

THE CHURCHMAN

October—December, 1938.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Roman Censorship and Mr. Alfred Noyes.

THE authorities of the Roman Church must have reason to regret their action in regard to the book on Voltaire by Mr. Alfred Noyes, which was published about two years ago. Mr. Noyes, a well known man of letters, joined the Roman Church eleven years ago, and like other literary perverts devoted himself to win others over to his new adherence. In a statement published in *The Times* he wrote : " Since I became a Catholic eleven years ago, the chief aim of all I have written has been to persuade or convince the sceptical non-Catholic world (especially the literary section of it) that the solution of its present difficulties and bewilderments is to be found in the Catholic faith and there alone." It was with this object that the book on Voltaire, which has now received an advertisement that must excite envy in many another author's breast, was written. As it happens, his well-meant effort to benefit the Roman Church did not meet with the favour he naturally expected, and much to his surprise he learned that on May 25th of the present year, " the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, having carefully examined the book," decreed as follows :

" (a) That the author be informed that the book be found worthy of condemnation by the Holy Office, but that such could be avoided if he removes, as far as he is able, all copies from circulation and at the same time writes something that will be equivalent to a reparation.

" (b) That the publishers be severely warned for having published the book, and that they withdraw it from sale."

This decree was communicated to Cardinal Hinsley in a letter to which was added :

" The Sacred Congregation charges your Eminence to communicate the above decisions to the parties interested and afterwards inform the Congregation of the Holy Office of the result of such communication."

The author and the publishers were duly communicated with, but no information as to the nature of the errors which the book was supposed to contain was vouchsafed to either. Mr. Noyes drew up a

statement describing the nature and purpose of his work, and this was forwarded to the Holy Office. In it he pointed out that it had received unstinted praise and encouragement from the Roman Catholic Press of this country ; and in a letter to Cardinal Hinsley he mentions that the points to which exception is taken are nowhere indicated—and, with reference to the demand that he should write something which would be equivalent to a reparation, says : “ What I *am* concerned with is the anomalous nature of a demand which obviously cannot be carried out, since the offence is unspecified.”

A Diplomatic Retreat.

It was a letter written to *The Times* by Lord Charnwood which first made the matter public. The letter was headed : “ Mr. Noyes and the Pope : a ‘ condemned ’ Book,” and brought a prompt reply from Cardinal Hinsley, who said that there had been no condemnation, certainly not from the Pope. He did not explain what the difference was between a book being condemned and being decreed officially “ worthy of condemnation,” coupled with an order to the publishers, a Roman Catholic firm, to withdraw the book from circulation. The statement certainly did not satisfy Mr. Noyes, who made light of the distinction. A lengthy and illuminating correspondence in *The Times* showed how great was the interest the case aroused. The facts elicited were that two years after its publication the publishers were ordered to withdraw the book ; that no reasons were given ; that the author was not communicated with directly, but was informed by the publishers that he was also to withdraw all copies of the book under his control and to make an act of reparation without being told why ; and that an American edition was suppressed, it having been stated quite falsely that it was the author’s wish that it should be done. Where the publishers are Roman Catholics they are amenable to this kind of secret, underground pressure, and an author has no redress, unless, perhaps, to sue them for breach of contract. To his credit, be it said, Mr. Noyes firmly resisted this tyrannical and oppressive action taken at the instance of an anonymous delator, and announced that he would publish a full statement of the case together with the relevant documents. This was more than the Roman authorities bargained for and there must have been some very hurried negotiations, for a few days later Mr. Noyes announced that the matter had been satisfactorily settled, that “ no errors concerning faith or morals ” were found in the book, but that there may be some points of Church history requiring further consideration. These are not indicated, but if there are any real errors of historical fact, Mr. Noyes said, as he had done from the first that, of course, he would see to their correction. Moreover, the book has now been transferred to a neutral publisher, so that Mr. Noyes is free from the risk of injury from that quarter. The incident simply affords another illustration of the fact that there is no greater enemy of individual freedom and intellectual liberty than a Church that is dominated by priests.

John Wesley.

