

VIDEANT CONSULES

'LET the Consuls see to it that no harm befall the State'; that was the mandate given to the chief magistrates by the Roman Senate constituting them supreme in times of crisis. But even in the ordinary course of events the consuls were preceded by those bundles of rods encircling an axe, which signified the power of life and death. To-day this emblem once again means power, and those who wield the Fasces possess, or mean to possess authority which is supreme and against which there is no appeal. For some years now we have been accustomed to them as the standard of the Fascist party in Italy, and already, in rather more than a decade, they have been invested by British eyes with a host of relevant and irrelevant associations, for the most part noble and joyous, but among those who equate liberalism and liberty often sad and regretful. Yet even those many Englishmen who pass secure and easy judgment of approval on the new Italy may have found it something of a shock to discover the axe and rods being carried through the length and breadth of their own country. On the book-stall and in the hands of the news vendor, on the political platform and even in the lapel of the coat, this sign has appeared with dramatic suddenness, proclaiming the birth of a new organization whose members are determined that the people shall pass the final decree, entrusting them once for all with the task of seeing to it that no harm befall the State. How urgent they believe this task to be may be judged from the words of Sir Oswald Mosley, 'The Leader' of the British Union of Fascists, in the (1934) edition of *The Greater Britain*: 'To drift much longer, to muddle through much further, is to run the risk of collapse Britain cannot muddle on much longer without catastrophe, or the loss of her position in the world.' He foresees either a sudden economic collapse followed by Communist anarchy, or the slow petrification of the nation's will until it becomes a nonentity among the peoples of the world.

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In view of the apparent success of Fascism in Italy, and of the mental and material strain and depression of recent years in our own country, it is not surprising that there are many who believe in the party that hopes to do away with party government as we know it, in the electoral and economic reforms which that party means to introduce, and above all in that new birth of the national spirit to which The Leader calls his followers. Here is a creed of authority and stability, of adventure and generosity; is it surprising that many Catholics, whose journey to the City not made with hands is undertaken in the same discipline, should be found in the Fascist ranks?

But social and political theory is much talked of nowadays, and Catholics especially, following the lead given to them by the Holy Father, have become increasingly conscious of their duty to uphold right social principles in a world which more and more tends to ignore and deny them. It is therefore to be expected that they should feel called upon to make careful enquiries as to the standpoint of the Fascist party in England with regard to these matters. And they have not been without cause for uneasiness. In the first edition of *The Greater Britain* occurred these words: 'To all moral questions the acid test is first social and secondly scientific. If an action does not harm the State, and if it leaves the doer sound in mind and body, it cannot then be morally wrong. *This test over-rides all considerations of religion, prejudice and inherited doctrines which, at present, obscure the mind of man.*' To Catholics at least, the suggestion that any test can override considerations of religion in the moral sphere must at once appear false, but it is also evident that no action which is morally right can possibly harm the State or be opposed to the common good. Yet the words we have put in italics imply that, the truths of faith and reason, the ends of the community and of the citizen might be in general incompatible, which is impossible. The form of the statement shows quite clearly that the State is considered as the ultimate judge of morality, and apart from our knowledge that it may be, we have plenty of experience to show that it often is wrong.

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The Headquarters of the B.U.F. were asked, it seems more than once, for an elucidation of this passage, and the reply given, authorised by Sir Oswald Mosley, stated that 'Any member is free to apply to himself any religious test or practice which his conscience dictates, provided that this practice does not conflict with his loyalty to the State and the Fascist movement. In the case, of course, of the Christian religion, and indeed of all established religion, no conflict whatsoever arises between religious practices and duty to the State.' In the new edition of the book the italicised words and the remainder of that sentence have been omitted. Instead it is asserted against objectors that the test coincides with every tenet of real religion. 'Our aim . . . is to indicate the Fascist conception of citizenship which is in every way compatible with religion.' Now the establishment of a religion, as we understand establishment in England, clearly does not necessitate the full acceptance of Christian principles of social morality by the State, and so it is not true to say that 'of course' no conflict ever arises, nor, when the Fascist party is the sole arbiter, is it necessarily true to say that the Fascist conception of citizenship is in every way compatible with religion. It is impossible to explain away the statement that religious principles will be tolerated only in so far as they are conformable to loyalty to the Fascist party. While the two things might be coincident in any particular case, yet the adoption of a doctrine like that leaves no doubt as to the attitude that would be taken up should they diverge at any time.

In matters of conduct, however, we are dealing with the particular, and so we are entitled to ask whether in fact the Fascist State will accept, reject, or remain indifferent to such principles taken individually. We will consider their attitude to the rights of parents over their children, the right of the innocent to bodily integrity, and the right to own private property. On May 4th, in answer to representations made by the Universe, a manifesto appeared in the *Fascist Week*, the official organ of the B.U.F., in which we find the following statement, 'A Fascist government

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will interfere in no way with present denominational schools, except to assure itself that a proper standard of education is maintained by duly qualified teachers. It is fully realized that Catholic parents wish their children not only to receive Catholic religious instruction, but that they should also be brought up in an atmosphere calculated to complement that instruction and develop a definite code of moral values. Fascism is prepared to encourage and support the application of these principles. Schools shall be judged entirely on their educational merits, and there will be no religious discrimination.' The editorial in *G.K.'s Weekly* of May 10th, remarks that in view of the absolutist nature of the Fascist State, the retention of the right to decide what constitutes a 'proper standard of education' is significant, and it might indeed invalidate the statement as a legal guarantee. But the State has the right and the duty of ensuring the education of its members, and we prefer to regard this as an example of the Fascist's determination to 'despise the windy rhetoric which ascribes importance to mere formula' and to cut 'through the verbiage of illusion to the achievement of a new reality' (*The Greater Britain*). There are occasions, however, when accurate formulation prevents, at the least, misunderstanding.

