

The Catholic Record

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LONDON, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1914

CATHOLIC FRANCE

An English officer with our army in the field, in a letter in the Evening Standard, writes:

"As an officer in His Majesty's service" also—and on active service—may I say how impressed I have been by the extraordinary religion of the people among whom we are campaigning. I have seized every opportunity of attending churches wherever we have been, and of observing the people and their habits. I find everywhere a magnificent piety, a religion which guides and fills out the lives of these people.

Hundreds of such reports as this come from the soldier priests: "Many officers and men come to confession during the night in intervals of the fighting and I have a crowd at the Military Mass on Sundays." Another recites that on ten different occasions of danger he had given public absolution to the kneeling soldiers at their own request; and the substance of many narratives is thus voiced by the Abbé Castelin:

"War is a great mission. The men here no longer know what human respect is; they have become fervidly religious. They make their confession in the streets, on the roadside; they attend services, sing hymns and recite the rosary. All wear medals, not round their necks or in their pockets, but in their caps or on their tunics."—America.

That France is Catholic despite its anti-clerical government there is abundant and gratifying evidence. Letters like the foregoing have been published by the score in English and French papers. In our own columns we have reproduced many, and even the secular papers contain from time to time similar testimony. Long before the war, the revival of religion in France called forth eloquent tributes from Anglican observers. We have quoted the splendid tribute of the Bishop of Oxford in the House of Lords on the occasion of the debate on Welsh Disestablishment. Recently we quoted the words of the Anglican headmaster of Eton who a year ago regarded the French religious revival as "the most momentous event occurring in Europe for at least a century."

The article in America from which we clipped the extract given above was sent us marked with the request that we comment on it and answer some questions which the sender wrote on the margin. "Is it not a pity that England should have such an ally?" was one of these questions. The article in question calls for no further comment than this. It over-emphasizes the importance of the anticlerical government. This government is not France. To see France look on the two millions of the flower of French manhood who are challenging the admiration of the world by their unsurpassed courage and—where they were believed to be deficient—their obstinate tenacity and heroic endurance. And "human respect" is gone; "they have become fervidly religious." The English officer pays tribute to their "magnificent piety;" "they pray aloud in action, not in fear, as we very well know, but with a high courage and a great trust."

In the face of all this there is a strange perversity in regarding an anticlerical government as France.

On the eve of the Revolution France was politically Catholic. "The State wore Catholic clothes as it were: the public occasions of pomp were full of religious ceremony." And yet religious life at that time in France was moribund. "The very fact that the Church had thus become in France an unshakable national institution, chilled the vital source of Catholicism." Hilaire Belloc from whom we are quoting, adds: "France, in the generation before the Revolution, was passing through a phase in which the Catholic Faith was at a lower ebb than it had ever been since the preaching and establishment of it in Gaul."

This War has already dealt anticlericalism its death blow. Political Catholicism did not prevent the Revolution; political atheism will never stem the rising tide of sincerely spiritual Catholicism. The epiteful anticlerical sputterings to which America gives such importance are in reality a corroboration of all the other evidence of the revival of religion in France. But the most significant evidence of all is found in the new circular issued to Generals Commanding which in effect safe guards Catholic liberty of conscience and practice from official and officious anticlerical interference. Here is the Table's summary of the recent instructions of the French Minister of War:

He points out that his previous circular, the object of which was to ensure respect for liberty of conscience and State neutrality, have not been interpreted uniformly. In no case were they intended to deprive the wounded or the hospital staffs of the opportunity of practising their faith or of receiving the consolations of religion as they would at home. He therefore says that, in cases where the hospitals are at some distance from the churches, he sees no objection to services being held in the hospitals, subject, of course, to the regulations and to permission being duly obtained, and provided that no room necessary for the work of the hospital is permanently set apart for religious worship. Funeral services of those who have died in hospital may be celebrated there without any special permission. M. Millerand concludes by telling the Generals Commanding that they must do all they can to carry out the circular "in the spirit of concord, moderation, and tolerance which has dictated it, and which ought in all circumstances to regulate their actions." This is indeed a new note to be struck by a French Minister.

It may be interesting and instructive to our correspondent and others to read America's concluding comment on this famous circular:

Thus, it would seem, one must be wounded or attached to a sanitary corps, before he may, as a soldier of France, exercise his liberty of conscience by performing religious services, or receiving "religious blessings."

