

# BLACKFRIARS

(With which is incorporated *The Catholic Review*)

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## EDITORIAL

THE NEW YEAR symbolizes the unquenchable optimism of human nature—an optimism that is justified, in truth, by the Incarnation alone. There is need for this optimism at the present time, for as we write the terms of the Anglo-French peace proposals have become public, and they do not encourage us to faith in either the wisdom or the justice of those concerned in the making of them. By the time these words appear in print the League will have dealt with (and no doubt rejected) these proposals, but we permit ourselves certain general observations arising out of them. We have said upon an earlier occasion that this war would prove a test-case for the League; we now say more precisely that the terms of peace will make or break it. The League has passed judgment on the aggressor; it will pass a much more damning judgment on itself if it should now favour the aggressor, unless it is prepared to quash its original indictment. In the latter fantastically hypothetical event it would even more effectively sentence itself to death. It is reasonably supposed that France was the true originator of the present peace proposals, and one cannot fail to admit that M. Laval is in an unenviable plight; but that is true of any member of the

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League that would run with the hare and hunt with the hounds or is concerned only with self-interest. The fact is that disinterested justice and truth alone can still the present upheaval and at the same time establish future security. The League gives little promise of this; our hope lies with the rank and file, and the forceful reactions to the publication of these peace proposals give grounds for that hope. It is true that a widely read English newspaper goes so far as to suggest that peace must be secured immediately even at the cost of justice. But we have yet to be persuaded that the readers of this powerful organ of private opinion have so fallen from Christian and human ideals as to be moved by it.

Indeed, notwithstanding the gloomy prognostications as to the trend and ultimate fate of modern civilization, uttered by wise and prudent observers, we look, at this time especially, amidst the grim shadows of materialism, for the glimmering of light that may herald the dawn. It seems to us that it may be observed in the recrudescence of practical interest in the truths of Christianity, and in the common-sense philosophy of life which is part of it, amongst the people as a whole. The problems of to-day, brought to a head in international politics by the war but urgent in every sphere of life, are reducible, largely and ultimately, to a lack of the essentially human characteristic of wisdom or common-sense. Common-sense is too readily regarded as prosaic and uninspiring; it becomes so in fact once it is canalized and conventionalized—but then it ceases to be common-sense; and the natural reaction is a desire to strike out into new paths, which offer all the fascination of adventure into the unknown with the possibility of valuable new discoveries, and all the danger of leaving the known solid track in crossing a swamp with the probability of finding nothing but disaster. In religion, philosophy, politics, art, science, and even in sober mathematics, these venturesome quests have been undertaken; and whatever of real advantage has accrued to humanity, most of the admitted chaos of to-day is due to them, for by a curious (though easily explainable) paradox errancy into unfounded idealism and fanciful theorizing on the part of the few produces materialism and atrophy of intelligence on the part of the many. But common-sense dies hard and so hope remains.

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Amongst the signs of the times, one of the most encouraging is the revival of interest in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is becoming more generally known that his writings do not represent the unreal theorizing of a mediæval dreamer nor the academic futilities of a case-hardened logician, but are the practical considerations and common-sense conclusions of a great mind keenly alive to human needs and problems. But, of course, the peculiar value of his teaching is not that it is Thomist but that it is Christian and Catholic; it is the epiphany of the God-Man, the Incarnation manifested in terms of everyday human life. In this context, we take the opportunity of registering our satisfaction at the establishment of *Aquinas Societies* by Catholic lay-people in various parts of the country. At present they are, no doubt, hardly a power in the land, but they may very well become so. Another new promise in Catholic wisdom is the *Catholic Psychological Society* which has formulated a general programme of propaganda, education and the promotion of Study Groups in connection with psychological science and problems. In other spheres, the *Catholic Social Guild* and the *Catholic Council of International Relations*, besides their ordinary important activities, have pooled their resources to organize an effective Catholic section in the forthcoming *Third International Conference on Social Work*. Finally, as a background to these, and the other signs of splendid vitality in Catholic circles, we may call attention to the *C.T.S. Lending Library* which provides a valuable storehouse of literature pertinent to all these activities.

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*The New Year wish of BLACKFRIARS to its readers is that they may share in its own optimism and in its determination to further the saving cause of Catholic Truth.*

EDITOR.