The fact that the fourth centenary of the Reformation has fallen in the same year as the two hundredth anniversary of the conversion of John Wesley, has had the effect of drawing off much of the attention which would otherwise have been attracted to one of the most notable names in the history of our country, and indeed, of the world. The great and world-wide Church which is proud to be known by his name has indeed not been backward in commemorating his services to the cause of religion the world over, but John Wesley is the possession not of a denomination merely, but of the whole Christian Church, as well as of others who recognize the extent of his influence in the shaping of all that is best in modern civilized life. On another page we call attention to a book by Dr. J. W. Bready, which should do something to remind the people of England of their debt to Wesley and to the Evangelical movement of which he was the acknowledged leader.

John Wesley was before all things else a servant of God. To that august service he devoted all his powers with an intensity of consecration which left no room for self-seeking or personal ambition. The fifty years which followed the experience that he describes as his "conversion" were filled with labours that seem incredible as we read of them. When we learn that in a period of less than fifty years he travelled a quarter of a million miles, the greater part of it on horseback, preached more than forty thousand sermons, crossed the Irish Channel fifty times and wrote more than two hundred books, and that for a large part of the time he was very frequently in circumstances of great personal danger and had to face not only the fanatical fury of mob violence, but the open opposition of bishops and clergy, and the polite sneers of the educated classes, we have to go back to the days of St. Paul for a parallel to such vast and unremitting energy. But in his own lifetime he had the reward of his labours in seeing the power of the Gospel exerted among the most degraded classes and in watching the change which was gradually but surely coming over the social life and ideals of the whole country. It is strange that this precise Oxford don with his sound classical scholarship, his complete mastery of logic and his width of reading, should have had such success with the common people of his time, while George Whitefield, who had been a tapster at an inn and had neither ancestry nor scholarship should have found his audience among the aristocracy.

There were those who predicted but an ephemeral success for the movement, but they had not reckoned with the sound common sense and the organizing ability of Wesley. He saw clearly enough that his converts must be brought together and that they must be properly instructed if his work was to have any lasting result. He would have effected this within the Church of which he was a minister had it been possible, but unhappily the temper of the Church and the circumstances of the times were too much for him. But though the full results of the Evangelical Revival of religion were lost to the Church they were not lost to the nation, and England to-day owes much of its best elements to the principles which John Wesley spent his life in inculcating.

John Bunyan.

In this age of anniversaries and commemorations, it is good that one whose fame has suffered somewhat by neglect in modern times, should be brought to mind. August 31st of the present year was the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of John Bunyan, who furnished Rudyard Kipling with an admirable subject for some verses on the late war :

“ A Tinker out of Bedford,
A vagrant oft in quod,
A private under Fairfax,
A minister of God.
Two hundred years and thirty,
Ere Armageddon came,
His single hand portrayed it,
And Bunyan was his name ! ”

The whole piece, which was a reference to Bunyan's *Holy War*, is contained in the author's "The Years Between," and is prefaced by the following quotation from the book : " For here lay the excellent wisdom of him that built Mansoul, that the walls could never be broken down nor hurt by the most mighty adverse potentate unless the townsmen gave consent thereto." Of the *Holy War*, Macaulay said that, if the *Pilgrim's Progress* did not exist, it would be the best allegory that ever was written. It would not be at all a bad thing if we could say in our day what Macaulay could truthfully say in his, that Bunyan was the most popular religious writer in the English language ; and yet his *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War* are among the chief treasures of our literature. They will never be out of date, for Bunyan chose his subjects from life ; the people he portrays he had seen and observed closely ; and, fundamentally, human nature does not change. It is true, as a leading article in *The Times* said, that if much (we should prefer to say " some ") of his theology seems out of date, the world needs to-day as much as ever his simple faith and his certitude that at the end of life's pilgrimage waits the Heavenly City wherein the trumpets sound.

If the *Pilgrim's Progress* has lost some of its popularity among English people, it is a compensation that it still, as the Rev. R. Mercer Wilson assures us, has an increasing popularity in the Mission field, for he estimates the number of languages into which it has been translated as probably more than two hundred, a number which has never been approached by any other book but the Bible. It is a book equally for children as for grown up people, and would meet the need of those who wish for a book for Lenten reading far better than many of the modern productions that take its place. There is not a better guide to the spiritual life or a more genuinely helpful book of devotion than John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the work of a man who had passed through the experiences he described and knew by heart the subject of which he wrote.