The whole reference is in the same spirit. Now read the Table's summary of the letter of the Bishop of Valence to President Poincaré:

How profound is the satisfaction with which the circular of M. Millerand, the French War Minister, on the practice of religion in hospitals has been received by Catholics in France may be gathered from a letter addressed to the President of the Republic by Mgr. Gibergeres, Bishop of Valence. His Lordship assures M. Poincaré that the circular has come as a real relief and gratification, and expresses the hope that it will put an end to the difficulties which had arisen on every side during recent weeks. Knowing the heavy anxieties and responsibilities of the Government, Catholics would not on any account do anything to add to them or to introduce any germ of discussion. Their desire is for the fraternal union which they are glad to see now reigning in the country. They have shown their readiness to forget the injustice and persecution of which they have been the victims, and they place the care of their interests in the hands of their Father who is in heaven, confident that a day will come when a loyal and sincere understanding on disputed points will be arrived at. "That day," continues M. Gibergeres, "they await calmly and without bitterness, assured of the justice of their cause. Their one desire is that, having done their share of sacrifice for the achievement of victory, mingled their fatigue, tears and blood with their countrymen on the field of battle, they may, in the most complete understanding and loyal co-operation, go forward hand in hand with all the sons of France."

Whether our inquiring correspondent was desirous of information, simply curious, or adopting the Socratic method of airing a little fine pro-German sarcasm we think he can find the answer to most of his queries in this article. That England and France are allies in this war is the surest guarantee that out of the dangers which threaten it European civilization will emerge triumphant and secure.

"PROPHECIES" CONCERNING THE WAR

A reader sends us a copy of an English paper containing an account of the "Prophecy of Brother Johannes" and asks what credence may be given to it. In this twentieth century there are credulous and easily duped people who see in this alleged prophecy the present war and its outcome foretold three hundred years ago. It is not worth while reproducing here this widely circulated "prediction." Suffice it to say that the Kaiser is clearly indicated as Antichrist and a son of Luther who is finally overthrown.

Father Thurston in the Month has investigated this and other similar prophecies and prophecies that find easy currency in these troubled times. "To begin with," says Father Thurston, "it lacks any sort of reliable authentication." It was given for the first time in print in the Figaro of September 10th and 17th. Obviously it required no great prophetic attributes to concoct such a "prophecy" last September. As for finding a plausible story of its being handed down unpublished through centuries Sir Walter Scott and other romance writers have always been fertile in such expedients.

"As for the supposed author, Brother Johannes," continues Father Thurston, "no information is furnished regarding his manner of life, or the place in which he lived, or the Order to which he belonged, or the circumstances under which this revelation was made to him. In glancing through some thirty odd volumes of this kind of literature which I have been able to consult I have not come on the least trace of Brother Johannes' wonderful seventeenth century prophecy."

Then the document under consideration incurs the gravest suspicion because it made its first appearance in print, in September as has been noted, with Joseph Peladan as its sponsor. This eccentric genius who loves to attire himself in long robes of oriental fashion and texture "may be described as a sort of medley of Richard Wagner, Cagliostro and Madame Blavatsky rolled into one." The Dictionnaire national des Contemporains gives this account of him:

"Peladan, Josephin, called 'le Sar' (i. e. the Serp), novelist, art-critic and dramatic author, born at Lyons, Oct. 20th, 1859. The son of a religious writer, he has devoted himself to a style of literature which is partly mystic and partly erotic, while the titles he has bestowed upon himself of Mage and Seer serve to direct attention to his own personality, just as his wish to seem different from the rest of the world is made clear to all by his eccentricities of manner and costume."

This should be sufficient with regard to the "Prophecy of Brother Johannes." We may add that Father Thurston after serious investigation finds not a trace of reason to doubt that the alleged prophecy is spurious, there being no shred of evidence that either the "prophecy" or "Brother Johannes" ever existed before the war was well under way.

Useful and relevant is Bishop Daponloup's warning issued about the time of the Franco Prussian War: "Prophecies arise and wonder-workers too; visions, oracles, prodigies are multiplied; with fanatics in good faith knives get mingled. Nevertheless, souls in their craving for light turn eagerly to any source which offers it, a curious ear is lent to those marvellous tales and to those voices which profess to come from on high; the credulous, and sometimes the sceptical themselves, through that deep need of penetrating the unknown which is inborn in the human soul, are swept off their feet; a whole generation feeds on chimeras, and at one time seized with vain fears trembles before the calamities announced as at the approach of the millennium, at another, following the dominant craze, is filled with exaltation, or goes to sleep without misgiving, buoyed up by hopes equally baseless."

