

## Entre Nous.

### Martin Niemöller.

'The name of Martin Niemöller is a great name in Christendom.' In these words the Bishop of Chichester begins his Foreword to *Pastor Niemöller and his Creed* (Hodder & Stoughton; 1s. net). To us all, Niemöller has become a shining inspirer. Every opportunity of learning more of him is welcome. This book, written anonymously by a close friend of Niemöller, shows that some current ideas about him will have to be revised. He was in sympathy with the programme of the National Socialist Party. He supported the Third Reich wholeheartedly and looked forward eagerly to the reconstruction of the Germany 'for whose greatness he had fought, and whose ideals and structure had naturally for him to wear Prussian colours.' It was only slowly and painfully that he found himself in opposition, as he realized the contradiction between 'that which serves the Nation' and 'that which "the Lord commands of thee."' Following the determined effort by Hitler for the deification of the State, the Pastors' Emergency League, with Niemöller as President, came into being. Ludwig Müller and his German Christians gradually usurped all the leading offices in the old Evangelical Church, and in the autumn of 1933 the Confessional opposition made its exodus from the 'Brownshirt' Assembly. 'Niemöller did this in a thoroughly typical manner, he deliberately appeared in a light grey suit and took no part in the preliminary service, to show his contempt, and his refusal to acknowledge the new constitution of the Church.'

If Niemöller's 'No' had been slow and hesitating at first, he now saw his way clearly. When the Councils of the Confessional Church met for consultation, and Niemöller rose to give his opinion, beginning his speech with the phrase, 'I have the impression,' his was the point of view that was carried. He was accustomed to leadership. His single-mindedness was never in question, nor his firm intention to live according to the principles of the Gospels. 'We ought to obey God rather than man.' His one wish still was to serve his country and to recall it from the service of false idols. The part the Bible played in his life was supreme, and what mattered was that the Word of God should remain pure and unchanged.

'Human mongrels,' he passionately exclaimed, 'may imagine they can live without their Saviour,

and suggest to the German nation that it has no inheritance of sin, but rather an inheritance of nobility, but the Christian knows that "we do not live by our actions, but by the forgiveness of our actions" (K. Barth).'

"Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." What can this mean but that God's kingdom should be set up over the whole of human life? But whoever interprets the Lord's Prayer in this way must inevitably clash with the demands of Totalitarianism.'

Again, 'If the Name of Christ into which we are baptized is more than just a decorative expression, if it really gives us eternal life, and makes us the children of God, then the words must also have a practical meaning, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," that means then that every baptized Christian is truly our brother . . . then racial distinction and paragraphs about "Aryans" have here absolutely no meaning.'

There is an interesting chapter on Niemöller's work as Pastor at Dahlem. Besides his enormous correspondence and necessary attendance at meetings, he spent not less than ten hours a week instructing hundreds of children in Confirmation Classes. He made it a condition that all the children should attend for not less than two years. (This is finding more and more imitators in Germany as Christian education outside the Church becomes more difficult. It is a suggestion that might well be considered here.) In the evenings there were 'Catechism Classes' for his congregation. Almost every day he preached in a different place. And besides his ordinary correspondence there was advice for the synods and Brethren Councils and much correspondence with the Official Church and State authorities. All his sermons were written by hand, and it would be one or two on a Sunday morning before he finished, for he had to drive himself sentence by sentence. Sunday morning would see him memorizing what he had written.

As is well known, on 1st July 1937, Niemöller was arrested and sent to the Moabit prison. Here he awaited trial until February 1938—free, however, to see friends and his wife and children. 'His greatest joys were when his boys greeted him with a loud, "God bless you, Father," or when, upon leaving, they meet the warden, and reply to his question of, "Do you know why your father is

here?" with a cheerful and confident, "Yes, because he has preached the Gospel loudly and truthfully," or when at home the little sister declares, "I feel quite proud whenever I write State Prison, Moabit."

After his trial he was re-arrested and sent to close confinement in the dreaded concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. In this spring of 1939 he is still there, and it was reported the other day that another pastor of the Confessional Church has just joined him. 'Robbed of his freedom, his work and his family, brought by force to silence, and yet in his cell he is probably more eloquent and more powerful than in the pulpit. "Before," said an English friend, "I knew he was a fighter—but now I know he is a believer."'

#### Bishop Wood of Nagpur.

A short memoir of Alex Wood, Bishop of Nagpur, who died in the spring of 1937, has been written by the Rt. Rev. Eyre Chatterton, his predecessor. The publishers are the S.P.C.K. (3s. 6d. net).

Alex Wood was born in Aberdeenshire on 27th July, 1871. He was brought up by his grandparents on a farm. The life was a hard one, but it was a fine training for the strenuous years that he was to spend in India. His grandparents were devoted members of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Although the nearest church was seven miles from the farm, Wood tells how they had to walk to it every Sunday in all kinds of weather. He distinguished himself at school, and later at Aberdeen University and at Edinburgh Theological College. After two years in the Home Church a call came to him to give himself to missionary work in India. There, for the first eighteen years, his work was that of an itinerant evangelist among the Gonds of the Chanda villages in the Nagpur diocese. Physically, he was eminently suited to the work. He was strong, loved adventure, and was a great sportsman. There was a streak of boyishness in him. A number of stories to illustrate this are told by his friend, Archdeacon Dickson. One, dating from a later time, is that he was on one occasion visiting lime quarries in Gangpur State. 'The manager, with some pride, showed us over the very modern kiln, a cube-shaped building about thirty feet high. Higher still was what was known as the crow's nest, approached by a frail iron ladder. This was strong enough for the lightly-made Indian but had not been constructed for sixteen-stoners. To the surprise of all, and the horror of some, a challenge from the manager sent the Bishop up the ladder.'

