

* A LETTER *

IN REPLY TO

Mons. B---,

Editor of the "Français."

RESPECTING

"The Brethren, their Doctrine, &c."

By J. N. D.

Translated from the French.

Xondon:

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NOTE.

One of the Editors of the "Frangais," a Catholic newspaper, had asked the writer of these pages for information about "the Brethren, their Doctrine," &c.

The author thus expresses himself in a letter to a friend: "I have given him in all simplicity what he asked me for. He avowed himself a Catholic and devoted to Catholicism. His letter was simple and honest. I replied to him as a Christian "—and a little further on—"I felt that my part was to be a Christian, there as elsewhere."

LETTER TO MONS. B---,

Editor of the "Frangais."

1878.

DEAR SIR,

My reply to the letter which you were good enough to address to me has been delayed by unceasing work which has left me no leisure. I have no difficulty as to informing you what my belief is, but a public newspaper is scarcely the place where I should wish to use my pen. I believe that the Christian calling is a heavenly one, that the Christian is not of the world as His Master is not of it, and that he is placed down here as an epistle of Christ to manifest the life of Jesus amongst men, whilst waiting for the Lord to come to take him to be with Himself in the glory.

As Editor of the "Français" you will quite understand that articles written in order to inculcate such principles as these would little suit a political newspaper. Now I live only for these things—a life feebly realised I am quite ready to confess—but I live only for them. However, I will communicate to you what appears to interest you, namely, what has led me, and others with me, to take up the position in which we find ourselves

as Christians.

It is well perhaps, in view of the infidelity which is spreading everywhere, to begin by saying that I hold, and I can add that we firmly hold, all the foundations of the Christian faith—the divinity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, one

God, eternally blessed—the divinity and humanity of the Lord Jesus, two natures in one person—His resurrection and His glorification at the right hand of God:—the presence of the Holy Ghost here below, having descended on the day of Pentecost:—the return of the Lord Jesus according to His promise. We believe also that the Father in His love has sent the Son to accomplish the work of redemption and grace towards men—that the Son came, in that same love, to accomplish it, and that He has finished the work which the Father gave Him to do on earth. We believe that He has made propitiation for our sins, and that after having accomplished it, He ascended to heaven—the High Priest seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Other truths are connected with these, such as the miraculous birth of the Saviour, who was absolutely without sin-and yet others; but, you will readily understand, Sir, that my object is not to give a course of lectures or a theological summary, but to make it quite clear that it is in nowise on the giving up of the great foundations of the Christian faith that our position is based. Anyone who would deny one or other of these fundamental truths would not be received amongst us, and anyone who, being amongst us, adopted some doctrine which would undermine one or other of these same truths would be excluded, but only after all proper means to bring him back to the For although these truth had been exhausted. are dogmas, we hold them as essential to living faith and to salvation, to the spiritual and Christian life of which we live as born of God.

But you wish, Sir, to know not only the great truths which we hold in common with others, but

also what distinguishes us from others.

Now, without in the least professing to give a course of Christian doctrine in connection with the

truths I have just pointed out, I am anxious, indeed I would heartily desire, to set them forth as the foundation, recognising as true Christians and members of the body of Christ all those, who by the grace of God, and by the operation of the Holy Ghost who has been given to them, truly believe these things in their souls. Converted by the grace of God, I spent six or seven years under the rod of the law, feeling that Christ was the only Saviour. but not being able to say that I possessed Him, or that I was saved by Him—fasting, praying, giving alms—always good things when done spiritually but not possessing peace, whilst at the same time feeling that if the Son of God had Himself forgiven me, I owed myself to Him—my body, soul, and means. At length God gave me to understand that I was in Christ, united to Him by the Holy Ghost -"At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." (John xiv. 20), which means that when the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, should have come, the disciples would know these things. With this were connected other blessed and reassuring truths-"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."—Rom. viii. 1.

