

Topics of The Times

It is estimated that there are 70,000 words in the Italian language, but they fail the Italian press in expressing joy at the magnificent tribute which President ROOSEVELT has paid to the Fascist idea by constituting himself a "dictator." The editors recall the proud Mussolinian phrase: "Where we have shown the way, others will follow."

Something, to be sure, remains to be done before Fascism in the United States presents a perfect replica of the original model. It detracts considerably from Mr. ROOSEVELT as dictator that he should have been elected to the job by an overwhelming popular majority. It would have been much nearer the real thing if the "dictator" who issued the bank-holiday proclamation on March 5 had been HERBERT HOOVER instead of FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT. That act should have been preceded on March 4 by Mr. HOOVER's turning to Chief Justice HUGHES at the last moment and announcing that he had decided to go on being President for the good of the country. He should then have called in a couple of regiments of Fascist militia to escort Mr. ROOSEVELT back to Hyde Park. No doubt that is what La Stampa of Milan expects Mr. ROOSEVELT to do to his successor some day.

Hoarding along a Books minor front has just in been assailed by the Crises. authorities of the New York Public Library. They have cut down to two the number of books which a cardholder may draw out at one time. Hitherto it has been six books, fiction and non-fiction. The step has been made necessary by the heavy slash in this year's appropriations for replacements, from \$260,000 to \$60,000. Books must therefore be made to circulate faster than in previous years. To some extent this is feasible because, unfortunately or fortunately, many people have plenty of time to read nowadays.

On second thought, let us put the best face on the matter and say it is fortunate rather than unfortunate that people have so much leisure for reading. The depression will be over some day; the benefits of a contact with books that would not have been made in busier and richer times will remain. Many a lasting friendship with great books has been established in similar crises—on a sickbed, in times of mental distress, in prison. Not a few of the members of the present Soviet régime acquired considerable part of their book learning in the Czar's jails or in Siberia.

One way to keep a serious situation from getting worse is to use fair samples. It will be a help against that unreasoning terror of which President ROOSEVELT spoke. PAUL SIFTON in the current Forum has shorthand impressions of a recent swift tour across these "Blighted States." His samples are in the main far from cheerful, yet they seem to be conscientiously chosen. His picture of the depression in Arkansas is not a heartening one. But there are other Commonwealths:

"Crossing the State line between Arkansas and Missouri is like crossing the railroad tracks in a small town. The boundary between the two States is as sharply defined as the frontier between poor Italy and wealthy France. The difference is noticeable instantly in the fields, houses, barns, stores and roads. In Arkansas, farming seems to be an unprofitable chore. In Missouri, farming seems to be a career."

One explanation why the American people today are not so urban-minded as the drift from country to town should have made it in the last twenty years is to be found in the latest monograph published by the Committee on Social Trends.

It is too often assumed that when people leave the farm it is always a case of boys and girls bound for the city. But often it is a drift from the farm to the village. The migrants are in large numbers elderly people retiring from active labor but not from the surroundings or the life to which they are accustomed.

In the decade after 1920 the farm population went down by 1,300,000, but the village population went up by 3,600,000. Since 1930 we have no comprehensive figures, but there is plenty of evidence to show a heavy flow from the cities back to the country. The drift is to the villages as well as to the farms, but the farms are now estimated to have won back all the population they lost since 1910. Most of the gain is actually that same farming population, and not "city fellers" driven to the land by depression. Of 10,000 returning families, very nearly four-fifths had previous farming experience. In another 10 per cent the husband or wife had been born on the farm. Only 13 per cent of the immigrants were without rural experience.

But this does not necessarily spell failure. Farming and farm life are not quite what they used to be twenty years ago.

If there were a way to get Congresses and Legislatures to meet on the last day of the session and work backward, they could get through their work in a week.

The extra session of Congress next Thursday might give a thought to the old-fashioned saloon, which was always glad to cash a small check.