We have also received some published sermons based on "fanatical explanations of Holy Scripture." These are numerous enough at present. Terse and to the point is this extract from a papal bull drawn up during the fifth council of Lateran in 1516, the council approving:

"As regards the time at which the calamities to come are to happen, the coming of Antichrist and the day of judgment, let no one allow himself to announce them and to fix their date, for Truth has said that it is not for us to know the times and moments which the Father keeps in His own power. All who up to the present have dared to make such predictions have been found to be liars, and it is certain that their conduct has done no small injury to the authority of those who are content to preach without predicting. For the future, then, we forbid all and any to

announce future events in their public discourses by means of fanciful explanations of Holy Scripture.

Without subscribing to papal infallibility or surrendering their cherished private judgment there are preachers in the twentieth century who might learn a useful lesson from this papal bull of four hundred years ago.

THE WAR'S OBJECT LESSON IN EDUCATION

From the Ontario School for the Deaf, Belleville, comes The Canadian containing an account of the visit to that institution of the Premier and Minister of Education. The occasion was the opening of two new "hand-some, commodious comfortable and sanitary" residences which have just been completed. This marks an important step achieved in the intelligent and comprehensive plan of bringing the buildings and equipment of the whole institution abreast of the requirements of the great educational work which the province commits to its charge. Great as is the work accomplished and projected in the matter of housing, accommodation and equipment it is but the outward and visible sign of the still more remarkable development in the educational work of the institution. The Superintendent, Dr. C. B. Coughlin, by his whole-hearted devotion to the duties of his office, and by his thoroughly well informed zeal, has attained first rank amongst the executive heads of provincial institutions.

It is not to the work, however important, or to the recognition of that importance by the presence of the Premier and the Minister of Education, but to certain pronouncements made on that occasion, that we desire chiefly to call attention.

In the course of his reply to Dr. Coughlin's address of welcome Premier Hearst said:

"It would be difficult to speak too highly of the zeal, the tact, the patient determination and persistence with which Dr. Coughlin had kept the needs of this School before the Government, and urged their urgent necessity for better accommodation. To Mrs. Coughlin, also, was due their gratitude and praise for the share she had had in bringing these improvements about, and for the splendid work she had in many ways done for the School. On his first visit here, as well as on this occasion, she had lost no opportunity of pointing out the numerous defects of the old buildings and the great need there was of a better equipment. Probably Dr. Pyne had had a similar experience, and for the results they had witnessed that day a large share of the credit was, no doubt, due to her winning importunity that would not be denied. This was not his first visit to this School, and the interest he had felt on the first occasion had this day been intensified. It would not be possible for him to exaggerate their appreciation and delight at what they had seen in the class-rooms they had visited. The work being accomplished was little short of miraculous, and he could not conceive of any nobler vocation that any band of men and women could be engaged in than that being so splendidly done at this School. No work could be greater, more worthy, more enduring. It should be the first duty of any government, of any community, to see that the children are properly educated."

The foregoing we could hardly omit without violating the Scriptural injunction "Honor to whom Honor." Note what immediately follows:

"The development of their mental faculties is not enough, is not the most important consideration; we must inculcate in them the principles of truth, honor, justice, morality. The world is having a sad illustration to-day of the disastrous consequences of a system of education that develops the intellect only, and neglects those faculties that make for the highest and best things. So we have in Germany the deification of brute force, a form of so-called culture that eliminates every sentiment of humanity, and regards the very thought of mercy and good will and charity as an intolerable weakness. Let us not make the same mistake."

This would be a common-places, perhaps, in the columns of a Catholic paper or from a Catholic pulpit. Coming from the Premier of Ontario it is a pronouncement of great importance and deep significance. Important and significant not so much as a vindication of the Catholic position on the question of education as an evidence of the assent to the Catholic contention, an assent fast becoming general amongst those who think and observe and especially amongst those on whom public spirit and the sense of responsibility enforce a wider outlook than that usually taken by the self-complacent adherents of the stagnant philosophy: "Whatever is, is best."

Premier Hearst indicates the great outstanding and compelling objective of the greatest and bloodiest war in all history. Nor is it Germany alone that has been obsessed with the narrow and radically defective ideal of education which has so long prevailed. The world-war proclaims the failure of the world's educational policy. Yet gone astray after false gods there are those who will not see the educational idol's feet of clay. After divorcing Education from Christianity; after driving from schools and colleges and universities, from the life of the individual and of the State, the Christian religion which created—and which can alone maintain—Christian civilization, they fatuously ask "Is Christianity a failure?"

