

COMMENTARY

FORTY YEARS ON. When Father Vincent McNabb published a book called *Where Believers May Doubt* there were those who professed to be scandalized at such a title: the only doubts that believers could indulge in, it appeared, concerned the good faith of their adversaries. Father Vincent was of course used to being misunderstood. It was the penalty he had to pay for so often being so far in advance of the ecclesiastical opinion of his time. (And how ironical it is that he is nowadays thought to have been a backward-looking romantic—an impression given in a deplorable broadcast programme about him last year, from which you could only suppose that he was an eccentric old priest who was proved wrong about back-to-the-land.)

It was in this journal, writing after the Lambeth Conference of 1920, that Father Vincent expressed hopes that have only now begun to be accepted as those which should animate Catholic prayer—and work—to hasten Christian unity. ‘The Shepherd who guides his flock where Peter laid down his life for the sheep will not hear the voice of the English without feeling his Shepherd heart moved to its depths’, he wrote, and this at a time when the echoes of *Apostolicae Curae* created ‘such evidence of the human emotions engendered on both sides that we wellnigh despaired of a reconciliation’. Good will cannot be a substitute for the hard work of theological understanding, and unspecified optimism can be the greatest deception of all. But, as the great Père Lagrange remarked in the same issue of BLACKFRIARS, ‘Catholics do not feel the sorrow they ought’. He went on to show that ‘There was a time when Christendom was uncertain as to the true Pope. There was no dispute as to principles; it was not doubted that the Church could have but one head. Yet the mere uncertainty as to the person of the head weighed on Christendom like a nightmare. . . . Today, after so many centuries of divisions, this deplorable state of things seems to have become accepted. We vaguely trust to time to being back to the fold the sheep that have strayed, and all the time others are straying and losing all Christian faith, partly owing to these same divisions. The paralysing of the Catholic apostolate is the only too evident result.’

It is worth recalling what was written in these pages forty years ago by two great theologians, for it seems only now that the urgency of their appeal has begun to be realized by the Catholics of this country. They wrote with the fullest awareness of the scale of the problem, and it has certainly grown no less. But in 1961, as surely as in 1920, we need to remember Father Vincent's words, which sum up his hopes—bold as they must then have seemed, and prophetic as they now are seen to be. 'We may be asked, "What will be the outcome of the present relation between the Mother-See of Rome and her beloved child Canterbury?"' Again we say, a little sadly, "We do not know". No quarrels are more enduring or more deadly than those between next-of-kin. The issues between mother and child depend wholly upon human wills. But when human wills are set resolutely upon God's truth and God's Will it is hard to find therein any other signs than those that look toward hope.'

HELEN PARRY EDEN. The death of one of the earliest and most loyal of our contributors has passed almost without notice. For ten years Helen Parry Eden endured deep suffering and a total helplessness, and there were few to remember the brilliant *Punch* reviewer and the poet who had promised so much. Throughout the years she had been a faithful friend of this journal, and she would ask no better memorial than a poem of hers first printed here in 1921.

NISI HIC ALIENIGENA

A stranger in Thy Church am I, my days
Dawned elsewhere, until my life is spent
I shall not speak Thy language, learn Thy ways
Or draw one breath without bewilderment;
Yet would I kneel before Thee with that man,
Of Thy ten lepers cured the only one
Who hastened back—Thy poor Samaritan—
To thank and bless Thee when the rest were gone.