On the subject of sterilization no policy is enunciated, and the refusal to take up any definite position for the present, must give rise to uneasiness at a time when the Nazis have recently made a law to legalize it in quite unjustifiable cases, and when false opinions of the rights of the community over the bodies of its members are everywhere gaining ground. We are told moreover that a man's 'religious rights are also political rights except in the unlikely event of the adoption by his Church of an anti-national policy,' another saving clause the interpretation of which rests solely with the Fascist government. As we have seen throughout, the decision as to what is right and therefore in accordance with the true interests of the community in the moral sphere is to be decided by the State, **by** no means impossibly in direct opposition to the teach-

ing of the Church. But indeed this assumption that **such teaching is no more than** the self-seeking of a sect, the fact that what belongs to the very nature of man should **only have** claims to consideration as a sectarian point of view, **all this is** a dreadful witness to the perversion of intellect and blindness of heart which has come about. **If it be true that no** other party in this country would grant more, **that does not** bear on the question whether to help **the Fascists to power** is a worthy object of Catholic activity. **We** have seen that there is much uncertainty and qualification in their statement of fundamental principles, yet **when** a lasting Fascist State is to be set up it is more important to have these clearly stated than even economic and administrative policy. Fascism proclaims itself as a progressive movement, to whose essence it belongs to develop with the situations in which it finds itself, but if it is merely to be a machine for passing *ad hoc* measures with no foundation in truth and justice, we shall make the clean sweep of the 'Old Gang' to which we are so constantly urged, only to find that our last condition is worse than the first. The very efficiency of the Fascist State must magnify its mistakes. The very definiteness of its powers of control will necessitate a perfectly clear understanding between the spiritual and temporal powers on those matters which must inevitably come under the jurisdiction of each. And if things have come to such a pass that natural rights are spoken of only as Catholic rights, then the Church and **her** teaching can be the only reasonable, let alone **the only** sure, **ally** even in the search for temporal happiness. **At present, perhaps, the Fascist will be up in arms at such a suggestion. He will talk of a predominantly Protestant country, of the impossibility of accepting only those principles which have received the approval of the Vatican, of a state within the State, of refusal to cede any part of the Fascist sovereignty to any foreign prince (see the manifesto of May 4th). Yet here we are not talking of religion, hardly even of politics, only of a return to right reason in our social relations, right reason of which the Church is almost the only champion to-day. Even when it was said in the**

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first article of the Lateran Treaty of 1929 that Italy recognized and reaffirmed that the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion was the sole religion of the State, and in the next article recognized the Pope as a king, this involved no ceding of sovereignty, the formation of no state within the State. In England there are no territorial complications, no possibility of the State identifying itself with the Catholic religion, not even the wish for a Catholic political party. It cannot then be supposed that the adoption of those social counsels of which the world has so needed to be reminded, and their adoption in definite and unequivocal terms, would in any way prejudice the secular authority, or do ought than increase the worth and stability of, or enthusiasm for, the Fascist party. There is a large emotional appeal in the presentation of Fascism, but to work up emotion, and to 'dedicate' one's life for a cause that shows signs, however small, of being wrong about the elements of social justice, is to court individual and collective disaster.

In the Papal Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, planned economy is spoken of with definite approval, as imposing the rule of social justice on the immoral chaos of free competition. As an example of planned economy a brief outline is given of the Italian corporative system, but the two comments on this should not be ignored. First is mentioned the fear of some who believe that the State is tending to supplant private initiative, and by developing an excessively bureaucratic character is running the risk of serving particular political aims rather than contributing to the initiation of a better social order; secondly, it is pointed out that for the achievement of this last purpose the cooperation of all men of good will is necessary, as well as the application of Catholic principles (see *The Social Order*, pp. 40-43; Catholic Truth Society). First and foremost it should be noticed that there is nothing in the theory of the Corporate State which is hostile to the institution of private property. Sir Oswald Mosley proposes to limit the right of transmission of property to posterity to those who have merited by service the possession of what they wish to

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leave, thus hoping to stimulate private enterprise and ensure that all shall & their duty as citizens. Such a regulation of inheritance does not appear to be beyond the competence of the State.¹

In an article entitled 'Fascist Parliamentary Association' in the *Fascist Week* of May 18th, the need is stated for precision in public pronouncements. Those who wish to see the corporate State built up in England and believe that it can only come about through the success of British Fascism (there are some who think otherwise) should use every means in their power to see that precision is attained in the matters of which we have been speaking, whether they are members of the movement or not. The Fascist paper has columns open to correspondents, and they pride themselves on having won for Englishmen the possibility of free speech at public meetings, unterrorised by hooliganism and violence. Of Italy the Pope himself has said, 'The Fascist State, as much in its ideas and teaching as in its practice, will not admit anything which does not accord with Catholic teaching and practice.' If we could say as much in England we could entrust to them the destinies of our country with full confidence, and say with good conscience and glad heart: 'Videant consules ne quid respublica detrimenti capiat.'

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¹Those who wish to learn about the corporate state in being should read *The Working of a Corporate State* by H. E. Goad and M. Gurrey (published by Ivor Nicholson and Watson at 2/-).