

Yet those later days too are now remote; far more remote, indeed, to us than the days of the monks who saw nothing fanciful in comparing the first four daughters of Cîteaux to the four rivers of Paradise. Moreover, at Cîteaux, where not a stone of St Bernard's time now stands, monks are working and praying again.

ÆLRED SQUIRE, O.P.

BACK TO REALITY. By Gustave Thibon. (Hollis and Carter; 13s. 6d.)

The 'back to the land' movement has always been popular amongst socially-minded Catholics, and nowhere so more than in France. The pessimism of Malthus and Sismondi regarding the future of industrialism greatly influenced Catholic thought, and almost a hundred years before Distributism was even thought of, the first attempts to find a solution to the social problem took the form of land colonies.

The appeal of the land is easy enough to understand, and there can be few people that at one time or another have not been attracted to it. On the one hand there is the appealing beauty of the static rural civilization which the Church has managed to christianize after many, many centuries, and on the other hand there is the dynamic but hideous and raw industrial civilization which has spread with such devastating speed over the whole world, and with which the Church has not yet been able to come to any sort of terms. Faced with these two alternatives, the Christian is greatly tempted to adopt the pessimistic, the defeatist attitude; to predict some sort of apocalyptic disaster, to leave the apparently irredeemable industrial world to its fate, and to preach a return to the simple rural life.

After the collapse of France in June 1940 the 'back to the land' movement became more popular than ever amongst the defeatist elements in French Catholicism. Pétain's plan, with Hitler's blessing, to turn France into a purely agricultural country appeared to be the way of salvation, and in the heart-searching that followed France's total and unexpected defeat, it was only too easy to accuse industrialism and democracy as the causes of disaster.

M. Gustave Thibon was the most distinguished amongst the many French Catholics who took this view, and when he published *Retour au réel* in February 1943, it became a popular text book for the keen supporters of Marshal Pétain's 'Révolution Nationale'. M. Thibon's arguments may indeed have sounded conclusive and irrefutable in occupied and defeated France in 1943, but it must be confessed that some of them sound rather silly today. His views on human love are likely to be distasteful to most Englishmen (and women) whether Catholics or not, and it is difficult not to be impatient with such rubbish

as 'love matches provide not only most of the divorces and unhappy homes, but the majority of homes without children'!

Those who are tempted to ignore the economic factor in social behaviour had better take a warning from the fate of poor M. Thibon who, in the chapter entitled 'Individualism and the birth-rate', attributes France's then falling birth rate to liberalism, materialism and democracy. Legal remedies such as concessions to large families are in his opinion 'very limited indeed' in their effects. Today France has one of the largest birth rates in Europe thanks to a system of generous family allowances introduced mainly as a result of the efforts of the Christian Democrats, those 'Christians of the left' who are mercilessly belaboured by M. Thibon in the chapter entitled 'Christianity and the Democratic Mystique' which, for reasons not easily understandable, is described by the English publishers as 'devastating'.

At a time when there is a crying need for translations of the many important Catholic books now being published in France, it is difficult to understand the reason for offering to the English Catholic public this obsolete work, and it hardly seems fair for the reputation of M. Thibon to revive for our benefit this old Vichy hangover.

JAMES LANGDALE

AMERICA AT MID-CENTURY. By André Siegfried. Translated from the French by Margaret Ledésert. (Jonathan Cape; 16s.)

In the fall of 1953 a cab-driver in Washington, D.C. (like all of his kind a repository of wisdom, political, social and sporting) who had a few months before lost a twenty-year-old Federal job through the advent of a Republican President assured me that it was the women's vote, stimulated by Mr Eisenhower's promise to stop the war in Korea, that had upset the Democrat's apple-cart. The trouble with M. Siegfried's book is that he obviously has never swapped stories with cab-drivers in Washington, D.C. or indeed anywhere else in the Union. The title of the French original, *Tableau des Etats-Unis*, of which this is a revised and dull translation (e.g. 'obsidional spirit' instead of 'siege mentality'), describes the contents far more accurately than the pretentious English title with its Beardian overtones. It is a picture of the United States, of its people and of its institutions, and as such is to be judged. The two questions to be asked are: (i) are all the essential elements of the picture there?; (ii) are they accurately depicted? In the opinion of the present writer the following elements should be included in any comprehensive and dynamic picture of America today: the expanding economy and its place in the world economy with the deep and permanent changes that automation are likely to bring about, and the forces for and against the implementation of the slogan 'Trade