Our brothers and sisters deprived of hearing may not be so badly off as we are who have ears and hear not, eyes and will not see. At any rate their excellent little publication, The Canadian, concludes an editorial on education with these clear-sounding observations:

"The world is having a terrible example to-day of the lamentable effect of emasculating the moral and spiritual faculties, of scorning the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, justice, truth—and deifying the body and the intellect alone. This ought the Germans to have done, and not have left the other undone. The body may justly claim due care and moderate gratification; the intellect should be developed as fully as opportunity permits, but both of these should be secondary. He only has attained to the fulness of the stature of the perfect man of the who, while not neglecting either the body or the mind, gives first place to the heart and soul, and is fully persuaded that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning,' and also the end, 'of wisdom.'"

AN ADVENT THOUGHT

Long ago two weary strangers waited outside the doors of Bethlehem. And they waited in vain. Gold would have opened a door to them, but silver and gold they had not, and so "there was no room for them in the inn."

Who that has heard these words but has felt for the forlorn child-mother? And which of us has not condemned the heartlessness of Bethlehem that would not share a roof with the homeless wayfarers? And we think had we been there they would not have sought in vain. Do we think rightly? The chances are we would have acted as the people of Bethlehem did. Like them we would see no profit in housing two beggars, and so would refuse to put ourselves out to help them. Ah no, you say, we would not be so hard-hearted. But pause a while. Are we not busy about many things and, albeit unconsciously, have we not sometimes asked ourselves what profit is there in receiving Jesus? Has it never happened that Mammon and Christ stood together at the door of our hearts, and have we ever opened to Mammon in preference to Christ? It would have caused a little inconvenience to admit Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas night, and the people of Bethlehem did not want to be disturbed. So to-day to admit Jesus we must put ourselves out a little. We must overhaul the chamber of our hearts, and we shrink from that unpleasant task because there are things housed in that chamber that we are unwilling to dispossess. And there are other things we do not care to look upon, and whose presence we would gladly ignore. All of which seems to confirm our opinion that we, too, would have closed our doors upon Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas night.

But the question is not what we would have done, but what are we going to do? Christ comes again this Christmas. He comes as a little Babe in the arms of Mary. Are we going to open to Him? Or with the world's voices in our ears will we be deaf to the still small voice of the Babe of Bethlehem? With the world's cares in our hearts will we tell Him there is no room. There is a danger that it may be so, and so the Church in her divine wisdom sets aside this season of Advent as a time of preparation for His coming. She knows very well that if left to ourselves we would be very likely to forget that coming, and so by prayer and fasting she would have us prepare the way of the Lord. Let us enter into the spirit of the Church and spend this holy time as she would have it spent. For the measure of our keeping Advent will be the measure of the reception we will give Jesus and Mary on Christmas night. COLUMBA.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE REV. DR. CLIFFORD, the venerable English Nonconformist leader whose visit to Canada a few years ago may be remembered, is reported by the cable to have uttered a warning against inculcating race hatreds in the rising generation in Great Britain. Special care, he said, must be taken that children do not grow up with a hereditary hatred of the Germans and Austrians as in former generations they imbibed hatred of the French. This is wise and salutary counsel which may be followed with advantage by those to whom, presumably, it was especially addressed—the Nonconformist public.

DR. CLIFFORD is an old man whose long life has been largely devoted to stirring up hatred and distrust in his own country. Catholics, and those who think with them on the subject of education, have been especially the objects of his recriminations. It is gratifying to know that his grey hairs have signalled some change of heart in this regard, and that since the War has occasioned the fact being made public, it is, after all, notwithstanding all its horrors, not wholly without its compensations.

FROM THE publishers, Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., comes Rev. Dr. Peter Coffey's latest contribution to the literature of metaphysics. "Ontology, or the Theory of Being," is the second instalment of the author's philosophical trilogy intended to place within the reach of students an introduction and general survey of metaphysics from the scholastic standpoint. The first, the "Science of Logic," was an enquiry into the principles of accurate thought and scientific method, considered under the two headings: "Conception, Judgment and Inference," and "Method, Science and Certitude," and the present volume is to be followed by a third on the theory of knowledge which will complete the series.

DR. COFFEY'S NAME is too well known to students of philosophy to require introduction at our hands. As Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in Maynooth, and as translator of De Wulf's "Scholasticism Old and New," and the "History of Medieval Philosophy," he has won an enviable reputation among European scholars and brought to his Alma Mater something of that renown which in former centuries distinguished the schools and schoolmen of Erin. He may be considered as one of the products of Leo XIII.'s great encyclical on the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Through his hands, since his accession to the chair of Logic in Maynooth in 1906, has passed almost a generation of aspirants to the priesthood in Ireland, and we may be sure that he has stamped upon them something of that enthusiasm for philosophical enquiry and of the art of expression which are so pre-eminently his own possessions. The volume before us deals with a difficult subject, but it is not a difficult book to read. The problems discussed are stated so clearly and the significance and bearing of his solutions brought out with so much lucidity as to hold the attention of the reader from beginning to end and to greatly widen his circle of his knowledge. We shall return to the subject again. Meanwhile to those interested we commend this very valuable and very interesting volume.

