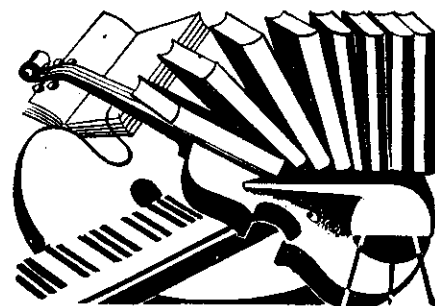




LOOKING BEYOND THE BATTLE



PRAYER AND COMPLACENCY

THESE questions that we asked were particularly difficult ones for a clergyman to answer, but when we put them to a minister who is closely connected with the Campaign for Christian Order, he answered them frankly, and agreed that it was right that the issues should be raised. At one period of the war, he said, people were ready to flock to special services of prayer and intercession, but he did not think they were so ready now. There was less religious emotion springing from fear.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "the leaders of the Churches were never very enthusiastic about such special efforts of prayer, even in the darkest days, and they would be even less enthusiastic now. I don't wish to suggest that Church leaders are sceptical about the value of prayer in times of crisis, but they realise that there is a danger in these special services of encouraging a superficial view of prayer—the idea that if you are in a tight corner a heavy onslaught on the Almighty will turn the scale. The danger of that attitude is that it leaves out of account the great moral issues involved. It is preferable that prayer should flow evenly and consistently out of deep conviction rather than out of deep panic. If a National Day of Prayer springs from a general feeling of repentance and of offering one's life and services to God, it is to be encouraged, but if people think they can have salvation without repentance, they are deceived."

"Do you think there is much of the it-can't-happen-here mentality in New Zealand?" we asked.

"Yes, and it is to be deplored. There is a very different temper among the soldiers who are fighting. In a way, it is morally perilous that we have had no bombs here. Thank God we haven't, and let's hope we never shall have any. And yet in this country there is no real feeling—certainly not a strong enough feeling—that the fresh chance now offered to us, the moral and spiritual chance, must not again be squandered. And this complacency, I admit, is to be found inside the Churches as well as outside them. At the same time, it is only fair to point out that a good deal of hard thinking is now being done within the Churches."

"A FATAL TENDENCY"

"THERE is no doubt that during the time of peril there was an increase of—shall we say, religion?" said a Catholic priest whom we interviewed, "and there has been a growing tendency to demand social justice for the future and the erasure of injustices of the past, but I think that there has been some relaxation of the public sense of responsibility. I think we are witnessing that fatal tendency to slip back after the most anxious moment has passed. One index of any steadiness would surely be a rigid maintenance of God's laws of

When France fell, and it seemed that the battle of liberty might be lost, people turned for consolation to religion, to books, to music and the arts, but very little to games or physical excitements. Now liberty seems safe again, and it is in any case not possible to remain mentally agitated for three years. Reports from London indicate that while battles in progress are still the chief topic of conversation, the question most frequently discussed is the post-war world. People are looking forward rather than immediately about them, and have ceased searching for emotional and intellectual ways of escape.

To find out what, if anything, is happening in New Zealand, we have made some inquiries into the reading habits of the public, checked up on obvious social changes, and tried to find out if ordinary men and women are still thinking of a new world, or returning already to their old interests and mental attitudes.

Here are the answers to some of the questions we have asked.

morality, but as it is, we have only seen an aggravation of juvenile delinquency instead of a diminution."

"FORWARD-LOOKERS AND MUGWUMPS"

"I DON'T think you can draw any single conclusions about the state of mind of the people as a whole," said an Anglican clergyman, "because there are two rough divisions of the people: those who are only longing for the chance to return to the *status quo*, and those who see the present day as a great opportunity for rebuilding a saner world. The Churches are roughly divided in that way, too; you have the forward-lookers and the mugwumps—the one kind, glad of such an opportunity, the other regarding the situation as a damned nuisance, but afraid to say so.

"There always is a larger body of people ready to worship and pray at a time of anxiety, but I think that has become less marked recently; people seem to be more honest with themselves, though there are still those who expect miracles from prayers."

WHAT YOUTH THINKS

A CHURCH leader who works especially among young people, and who travels all over the Dominion, said that his experience of youth in camps and conferences indicated that there was a strong desire among young people for more knowledge. There was so much confusion in the world, they were always pointing out; where did Christians stand to-day? For example, after the Campaign for Christian Order was started, they began asking questions about world

order. Their imaginations were touched by the conception of the Christian Church as a world-wide organisation moulding the destinies and to some extent the policies of all races.

So far as special problems were concerned, he would not like to be dogmatic. It was difficult to generalise when speaking of young men who came not only from industries and commerce in the city but from the country also. He could, however, say that they were quite ready to consider new points of view—in fact that many of them would accept pretty radical solutions of the world's troubles. In the meantime, they were distinctly critical of vaguely pious resolutions. They wanted to know what these meant in terms of conduct—what religious leaders proposed to do, and what they themselves were expected to do. In all these matters, he emphasised, the tendency was more marked than it was three years ago. Youth had been stirred by what was going on, and was both more critical and more hopeful.

THE BOOKS WE READ

LIBRARIAN (Country Library Service): "As far as I can tell from the requests for books that come in there is no slackening in the demand for political or semi-political books. These include political books such as those by Quentin Reynolds, John Gunther, Douglas Reed, and so on, but there is also a demand for books about the country that is being fought over—Libya, New Guinea and so on—and accounts of the war. But I could ask more questions than I can answer. Why, for instance, is there such a big and sudden demand for Tolstoy's *War and Peace*? Is this a recoil from war?"

ANOTHER Librarian (General Assembly Library), agreed that there was still a demand for books about the war and about countries and people concerned in the war. "There is a slackening of demand for books on specific topics, such as air-raid shelters, or bombing, or E.P.S. and A.R.P.—topics of that sort were rushed last year, but there is still the demand for post-war reconstruction books: in fact I would say that people's attitude to that is becoming more realistic and consequently more hopeful."

MORE QUESTIONS

"YES, but if things have changed, has it been a genuine social change caused by the war news?—how much for instance, is due to mere comings and goings of interests that might have come and gone, anyway?" asked one of two experienced librarians whom we found working together in one room.

"Quite so, We must not make the error of thinking *post hoc propter hoc*," said the other. "If at some particular moment more people seem to be reading

(Continued on next page)



Christmas holidays, 1942, record racing crowds: a scene at Ellerslie on Boxing Day