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Matter for the Editorial Department should be addressed to

REV. R. C. JOHNSTONE,

160 James Street East, Winnipeg, Man.

All business communications, money orders, etc., should be sent to

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H. S. WHITE. (P. O. Box 1351) J. J. ROBERTS

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EDITORIAL.

THE PAPAL DECISION IN REGARD TO ANGLICAN ORDERS.

The decree of the Vatican in respect of the validity of Anglican orders is no vague, indefinite document. It goes straight to the point, and in language that cannot be misunderstood, declares that "ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been and are absolutely null and utterly void." When we think over the whole matter we wonder why the question was ever submitted to such a tribunal. Any one at all acquainted with the ecclesiastical history of the past would naturally come to the conclusion that Rome would not abate one jot or tittle of her claims; ut, that if there were to be a reunion of divided Christendom, she would demand full and unreserved surrender, nothing short of complete absorption on her part would satisfy her. This is exactly the line adopted by the supreme pontiff.

We do not for a moment doubt his earnestness in regard to unity. We believe him to have all along been actuated by the best of notions; but, from the stand which Rome has always taken towards the rest of Christendom, he could not do other than he has done; he could only assert what the bishops of Rome have for such a long time asserted that all orders outside the see of St. Peter was "null and void."

At the same time, the Anglican church remembers that she is not a small insular body, but is possessed of vast, far-reaching influences in every land where the Anglosaxon race bears sway. Within her borders she doubtless embraces a number of Christians who are unable to believe in branches that have been disowned by the trunk; for such there is now no logical way of carrying their principles into practice, but by absolute submission to the Bishop of Rome. On the other hand, there is a vastly greater number, who hold that the two may be churches existing side by side, between whose dogmas and formulas there is a considerable divergence, and yet that both may justly claim to hold their immutability from Christ. Such will be in no wise daunted by the strong language of the Roman pontiff; they will be content to go on as before, believing, as they have always done, that the orders which were conveyed by the sainted prelate who but a few days ago was called to the rest of Paradise, are as valid, and as much replete with divine grace, as the Roman church, along with the Anglican, believes to have been conveyed by the long and illustrious line of bishops who have occupied the chair of St. Augustine.

There are many among us who long earnestly for corporate re-union, but such a re-union would not be the result of absorption by the Church of Rome. The inflexibility of Rome has a charm for some minds, but these are comparatively few. The majority of Anglicans will continue to hold a kind of archaeological respect for Rome; but they will not feel in the least disposed to yield themselves entirely to her—to give up their right of private judgment—to be absorbed in such a complete way as to lose their own identity.

We would again note the fact that Leo XIII. has all through this controversy been straightforward, and courteous. He has not thrown out any

clap-trap attractions to decoy Anglicans into the Roman net; he has maintained the position which he claimed for his see in a dignified and becoming manner, and, while we cannot for a moment make the concession he demands, we respect the kindly patriarch for what we believe to be the expression of a very fervent desire on his part for the unity of Christendom.

As many of our readers have possibly not seen the papal bull which has caused so much fuss we shall in our next issue give a summary of it.

AGNOSTICS ANCIENT AND MODERN

By the Rev. F. S. Webster, M. A.

St. Mark, xi. 33.—"And they answered and said unto Jesus, 'We cannot tell.'"

It was not a difficult question which our Lord had to put to them. The baptism of John was of quite recent occurrence. Only a year or two had passed since they had watched the people trooping out from Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah, drawn by the great preacher of Righteousness to the deserts of Jordan. Many of them had mingled with the crowd, and had seen conscience-stricken men and women hang down their heads with shame as their sins were exposed and denounced, and yet a little later look up with fresh hope and confidence as they heard of the coming Saviour. They had watched them pressing into the river Jordan, and there humbly standing to receive the baptism of repentance. They knew how real the work had been, and how the people had gone back to their homes humbly determined to fear God and work righteousness. They had heard, too, the Baptist's testimony to Jesus, and knew how the decision of the people was gathering more conviction every day—"John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true."

So when Jesus put the question to them, with unusual peremptoriness, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of man? Answer me." They did not answer "Of man," for such an obvious falsehood would damage their reputation with the people. They could not say "Of Heaven," without condemning themselves. So they took refuge in a dishonest evasion, and said, "We cannot tell."