

## The Bohemian Schism

A few weeks ago we had occasion to take note of a letter in the *Times of India*, which gave a very exaggerated account of the Czecho-Slovak Schism (says *The Examiner*, Bombay, for June 18). The cuttings then at hand reduced the story to more moderate dimensions, but last mail brought us more exact and later information which whittles the thing down still further till there is very little indeed left of it.

From the *Catholic Times*, May 7—

The papers both in England and abroad have frequently made mention of the Czecho-Slovak Schism, "the great secession from Rome" and "the terrible disaster to the Catholic Church." The reports vary considerably, and rarely give a full or accurate account of the matter, besides leaving the impression that more satisfaction is found in writing about the "disastrous anti-Catholic movement" than in representing the true state of affairs.

It must be frankly acknowledged that no one knows the exact truth with regard to the number of those who have seceded, since the country is as yet so unsettled, that it is not possible to give quite reliable information.

### Some Reliable Figures

*Katolicki List*, a very well-informed Yugoslav review, in its April number, gives the best available figures concerning the apostates in most Czecho-Slovak dioceses. They are as follows:—

| Dioceses          | Churches taken from Catholics. | Apostate Priests. | Lai-cized Priests. | Lay Apostates. |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Prague ... ..     | 8                              | 29                | 17                 | 23,000         |
| Leitmeritz ... .. | 8                              | 10                | 20                 | 10,000         |
| Konigratz ... ..  | 12                             | 11                | 31                 | 4,000          |
| Budweis ... ..    | 4                              | 4                 | 30                 | 1,500          |
| Olmütz ... ..     | 4                              | 7                 | 7                  | 10,000         |
| Brunn ... ..      | 0                              | 0                 | 3                  | 100            |
| Pressburg ... ..  | 3 <sup>2</sup>                 | 2                 | 2                  | ?              |
| Total ... ..      | 36                             | 61                | 118                | 48,000         |

These numbers regarding churches and priests may be considered reliable. The number of lay-apostates may doubtless be considerably higher, since these dioceses do not represent the whole country. For example, the Ruthenian Uniates have suffered serious losses and are not even mentioned in the foregoing list.

### The Hussite Spirit

But the numbers, though they appear considerable, are not so in reality, if we take all the circumstances into consideration. For anyone acquainted with the country knows that the spirit of the old Hussites, although suppressed by the Austrian police force, did not die out. John Hus, who was condemned by the Church as a heretic, always found a few followers and admirers in that country. These succeeded in representing him as the hero of the nation, condemned not because he was a heretic, but because he was a Czech. However mean and absurd this statement may appear, it is to-day a powerful incentive to oppose the Church. When, after the armistice, the new Czecho-Slovak Republic was formed, these old Hussites, led by some few ambitious apostate priests, commenced a dishonorable propaganda against the Church, as the historical enemy of the nation, with the view of nationalising the Bohemian Church.

### The Austrian Regime

It is to be remembered that the Czechs are patriots, and decided enemies of Austria, which unfortunately, under pretence of Catholicity, often limited the rights of the nation. Thus the national reaction was directed principally against the Catholic Church. Characteristic are the words of the memorandum for the union with the Serbian National (Schismatic) Church, signed by the "Central Committee of the Czecho-Slovak Church": "Our nation fell under the influence of Rome, which was ever and everywhere hostile to our national aspirations. It was the great priest and martyr, our master John Hus, of holy memory, who fought for the moral revival of the nation and its separation from Rome."

### The Los von Rom Movement

Public opinion was well prepared for the apostasy by the Los von Rom Movement. This Los von Rom Movement was begun and supported chiefly by German Lutherans to pave the way for apostasy on a big scale. It was notoriously unscrupulous in its methods and did not hesitate to make use of lies and violence. Moreover, the Socialistic movement in Bohemia does not fall far short of Bolshevism in the matter of religion. It is not surprising, then, that they had little respect for traditions. It was no uncommon thing for a brass band to play on the occasion of an apostate priest's marriage. The Government did not even attempt to disguise their sympathy with the movement, and treated Catholics in a somewhat unfair manner. This, of course, encouraged the excesses and the lawlessness of the populace, a striking example of which were the iconoclastic outrages.

### Catholic Surprise and Resistance

The Catholics were at first not a little surprised at such fanaticism and, of course, were not ready for such a campaign, while the apostates were encouraged and supported by almost all the papers of the country. Thus they succeeded in winning over large numbers, particularly of the uneducated, who did not even know the true nature of the question at issue. But the Catholics soon began to organise themselves with remarkable success. A keen observer of the situation wrote a short time ago in *Zivot*, a Yugoslav review, thus: "Now the Czech Catholics are preparing themselves and waiting for the moment to fight for freedom of religion and the Church. All who remain faithful to Catholic principles form together one united Catholic front. The hardest struggle is the formation of a Catholic press. Yet the new Catholic paper *Lid* reached in a short time a circulation of 30,000. The leaders of the national Church, Zahradnik and Farsky, lose more and more of their adherents, and the circulation of their paper fell from 15,000 to 3000.

### The Schism a Failure

"The schismatic movement, as a whole, is a hopeless failure in every way. The Catholics sincerely regret that so many have been misled, and have reason to complain of the fanaticism of the sectarians and the absence of just protection on the part of the Government. Yet the movement, while inflicting no serious wound on the Church, will serve to purify her by removing the lifeless and withered branches. The eleven and a half million Catholics who remain faithful will be the stronger and the better once the immediate troubles are over. The schismatic movement is not likely to have any lasting influence. Dr. Radle, a professor at the University of Prague and a friend of the movement, expressed his disappointment in these words: "A good will is not sufficient for the national Church to overcome Catholicism. There is no need of a clear principle and of a religious programme. For want of such a programme Hussitism succumbed to Catholicism, although it was a stronger movement than that of the new national Church. Catholicism is an idea and a powerful idea, and can only be overthrown by another idea. But where is this new idea in the Czecho-Slovak Church?"

(2) *America*, April 30, provides some further details of the situation as follows:—

"The Czecho-Slovakian National Church has gone the way of all sects and schisms, and is rapidly splitting up into new divisions. A number of the apostates, such as Farsky, are thorough unbelievers, and form one party, while others, with Zahradnik, would create a national Church under the patronage of the State. The Serbian Orthodox Synod, it may be remembered, had been asked to affiliate the new sect to the Serbian Orthodox Church, but in the course of the negotiations the antagonism between the Serbians and Czecho-Slovakians became manifest, the latter refusing to submit to the demands of Orthodoxy, which were against the principles of liberty of conscience and personality." Probably a general congress of parish groups will be convened to decide the future course of what is quite properly called the "Unnational Church," since it certainly does not represent the people of the new Republic who remain overwhelmingly Catholic.

Another sign of disruption is the fact that the apostate priests are more and more losing their ascendancy in