

A CATHOLIC PLEA FOR RE-UNION

THE first impression of many priests on reading *A Catholic Plea for Reunion*¹ is likely to be: Why! here is a man saying a number of things which I have often said myself or heard others say; and putting them on paper with a lack of qualification that usually characterizes the convivial talk of common-rooms and recreations, but without the air of levity which makes things said in such circumstances very pardonable. There is a good deal here about the centralisation of the Church's government, about the autocratic ways of our superiors, about the hair-splitting niceties of moral theology, about the multiplication of devotions and the frequency of the confessions of those who have nothing to confess, about the way of life and rules of nuns; all harmless enough in itself, though liable to be completely misunderstood by outsiders and when said with full seriousness generally betokening in the speaker a particular grievance or a disgruntled outlook on life.

All this forms the setting for a thesis fairly common on the Continent, but so uncommon here as to require in the writer's eyes the protection of anonymity—the thesis of the Abbé Portal and Dom Lambert Beaudouin that corporate union between the Church of England and the Holy See is both possible and desirable, and that steps ought to be taken to facilitate the setting up of an Anglican Uniat Church in England side by side with the already existing Catholic organization.

The writer sees two advantages which would come from the realization of this project; first it would result in a great accession to the strength of the Catholic Church in England. Atmosphere and surroundings, not dogmas, are the chief obstacles to conversion. Corporate union would bring great numbers to the Faith who are at present kept from it by the unconscious difficulty of changing their ac-

¹ By Father Jerome, R.C. Priest. (Williams & Norgate; pp. 75; 3/-)

A CATHOLIC PLEA FOR REUNION

customed environment for the alien environment of Catholicism; once united, the corporate body of Anglicanism would become gradually acclimatised to the Catholic *ethos* as an individual convert does after living several years within the life of the Church. The second advantage which would come from the accession of a large corporate body of converts to the Church would be that such an event would have a salutary effect upon Catholicism itself, and would be a means of putting to an end certain tendencies in the Church to-day, which are in the writer's eyes undoubted abuses.

The thesis, put forward candidly and persuasively, is vitiated by an evident ignorance of the true nature of the Church of England, which is spoken of as if it consisted entirely of Anglo-Catholics of the type that represented Anglicanism at Malines. In fact, the Church of England is divided by differences which are absolutely fundamental; neither belief in supernatural revelation nor in the divinity of Christ is required for membership in it; only a small section of it looks to Rome; the great majority of Anglicans have no desire for corporate union, and would reject any proposals for it even were our doctrinal formulas made easier by explanation or relaxation. In proposing the latter expedient the writer is proposing what is in fact impossible; the Church is a living, growing organism and cannot lay aside even for a time formulas and decisions which she has made part of herself by assimilation.

If agreement could be secured among Anglicans themselves, and if such agreement ever extended to the whole Faith the concessions which the Church would be prepared to make in matters of custom and discipline would be a question not of principle but of expediency; and we ought to be prepared to envisage the granting of wide and even startling concessions if these would in any way contribute to the winning back of our country to the Faith.

This book if read seriously will produce much disagreement—it is sometimes marred by an underlying flippancy of treatment—but it will also do good—much that is said about the psychological approach to the Faith is sound **and**

BLACKFRIARS

useful. Religion is not only dogma, it is dogma wrapped in a complicated setting woven of a thousand intertwining loyalties, emotions, memories, prejudices; to hammer away at dogma in the accustomed manner of the Catholic controversialist often produces effects opposite to those intended. What is needed among Catholics in England today is the renunciation of the attitude of rigid aloofness and superiority and the removal, by personal intercourse and friendly contact, of the barriers of a widely different environment and atmosphere. The spirit of Malines was right, though its opportuneness may have been questionable. We shall begin to convert our Anglican countrymen in large numbers only when we approach them in the spirit and with the methods of Malines.

HENRY ST. JOHN, O.P.