The promise of the Spirit is given to all those who have part in the remission of their sins, for "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." -1 Cor. vi. 17. Hence Christians are temples of the Holy Ghost—"Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you."—1 Cor. vi. 19.

I should say that at this time the Word of God became for me an absolute authority as to faith and practice, not that I had doubted it previously, but it had now become such from conviction, implanted by God Himself in my heart. In this way the assurance of salvation through the work of Christ, the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, by

whom "having believed, ye have been sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. i. 13, 14), salvation known and possessed, and this indwelling of the Holy Ghost giving us the assurance of it, constitute the normal state of the Christian. He is no longer of this world, save to pass through it peacefully, doing the will of God. Bought with a great price, he is to glorify God in his conduct.

This brings in the thought of the Church and of its unity. For me the body of Christ was now composed of those who were united by the Holy Ghost to the Head—Christ in heaven. If we were seated in the heavenly places in Christ (" Even when we were dead in sins hath He quickened us together with Christ—by grace ye are saved."—Eph. ii. 1, 5) what were we still waiting for? For Christ to come to place us up there in fact. "I will come again" said the Lord," and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also "-John xiv. 3. "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory "-- Риц. iii. 20, 21. We have been converted "To wait for His Son from heaven."-1 THESS. i. 9, 10.

Hence the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, and the attitude of waiting for the Lord constitute the normal state of the Christian. But all those who possess this Spirit are, by that very fact, one body. "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body"—1 Cor. xii. 13. Now, this baptism took place on the day of Pentecost. "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not

many days hence."—Acrs. i. 5.

All those around me had not reached that point, at any rate they did not profess to have, and it was easy, reading Acrs ii. and iv., to see how far we

had got from what God had set up on the earth. Where was I to look for the Church? I gave up Anglicanism as not being it. Rome, at the beginning of my conversion, had not failed to attract me. But the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews had made that impossible for me: "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin"—Heb. x. 14, 18.

Then again it rendered impossible the idea of a sacrificing priesthood down here between me and God; seeing that our position, as the result of the work of Christ, is that we have direct access to God in all confidence. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of

Jesus."—HEB. x. 19.

I am stating facts, Sir; I am not entering into controversy: but faith in an accomplished salvation, and, later on the consciousness that I possessed it, hindered me from turning in that direction; whilst having grasped the fact of the unity of the body of Christ, the various dissenting sects no longer attracted me. As to the unity to which, as we all know Rome pretends, I found everything in ruins. The most ancient Churches did not want to have anything to say to her, nor did Protestants either, so that the great majority of those who profess Christianity are outside her pale. On the other hand, it was not a question of seeking this unity amongst the Protestant sects. Besides, whatever their ecclesiastical position might be, most of those who call themselves Christians are of the world, just as much as a pagan might be.

Now the 12th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians shows clearly that there is a Church formed on the earth by the descent of the Holy Ghost. "For by one Spirit are we all baptised

into one body;" and it is evident that this is on the earth, for "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."—1 Cor. xii. 27. Besides, the apostle speaks of gifts of healing and of tongues, which only apply to the state of the assembly down here.

The assembly of God, then, has been formed on the earth, and ought always to have been manifested. Alas! it has not been so. In the first place, with regard to individuals, the Lord had pointed this out beforehand. "The wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep," but, thank God, "No one shall catch them out of my hand" said the same faithful

Shepherd—John x. 12, 28.

But this is not all: the apostle Paul, bidding farewell to the faithful of Asia, said, "I know this, that after my departing shall grevious wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acrs xx. 29, 30. Jude declares that already in his time, deceitful men had crept in among the Christians, and, which is of all importance, they are marked out as being the object of the judgment of the Lord when He comes again. "Certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men." "The Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all."—Jude 4 & 15.

These men were corrupters within the Church, but there will be those who will entirely abandon the Christian faith. "Little children," says the apostle John, "it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us," &c .-1 Јони іі. 18, 19.