THAT GENERAL JOFFRE is the idol of France to-day and that he has well earned all the enthusiasm and gratitude with which he is regarded is an assertion scarcely calling for emphasis or proof. He may be said to have already vindicated his claim to be regarded as one of the great commanders of history, and, whatever the duration of the war, to have been the chief instrument in shattering the proud boast of the Kaiser, four months ago, that all the German armies had to do was to march in Paris in order to bring hostilities to a speedy end. Paris is much further from becoming a German prize than it was on September first, and if signs point to anything it is rather to the occupation of Berlin and Vienna than to the boasted dinner party on the Seine.

FOR ONE who is so much in the limelight it is remarkable how little is known outside of France of General Joffre. He is known as a great soldier who knows how to hold his tongue, and as an exceedingly humane leader who, for the time

being, considers himself the guardian of every man under his command, and that is about all. His past career and his personal characteristics have never been heralded abroad and his native modesty has not, even in the hey-day of success, for a moment deserted him. The world will not be satisfied long to leave it so and in due time, no doubt, will know all, and more than all, that he has ever said and done.

THE FOLLOWING few particulars regarding the French Commander-in-Chief may therefore be of interest. He was born in 1852 and was educated chiefly at the Ecole Polytechnique, where all aspiring officers for the artillery and engineers receive their training. In September, 1870, the year of the War with Prussia, he was gazetted a sub-lieutenant in the Field Artillery and in that capacity received his baptism of fire in the operations in defence of Paris. When Paris had fallen and peace was declared, Joffre rejoined the Ecole Polytechnique, and passed out with a commission in the Engineers. Joining the 2nd Pioneers he was gazetted captain in 1878. In 1885 he was ordered to China, and served in Formosa and Tonquin. In 1904, on the death of his superior, Colonel Bonnier, he took command of the relief column that entered Timbuctou. He served as colonel in Madagascar, and created the fortifications of Diego Suarez.

In 1901-1902, General Joffre served in the War Office as Director of Engineers. In 1905 he became Governor of Lille, in command of the 6th Division. From the Second Army Corps (Amiens) he was promoted to a seat on the Superior Council of War and Inspector of Military Schools. In August, 1911, General Joffre became Chief of the General Staff of the Army, and at the outbreak of the War with Germany, General in Command of the North Eastern Group of Armies. Technically the title Commander-in-Chief is retained by the Minister of War. But General Joffre is Generalissimo Designate.

WE HAVE no information as to General Joffre's attitude towards the questions concerning Religion which, in late years, have so greatly convulsed his country. Nor do we know anything of his personal convictions. However, in the notable revival of religion in France since the War broke out we would feign hope that her greatest soldier has had a part. He, at any rate, appears to have given every facility to the many priests in the army to exercise their functions as such. And his inspiring address to the people of Alsace does not point to either a materialist or a worldling.

THE WIDESPREAD character of the European War and the traditional ubiquitousness of the Scot and the Irishman in regard to military matters as thereby once more exemplified is recalled by a cutting from an old scrap book which has come under our notice and which in the present crisis will bear republication. It tells of an English interpreter in the Levant was abusing the Scots to a Turkish officer, Hassan Bey, when Hassan broke out:—"I'll tell ye what my man, gin ye lowse yer ill-scrapit tongue on my country like that I'll gie ye a clout on the lug that'll gar it ring frae this to hallow-e'en!" "Why, my good man, I thought you were a Turk!" "And sae I am a Turk the noo, yet when I gang hame I'll just be Wully Forbes, son o'auld Duddy Forbes o' the Gorbals."

PRESENTLY—so runs the story—a splendidly dressed Hungarian came up and said to the Turk, "Wully man, there's a truce the noo for 'two hours; just come we' me and we'll ha' a glass o' whusky together." "My word!" exclaimed the interpreter, "is everybody on earth a Scot?" But when the Russian General Tarasoff said: "Eh, Donal' Cameron, are you here?" and Ibrahim Pasha burst forth simultaneously, "Man, Sandy Robieson, is that yer?" The Englishman fainted and was borne away to the hospital tent to be treated by a Scots physician and a Scots nurse. It is safe to say, however, that no broad Scots is to be heard in the Turkish or German armies of to-day.

I ask this seriously. It is a question which each of us should ask of self more or less regularly. If we should undertake to answer it seriously, quite a number of us might be happier and more useful.—Leigh Mitchell Hedges.