REPRISALS

ENVISAGING the possibility of reprisals, in its issue dated Sept. 4th/5th, the semi-official newspaper of the Holy See, the *Osservatore Romano*, recorded the German and Anglo-French replies to President Roosevelt's appeals for 'humane' warfare, in which both parties undertook to refrain from civilian bombardment on condition that the other did the same. These replies elicited from the *Osservatore* the following important comment:

As is also known, from the first news of hostilities onwards, there has been talk—accusations here, disclaimers there—of air bombardments not limited to military objectives.

It is the third day. In war as elsewhere, there may be—shall we say?—moments of inexperience. But from now on, the pledged word of both sides cannot provide itself with the alibi of early uncertainties, of the non-arrival of orders. Above all, let it not be forgotten that nothing more deeply wounds the civilised conscience than such transgression of the very laws of humanity; the more so since for seven centuries the Church in her Councils has declared the inviolability of civilian populations—and, what is more, of their work, their fields, their workshops, their houses—from every assault of war.

The best of causes, defended by such means, will be destroyed before that tribunal of the world from which there is no appeal—a tribunal which will consider intentions and promises less than deeds—deeds that should be inspired by the most humane, the most Christian, the most civilised of scruples. With the march of time, with the upward movement of nations, war itself cannot be exempt from 'progress.' Leave us this belief, in God's name! The old saying that 'war is war'—the other that 'the end justifies the means'—the third and worst, that 'frightfulness shortens frightfulness'—cannot mask the blind savagery which in these conditions would flood the world again; they cannot absolve anyone whatever for carrying the offensive beyond the strictest limits of those necessities of war which are already terrible in themselves.

And let there be no talk—none!—of reprisals. Our words here must be plain and strong. Let no one quote against us the

'harsh law of necessity'; that is another ready-made phrase to screen one kind of harshness only—that of cruelty. Reprisals against civilian populations are a monstrous thing. The innocent would still pay for the guilty. Against the innocent victims of the one side would be set the innocent victims of the other. Not thus are humanity and offended justice to be appeased; this is no repayment of injuries; it is complicity in a crime—a crime not only as towards the contending parties, but first and foremost before the loftiest inspirations of life, of reason, of the heart of man.

The law of retaliation applied to those unarmed, to women and children and the aged—one has only to think of it, only to formulate it to arouse in every soul an unequalled horror, to find oneself powerless in any language to express its shameful, accursed meaning.

War is a chastisement. God is to be propitiated, not to be defied. Far from appeasing his vengeance, nothing can more loudly cry out for it than bloody havoc wrought on those weakest ones who even now are suffering the pangs of a ghastly trial in which they have no hand.

**BLACKFRIARS** feels that every publicity should be given to this most Christian appeal which, we cannot doubt, has the approval, if not the actual authority of the Holy Father himself.