After the end of the War Wood was appointed Bishop of Chota Nagpur. This diocese is described as very fairly homogeneous and compact! But compact is further explained as 'only the size of England.' Much of his work now was educational. He had the responsibility of establishing two schools at Namkum, and he took the keenest interest in three Anglo-Indian schools. For the last eleven years of his life he was in charge of the enormous straggling diocese of Nagpur—at least seven times as big as England and consisting of three great territories—the Central Provinces, under British administration; Central India, the land of Mahratta and semi-Rajput Rajahs; and Rajputana.

Wood had one great joy there. He was enabled to see the results of his own early labours in the villages of Chanda, from which large numbers of converts were now coming. But there were difficulties and discouragements also. During a tour in the Central Provinces he writes: 'At present I am wandering in a sad part of the diocese, where a once flourishing Mission is slowly dying from a lack of missionaries. We used to have 8000 Christians here; we now have fewer than 1000!! I remember the days of Molony, when this was the most promising Mission in the C.P. Since he left it has been one long tale of defeat and retreat.'

#### 'Rejoice.'

In *The Christian World* for 2nd March, there is an outstandingly suggestive leading article and one which is peculiarly apt to-day. It is written by Dr. Herbert H. Farmer. We make the following quotation from it: 'Coleridge calls joy "the strong music of the soul" and again, searching for a phrase, "a luminous mist." Probably music affords the best, if still inadequate, analogy.

'... I remember once seeing a little child one bright summer morning sitting amidst the rosebeds in the sunshine. She was lifting handfuls of earth and letting them run through her fingers, and humming softly to herself. Obviously her little spirit was glowing with joy, but the joy resided not in the light and warmth of the sun, nor in the pleasurable feel of the earth, nor in the healthful harmony of her body, nor in the love of the home by which she was surrounded, but in all these fused together. Joy was the music of all these natural impulses and feelings taken together. Now, as the soul of man develops and enlarges its range and depth, so it becomes possible for it to take up into the strong music of the soul, into joy, things, feelings, experiences, which by themselves would be

odious and irksome discords. In this the analogy with music still holds. Wherein lies the difference between a pleasant little ditty and a great sonata? Partly at least in this: that the little ditty is made up of simple elements simply related, whereas the sonata is deep and complex, having within the ultimate harmony pauses and stresses and discords which by themselves would irritate and annoy. . . .

'We cannot by an act of will substitute joyous hope and confidence for despondency and despair. That, no doubt, is true, if nothing is involved but our will and our feelings. But the exhortation is not simply to rejoice; it is to rejoice in the Lord. What is bidden therefore is that we should take the trouble at all times to set things within the context of the whole Christian gospel. Apart from that context there is nothing that can save us from an ultimate despair; but in that context there is nothing that can deny us an ultimate blessedness and joy. And the whole Christian gospel is somehow in the Cross. To see that Cross rising out of the midst of the evil and chaos of human life is to recover joy at the deepest level of our being, that level where there is unveiled to us the ultimate secrets, not only of our own being, but also of God's.'

#### Confession: The Antidote to Venom.

Two of the leading writers of 'thrillers' have lately done work which has religious significance. First, Dorothy Sayers, with her spiritual drama, *The Zeal of thy House*. Later, Mr. Freeman Wills Crofts, retaining his own medium, has written one of his most ingenious crime stories—the method of the crime being brilliantly solved by Inspector French. But it is more than a crime story. It is a powerful study of a man's growing remorse, repentance, and confession.

The craftsmanship is excellent. Each chapter has some aspect of venom—actual or figurative—for its subject, and the last, *Antidote to Venom*, gives the title to the volume.

George Surridge, Director of the Birmingham Zoo, in despondent mood, his moral resistance lowered by unhappiness at home and financial troubles, succumbs to temptation. He has just learnt that Capper, an unscrupulous solicitor, has embezzled his money. The solicitor will repay Surridge at the death of an uncle from whom he will inherit. The uncle has been conducting experiments on snakes, and Capper has a scheme to bring about his death if Surridge will provide cover for

him by taking venom from a snake at the zoo, drowning the snake, and sending snake and venom to Capper. The method of the crime must remain undisclosed.

In addition to all the qualities we expect from a book of Mr. Crofts, *An Antidote to Venom* is a convincing study of a decent man's reaction to his crime—never for one moment at rest after his fatal agreement.

'He was conscious of a fundamental unrest and disquietude of spirit.' 'An intangible load which seemed to bear him down like an actual weight. He had lost the power to enjoy the money. He hadn't realized things were going to be like this. Better to be dead.'

And after Capper was convicted the burden grew greater. 'How he envied the people who had free minds and clear consciences. What would he not have given to have his choice over again. . . .'

'For nearly a fortnight George suffered intolerable misery and distress. Then one night, when he was at his very lowest, his thoughts went back to his childhood and his childhood's teaching. Some old words that he had then learnt recurred to him, about going to Someone and being given rest. . . .'

'Presently, from sheer weariness, he fell asleep, and when he woke he knew somehow that he had taken his decision. Cost what it might, he would confess and be done with the struggle. . . .'

After the confession events moved quickly. He was sentenced: entering on the last week of his life, 'George himself, though at times he grew a little sick as he looked forward, was more thankful than he could say for his decision. His prayer and confession had been the first steps to a vital contact with the Divine. Though his sorrow for what he had done remained, he now knew himself to be forgiven, cleaned from his load of guilt, and with a power and confidence to face the future to which he was moving, such as he had never before experienced.'

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