

Topics of The Times

One Corner Turned. One reason why President ROOSEVELT may be expected to act with swiftness and decision is that he has six weeks less time to make a record in than his predecessors. His term of office expires in January, 1937, instead of on March 4 of that year.

The optimist suggests that so many States are declaring bank holidays under the mistaken impression that they are ratifying the repeal amendment.

Because of her sex the new Secretary of Labor will cost the country an extra amount in printing bills. The newspapers will say Secretary of State HULL. But they will say Miss FRANCES PERKINS, Secretary of Labor, or, at the very briefest, Secretary of Labor FRANCES PERKINS.

The Juilliard Foundation is quite right in asking more American opera in return for its subsidy to the Metropolitan Opera House. If you pay the piper you call the tune.

But Which Individual? Chancellor HITLER wound up his campaign, as regards his personal activities, on a high level. Leaving it to his subordinates to suppress opposition newspapers and beat up opposition orators, the Nazi leader made his final public address a philosophical discourse on individualism. His main quarrel with "Marxism" is that it exalts the masses, whereas everybody knows that the destinies of humanity are shaped by individuals. "The individual inventor or organizer of human achievements in all ages has been the leader of mankind," said Herr HITLER.

This may very well be true. Printing presses and steam engines were invented by individuals. All that Herr HITLER has to do is to look over five million Englishmen about the year 1700 and tell us whose man's son or grandson will invent the steam engine. So it would be a help if about the year 1400 HITLER could look over several million Germans and tell us who would invent the printing press fifty years hence.

Quest of Excitement. Concerning one new book of the season the publishers state that people are excitedly for the book or excitedly against it, but anyhow everybody is excited. This appeals. All the world except that small portion of it which is recovering from a nervous break-down is fond of exciting books. The book reviewers and play reviewers today are ever on the lookout for excitement.

But how is it with other things than books? Is the capacity for producing excitement always a merit? Not so very long ago a great deal of excitement was evoked by remarkable figures relating to the progress of mechanical invention and productivity. As it turned out, the figures were grotesquely wrong. Yet many people were excitedly for the figures and many people were excitedly against the figures. Did the excitement both ways make the discredited arithmetic any more valid? Many people are excitedly for Soviet Russia and many people are excitedly against it. Is it to be recommended, therefore, for a study of the facts about Soviet Russia, that a person begin by working himself up into a state bordering on delirium?

Things Done Quietly. A task that might appeal to one of the learned Foundations would be an inquiry into the rôle played by excitement in the progress of the human race. It might help to draw up a list of the Fifteen Decisive Events of world history and see how many of them have taken place in a state of excitement, how many of them were worked out in a state of calm and reflection. The Battle of Marathon and the French Revolution and the Battle of Gettysburg were obviously exciting events. But on the other hand—

The printing press was not invented in a state of excitement nor by methods like those now being applied by JOSEPH STALIN to the Russian peasants. The steam engine was not invented in a state of excitement. The Breton fishing boats that were blown across the Atlantic and brought back rumors which aroused the interest of a Genoese sailor named CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS were not fishing just for excitement. They were engaged in the humdrum business of making a living when they stumbled on a new world. The kind of excitement we experience in picking up so many of the new Spring books did not figure conspicuously in the equations worked out by GALILEO, NEWTON and EINSTEIN; nor in the way KOCH and PASTEUR did things in the laboratory; nor in the way people managed to find out about the X-ray and the flying machine.

Gluttons for Punishment. But the most surprising thing—we were almost going to say the most exciting thing—is that today of all times people should still look upon excitement as an object to be striven for. Today we are being tossed about and buffeted and overwhelmed in the full backwash of one of the most exciting epochs in all history. This was the famous New Era of only three and a half years ago.

There was an exciting time for you! Such exciting behavior on the Stock Exchange! Such exciting banking and brokerage! Such exciting development of unnecessary real estate! Such exciting skyscrapers for which there could be no business tenants, and such exciting penthouses for which there could not be enough millionaires, and such exciting three-automobiles-to-the-family production! Such mergers, such split-ups, such profits in the future, such prices in the present—such excitement!

Yes, consider your banker of the New Era. In 1929 we were nearly all of us excitedly for him. Today we are all of us excitedly against him. But always excited. Think back to the intolerable tedium and humdrum of the typical banker of the eras before the New Era, and then think of his tingling, electrifying successors. Always something doing, and not a moment left to yourself; with the delightful results now everywhere apparent.

But we still want our books to be challenging and exciting.