But even this is not all. The apostle Paul tells us "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth

sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." _2 TIM. ii. 19-21. Here is the Church: it is a great house with vessels of all kinds, and a call comes to the faithful man to purify himself from the vessels to dishonour. The following chapter is still more definite. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud," &c. _2 Tim. iii. 1-5. These are almost exactly the same terms as he uses when he charges the heathen with sin (Rom. i. 29-31) but he adds here "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." —2 Тім. іїі. 5.

He warns us that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse."—2 Tim. iii. 12, 13; but he gives us as a safeguard the knowledge of the person from whom we have learnt those things which we believe: it is the apostle himself, with the Scriptures, which can make us wise to salvation by the faith which is in Christ Jesus. He assures us that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

doctrine, for correction." &c.

Thus we have the proof that evil, having entered into the Church, would continue and would not be healed. "The mystery of iniquity," says the apostle, "doth already work; only he who now hinders will hinder until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed.

whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of His mouth, and shall destroy by the brightness of His coming."—2 Thess. ii. 7,8. The evil which was already working in the time of the apostle was, then, to continue until the wicked one himself should be revealed. The Lord will destroy him then by His coming; and although it be not spoken of the Church properly so called, the same thing is revealed to us in regard to Christendom, for we learn that tares have been sown in the place where the Lord had sown good grain. When the servants desire to pull up the tares, the Lord forbids them, saying, "Let both grow together until the harvest."—MATT. xiii. 24-30. The evil done to the Kingdom of God was to remain in the field of this world until the judgment. Christ will doubtless gather the good grain into His garner, but the crop is spoiled down here. You will tell me "But the gates of hell are not to prevail against that which Christ has built." Granted, and I bless God for it with all my heart, but we must distinguish here as the Word of God does. There is on the one hand the work of Christ, and on the other what is done by men and under their responsibility. The enemy will never destroy what Christ built (we speak of the Church of God), nor will he prevail against the work of the Lord. Whatever be the evil that has come in—for that there are heresies and schisms we do not deny-that which Christ works has endured and will endure for ever. It is the house which we find in 1 Peter ii., the living stones coming to Christ as to the living stone, and built to be a spiritual house. I find this house also in Eph. ii.—"Ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together

groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord."— Eph. ii. 19-21. Here it is again the work of the Lord Himself; living stones who come, a building composed of saints, growing to be a temple which

is not yet completely built.

But, in Scripture, the house of God on earth is viewed in another way also. "As a wise masterbuilder," says the apostle Paul. "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.

If any man build upon this foundation gold wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." "Know ye not," he adds "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

—1 Cor. iii. 10-13; 16-17.

Here then I find the responsibility of man and the judgment of his work; the whole is called the temple of God, and the judgment of God commences there, at His house, says the apostle Peter. Already, during the lifetime of the apostle, the time had come for that (1 Peter iv. 17), although the

patience of God, acting in grace, still waited.

I recognise, therefore, the responsibility of the house of God, of the whole of Christendom. That which Christ Himself builds is one thing, and the fruit of His labours will not be lost; that which responsible man builds is another thing. At the beginning "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."—Acrs ii. 47. Soon "false brethren" crept in, tares were sown, and the house was filled with all kinds of vessels, from which faithfulness was to purge itself; and with a form of godliness without power, from which the faithful one was to turn away.

This is what the Word of God presents to us historically and prophetically in the New Testement: this Word, addressed by the teachers to the faithful, is our resource when these perilous times should come; and, if that were necessary, the facts have

borne out all that it says.

