

CATHOLICS AND THE WAR.

A NEWSPAPER OPINION AND OUR COMMENT THEREON.

A PROTESTANT gentleman residing in Wanganui has forwarded us the following extract from an obscure religious weekly that appears in Sydney. He requests us to publish it and to append thereto an editorial comment as to the attitude of Catholics towards the present war. As the extract from such a source would meet with no notice at our hands but for the fact that it represents a point of view that is not unknown in New Zealand, and that at the present moment a mischievous attempt is, to our knowledge, being made in certain quarters to secure for the opinions therein expressed a hold upon the public ear. The extract in question runs as follows:—

'Protestants differ among themselves as to the wisdom or righteousness of the British engaging in war against the Boers. Some doubt whether England was justified. But it is remarkable that while there is a minority among Protestants who have opposed the actions of England, the Roman Catholics, if we are to judge by their Press utterances, are practically unanimous in their condemnation of the British. As the *A. C. World* points out: "No Catholic priest has attended any of the patriotic gatherings or spoken a word of encouragement to the loyal supporters of the Empire. Roman Catholic Members of Parliament are silent as the grave. The Patriotic Fund has swollen rapidly through the generosity of the people, but we can scan the daily lists in vain for the names of well known and wealthy Catholic citizens. . . . Cardinal Moran maintains a discreet silence. Only once he has spoken, and then it was to say concerning the departing contingent. "If any of them should ask my opinion, I would advise them to stay at home. If, however, the public desire to know the real opinions of the Roman priests about the present campaign, it is only necessary to read their own paper, the *Catholic Press*," which is ever and always antagonistic to England. The truth is, England is Protestant, and that in itself is sufficient to excite the hatred of the priests of Rome. The colonial Catholic Press is in harmony with the R.C. Press elsewhere. The official Vatican organ, the *Osservatore Romano*, published in Rome, speaking of the Transvaal crisis said: "With the defeat of England Protestantism would be crushed for ever." It is evident that while a minority of Protestants question the righteousness of the war, the Catholic Church as a whole favours the Boers, simply because the defeat of England would be in their estimation a blow to Protestantism.'

A GENERAL COMMENT.

Thus far the extract. It is a veritable lawyer-vine tangle of confused views, false statements, and rampant fallacies. Its intent lies plain upon the surface. And it is simply this—to evoke the demon of sectarian passion against a section of the community during the period of strong political ferment through which we are now passing. We have a lively sense of the shortcomings as well as of the merits of the secular Press. But we venture to say that there is not in Australasia any editor of a secular paper who would admit such a display of sectarian sky-rocketing into his leading columns. Such unchristian work has been reserved for a newspaper that unworthily bears upon its title-page the glorious name of 'Christian.' As far as one can unravel the tangled meaning of the extract given above, it charges the Catholic Church with anti-British partisanship regarding (1) the origin of the war in South Africa, and (2) regarding its ultimate issue. It is scarcely necessary to say that the writer of that slipshod piece made not the slightest effort to sustain his statement. We might dismiss him with a curt statement of his fatal omission, coupled with a reminder that the whole burden of proof falls upon him. But for the reasons stated in the opening paragraph of this article we prefer to adopt a different course and to lay before our courteous Protestant correspondent and our other readers some pertinent points in connection with this unworthy attempt to aggravate the present position by importing into it the snarling element of sectarian bitterness and hate. Here in New Zealand the attempt is being publicly made under the auspices of the Orange organisation. Unless we are mistaken, the obscure weekly from which the above-quoted extract is taken represents, or once did represent, the views of that body. If so, it, like them, should blush to the roots of its hair at the mere mention of the word 'loyalty' to the throne or Empire. Those who are acquainted with the facts of Orange history and ritual cannot easily forget the society's systematic, deliberate, and successful corruption of the loyalty of some 50 British regiments between 1829 and 1836; the famous Cumberland Plot which they carried out in order to prevent the accession of the Princess (now Queen) Victoria in favour of their Grand Master Ernest, Duke of Cumberland; their condemnation by King William IV., by the British Parliament, and by several Royal Commissions, and their suppression in 1825 and 1836 as a disloyal and dangerous association; the watch-cry of the Irish brethren 1868-1869: 'We'll kick the Queen's crown into the Boyne'; the illegal and criminal oaths taken to this day by the brethren at their initiation to the first and second degrees; their systematic interference with the course of justice and of public tranquility in Ireland; and the avowed object of the association, as declared in their rituals, tracts, and speeches—namely, to drive Catholics for ever out of public life, and to undo what their 'accredited organ,' the *Victorian Standard* of May, 1893, termed 'that fatal error, the Emancipation Act of 1829.' The yellow-scarved brethren have a weakness for obtaining a cheap reputation for loyalty by decrying that of others. But lectures on 'disloyalty' from such a source remind one forcibly of Satan reproving sin.

POINTS TO REMEMBER.

