

The Beginning of a New Reformation in the Roman Church

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ONE effect of the Oxford Movement was to belittle the authority and to neglect the works of the early Victorian historians and essayists. In recent years the pendulum has swung back and it is interesting to observe the growing tendency to treat them with respect and accept their main conclusions. Macaulay and J. A. Froude are no longer mentioned with an almost contemptuous smile—they have re-gained their influence and authority. In both cases what they said in regard to the Roman Church is generally accepted as strictly fair and reasonable. With the accurate information now to hand through modern research, particularly that done by Professor Coulton, few will question Froude's statement—"never were any institutions brought to a more deserved judgment than the monastic orders of England." His essay on the Revival of Romanism is as forcible and apposite to-day as when it was first written—"The Reformers of the 16th Century were contending against definite falsehoods, which had been taken up into the system of the Church of Rome and were offered by it to the world as sacred realities. Purgatory, penance, pilgrimages, masses, the worship of the saints . . . these and their kindred superstitions the Reformers denounced as frauds and impostures. . . . They appealed to the Bible as an authority which Catholics themselves acknowledged. With the Bible in their hands they pointed from the idolatrous ceremonial to the spiritual truths contained in the Gospels and Epistles, and the service which man owed to his Maker they affirmed to be, integrity of heart and purity of life and conduct."

This has a real bearing on the possibility of a new Reformation within the modern Roman Church. Those who look at its work from the outside are inclined to see it wearing the similitude of an angel. Its priests and nuns in England seem to be energetic and devoted and on occasions, particularly in regard to grants from public funds for education, it appeals for toleration and even pretends to be itself tolerant of other Churches. She has no hesitation in claiming what she herself, under similar conditions, would deny immediately. After the evacuation of schools, the nuns of a London school went to the Head of a C. of E. Secondary School in the Midlands and pitifully begged for the use of a few class rooms on the plea that they had been crowded out of the big local Convent School which works in keen opposition to the Church High School. It is almost incredible, but with great inconvenience room was made for part of the evacuated school and one result is that it has led now to some curtailment of the religious instruction in the High School! Has ever Christian charity been more shamelessly and flagrantly abused?

RENAISSANCE

In the British Empire and the U.S.A., the Roman Catholic laity enjoy a freedom denied them elsewhere. The most intelligent of them mix freely with Christians of other denominations and refuse to be priest-ridden, and they constitute the hope of the future. It is evident from what has been made public that the lay members of the Sword of the Spirit Movement desired to include on the Committee, representatives of other churches on equal terms with the Roman Catholics. Their efforts were defeated but we have not heard the last of this bid for liberty of conscience.

In the U.S.A. there is some evidence that the R.C. hierarchy are far from contented with the predominance of Italian Cardinals and Bishops. In this connection the last book written by E. F. Benson has a pertinent illustration. This clever family of a former Archbishop of Canterbury had some interesting and somewhat exciting re-unions. . . . "Hugh (the R.C. priest and Monseigneur) told us *a propos* of the invalidity of Anglican orders, that the election of the Pope was always directly controlled by the Holy Ghost. He bitterly resented an exasperated brother asking why the Holy Ghost always chose an Italian! 'You hurt me when you say that'—he complained". . . .

Professor Herbert Moran, the famous Australian surgeon, has published the story of his remarkable career.* He is of Irish descent and an earnest Roman Catholic and the last chapter of his book is concerned with his religious life and is entitled Faith, Hope and Insurrection. His religious insurrection began in 1900 when as a high-spirited and devout young man his heart was grievously stirred by the report in Sydney that a well-known priest had been cited as co-respondent on an unsavoury divorce case. It was found impossible to unravel the truth from the tangle of intrigue and lies which followed, but the incident made a lasting impression on Dr. Moran's mind. Many years afterwards when an English Jesuit said to him—what is wrong with the Church in Australia? "the answer came pat, "The priests." He gives many reasons for this belief and he concludes with these words—"All my experience of priests convinces me that the purest minded men are those who have found their sexual equilibrium in a happy marriage." He therefore makes a strong appeal against the celibacy of the clergy which "was no general rule of the Apostolic Church during the Middle Ages."

But this is not the only blemish which he condemns in his Church—"In every Australian city there have risen great palaces, luxuriously furnished and admirably equipped. They are the modern hospitals owned and directed by different Orders of nursing sisters. The architecture is magnificent; in their elaborate specifications they have economized only on their charity. In my last ten years of medical practice I found the poor Catholics had always to seek refuge in the Government institutions, since they had no money and could not get admission to hospitals of their own religion except as accident cases delivered on an ambulance. . . . An intense rivalry has sprung up between the different religious nursing homes and with it, a fury for ornate buildings and lavish decoration. The huge capital

* *Viewless Winds*. Peter David. 1939.

expenditure gradually causes the proprietors to think almost entirely in terms of revenue. . . . The rule of every nursing order has been deliberately and cynically set aside. . . . Do these sisters go into the slums and visit there the infirm? No. Do they nurse the advanced tuberculosis patients? No. Or the intractable cancer sufferer? No. Do they minister to the poor who are mentally deranged? No. Do they take in children sick with contagious disease? No. These answers are absolutely true for my own State of New South Wales. . . . These women are avowed to chastity and poverty, yet they enjoy most of the amenities that opulence confers. . . . They have been indemnified against the loneliness of spinsterhood, against unmarried neglect, they are guaranteed against any of the effects of poverty to which they vowed themselves. They live very comfortably. This is not poverty merely because they handle no coins. Their lives have nearly all the pomp and circumstance of wealth. They have fewer worries than any married woman. Only one thing can justify them in their pretension to higher merit—not their professional competence, nor their negative virtuousness—it is the possession of a true spirit of charity in their care of the sick poor. Without this they have dedicated themselves not to God, but only to a safe career. And without charity their magnificent institutions are nothing more than pagan monuments erected to the memory of a spirit which has departed. . . .”

These quotations are given not to be used in a spirit of self-righteous Phariseism (the Church of England is not without many flagrant abuses of its own) but to illustrate a tendency towards revolt on the part of intelligent Roman Catholics and a demand for a stricter and higher code from their religious leaders. It was this kind of spirit which led the monk Martin Luther to appeal for the Reformation of the Church, and a return to the Scriptural rule of Christian life and service. Dr. Moran urges that what he has written “are not petulant objections frivolously set down but the observations of one who has known Catholic life from inside. Let us confess that it is the Catholics of yesterday who in Catholic countries pull down the Church—not for a doctrine, or after an historical argument but because some priests or religious orders have become venal. . . .”

We too in the Church of England must be on our guard against similar shortcomings in our midst. It is well to remember that “repentant tears are the waters upon which the spirit of God Moves.” Episcopacy, sacraments, church ordinances and organisations are not unimportant but the primary facts of the Christian Faith are the Fatherhood of God, redemption through Christ, goodness through the Holy Ghost and the universal brotherhood of man. We must teach these things, preach these truths and live these realities, and be ready at all times to give the right hand of fellowship to all who share with us these fundamental truths and desire to work with us for the salvation of the world.