What is to be done? The Word declares to us that where two or three are gathered to the name of Jesus, He will be in their midst—Matt. xviii. 20. This is what we have done. There were only four This is what we have done. There were only four of us to do it at the first; not, I hope, in a spirit of pride or presumption, but deeply grieved at seeing the state of that which surrounded us, praying for all Christians, and recognising all those who possessed the Spirit of God—every true Christian wherever he might be found ecclesiastically—as members of the body of Christ. We were not thinking of anything else dear Sir than of satisfying thinking of anything else, dear Sir, than of satisfying the need of our souls according to the Word of God, and we had no thought that the thing would have gone any further. We have thus found the promised presence of the Lord. Salvation through Christ has been preached, when there was gift to do so. The same needs caused others to follow the same road, and thus the work has extended in a way of which we had not the remotest idea. It commenced in Dublin, to spread in the British Isles, in France, where a great number of persons, open unbelievers, were converted; in Switzerland, where the work on the Continent had commenced, in Germany, in Holland, in Denmark, where it is commencing, in Sweden, where a great religious movement is going on at this moment. The path we follow has spread to a considerable extent in the British Colonies, and more recently in the United States, in Asia, in Africa, and elsewhere. The Spirit of God acts and produces needs of soul to which the religious systems offer no answer.

In a word, this is definitively the position of those brethren who rest on the authority of the Word of Christ is seen, in this Word. as the Saviour, God. Child as the Saviour, in three different positions:—first, as accomplishing redemption on the cross; then, as seated at the Father's right hand, the Holy Ghost being thereupon sent down here; finally as coming back to take His own to be with Himself. These Christians believe these things, have the assurance of their salvation, having faith in the efficacy of this redemption; and finally, being sealed with the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every true Christian, they wait for the Son of God from heaven without knowing the moment of His coming. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!"—Rom. viii. 15. We believe in the promise "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."-JOHN xiv. 3. Absolute faith in the efficacy of redemption: the seal of the Spirit which gives the assurance of salvation and the consciousness of being children of God; the attitude of waiting for the Lord-this is what characterises these Christians. Bought with a great price, they are bound to regard themselves as no longer belonging to themselves, but to the Lord Jesus, to please Him in everything and to live only for Him.

I do not mean to say, Sir, that we all walk at the full height of the heavenly calling, but we acknowledge the obligation to do so. If anyone fails openly in what becomes a Christian—in point of morality or in what concerns the faith—he is excluded. We abstain from the pleasures and amusements of the world. If we have evening parties, it is for the purpose of studying the Word and of edifying ourselves together. We do not mix in politics; we are not of the world: we do not vote.

We submit to the established authorities, whatever they may be, in so far as they command nothing expressly contrary to the will of Christ. We take the Lord's supper every Sunday, and those who have gift for it preach the Gospel of salvation to sinners or teach believers. Everyone is bound to seek the salvation or good of his neighbour according to the capacity which God has given him. Feeling that Christendom is corrupt, we are outside the Church-world, by whatever name it is called. As to the number of those who follow this course I cannot tell you what it is: we do not number ourselves, wishing to remain in the littleness which becomes Christians. Besides we reckon as a brother in Christ every person who has the Spirit of Christ.

I do not know that I have anything else to put before you. I am almost ashamed, Sir, to have given such a long explanation of the principles which govern the walk of the Christians in question. We recognise that the Church is one, the body of Christ: then, too, the house of God by the Spirit.

You ask me what is the advantage of this course. Obedience to the Word of God suffices to decide us. To obey Christ is the first requirement of the soul which knows itself saved by Him, and even of every soul acknowledging Him as the Son of God, who has loved us so much and has given Himself for us. But in fact, in obeying Him, in spite of weakness, faults, and failures, which, on my part, I own, His presence manifests itself to the soul as an ineffable source of joy, as the earnest of a bliss where failures, blessed be His name for it, will no longer be found, and where He will be fully glorified in all believers.

You will tell me that these pages scarcely suit a newspaper. I admit it, but it is because the current of my thoughts scarcely flows in that

line. I have explained to you in all simplicity, what you asked me, and as well as I could. Having had to take up my work more than once owing to unavoidable interruptions, I much fear that it may contain some repetitions. Please excuse them and accept the assurance of my esteem.

J. N. D.