1. In the first place, it is quite true that the serious religious disabilities of Catholics and Jews formed a genuine portion—the

most genuine, in fact—of the Uitlander grievances in the Transvaal. But it is equally true that these grievances were not even the occasion, much less the chief or sole cause of the war. The war, in fact, is not even remotely a religious question. It was a question of politics and political expediency. And such it should be permitted to remain. The man who seeks to make it the occasion of an appeal to sectarian passion and endeavours through it to set citizens of one creed against citizens of another creed, is a worse, because more cowardly and hypocritical enemy to his country than if he straightforwardly shouldered a Mauser rifle and marched and fought under Joubert.

2. The Catholic Church has her known and definite voice to speak her views. She has not pronounced, either officially or unofficially, directly or indirectly, upon the merits of the present war. She is not the Church of one race or nation. Her subjects are everywhere, in Holland and Germany and the Transvaal, as well as in Great Britain. The Pope did what lay in his power, in a friendly way, to avert war. He has proved himself long ago a man of rare enlightenment and a past-master in the knowledge of diplomatic usage. And to take sides on the lines suggested by the screaming little weekly from Sydney would be—to put it on merely political grounds—a blunder of the first magnitude. For the rest, the Pope is entitled to be judged by the repeated public writings and utterances in which he has expressed his admiration of the British people and their sovereign. As to the *Osservatore Romano*, it is not the organ, whether official, semi-official, or unofficial of Vatican opinion. And, moreover, it never gave editorial expression to the opinion quoted in the extract with which we are dealing. The little Sydney 'religious' sheet is simply retailing at tenth hand a clumsy calumny that was exposed months ago in the London Press. Its editor evidently needs a tonic.

3. It is not true that there is among Catholics or their Press-organs any special unanimity of opinion as to the war more than among Protestants. Catholics are as free as people of other creeds or of no creed to hold, and in due moderation to express, their opinions on the war, just as they do on other questions of imperial or national politics. And in the exercise of that freedom they have ranged themselves freely and, we are glad to say, without intolerant bitterness or recrimination, on the side of the various political parties to which they owe allegiance. For, as we have said, the question is a purely political one, and in Great Britain the various opinions upon the justifiability of the war follow closely, though not absolutely, along the lines of party cleavage. Thus, practically the whole Liberal Press and party, together with a section of the Liberal Unionists, held, as we did, that the war with the Transvaal was unnecessary, impolitic, and honourably avoidable. This view was forcibly urged in Parliament, in the Press, and on the public platform by prominent Englishmen of such diverse creeds and no-creeds as Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Mr John Morley, Sir William Harcourt, Lord Spencer, Lord Kimberley, Mr Herbert Spencer, Mr. Labouchere, Mr Philip Stanhope, Mr. Stead, Mr. H. W. Massingham, and by Liberal Unionists like Mr. Leonard Courtney and Sir Edward Clarke. A like view was taken by at least two prominent British Generals, Sir William Butler and Sir Redvers Buller. The English pulpit generally was opposed to the war on the same grounds. So was at least a large and healthy section of the Protestant religious newspapers of these colonies, conspicuous among which is the temperate and scholarly *Outlook*, the organ of the Presbyterian body of New Zealand. The same view is held generally, though by no means universally, by the Catholic Press in the Empire. Thus, two of our Australian exchanges hold themselves neutral on the question. And the *London Tablet* and some other English Catholic papers adopt fully the attitude of the Conservative party and stoutly maintain the original necessity of the war. But whatever various views as to the need or otherwise of the present war have been adopted by the Catholic Press and public, they have been adopted quite irrespective of the mere religious beliefs of the contending parties. The fact remains that there has never been a war in English history on the original justifiability of which British opinion, irrespective of creed, has been so profoundly divided. As to the Continental and American newspapers, whether Protestant, secular, Jewish, Agnostic, Freemason, or other, the voice of the vast majority of them has been against the war. It is the merest nonsense for any newspaper to hint or state that 'a minority of Protestants' stood for the unwisdom of the present struggle. A great majority did. We are not over-squeamish, and we are no supporters of the principle that 'there never was a bad peace or a good war.' But war is, even at its best, a fearful calamity. And it ill becomes a religious paper to stand forth as its advocate unless on the clearest and most cogent grounds of public necessity.

VIEWS ON THE ISSUE OF THE WAR.

So much as regards the views of Catholics and others on the original justice or injustice of the campaign. The question has long since passed beyond that stage. We merely refer to it here because, by a contemptible piece of journalistic trickery, the views which many Catholics and Catholic newspapers share with non-Catholics upon the subject have been, as in the case of the extract with which we are dealing, tortured for a purpose into an accusation of rank traitorism, just as Cobden and Bright were dubbed traitors and burned in effigy for their honest and manly opposition to the declaration of the Crimean War—a war which has long since ceased to find a sane defender. As to the present campaign in South Africa: fresh issues have, since its inception, arisen which have made the original cause of quarrel pale into comparative insignificance. Chamberlain, in forcing on this war, has undoubtedly committed not merely a political blunder, but a political crime of the first magnitude which, we trust and believe, will in due course relegate him for the remainder of his days to the dishonoured obscurity which his overvaulting ambition so well fits him to adorn. The triumphal march to Pretoria which he anticipated or professed to anticipate over the bodies of a few strong Boer