

AN ENGLISH DIARIST AND THE CHURCH

IT has been said of the Dictionary of National Biography that its compilation has permanently put out of employment the writers of what used to be called the Miscellanies. Drudging, uninspired work it was, this labour of the writer of miscellanies, yet one may have a feeling of sympathy for the painstaking and reasonably honest workman who might have earned his bread for a day or two by quarrying in the pages of the Greville Diary.

My edition of Greville is that of Philip Whitwell Wilson, published by Heinemann in 1927. The editor informs us that nothing printable has been suppressed, and that only a rare and irrelevant vulgarity of the stables has been omitted. There is since, I believe, a more complete edition.

Within the limits of the edition before me, there are occasional passages of interest to any Catholic with a relish for the quaint or the unexpected. There are the usual reactions characteristic of the fair-minded Protestant of the period, to Catholic persons and institutions, and to what we may call Catholic aspirations, whether religious or political. We know the kind of thing a Protestant Englishman of the period would think and say about the Popes and the Temporal Power, Daniel O'Connell and the Irish, Mazzini and united Italy. We know all this, and need not trouble to reproduce what Charles Greville thought, said, or wrote on these matters. But it may be at least of passing interest to read of a few of the contacts made with the Catholic Church by a cultured man of affairs in the early Victorian age of the world, the English world.

Blackfriars

In 1794 Charles Greville was born into this world to be a man of mark. He was a grandson of a Duke of Portland, and was related by blood or marriage to nearly all the ruling families of England. His mind showed itself worthy of the culture provided by Eton, Christ Church, the Grand Tour, and the easily come by experience of life. In his youth he was for a time page to George III, and came to know and assess the numerous Royal Dukes, whose jealousies, whimsicalities, and fancies were to present many an absurd crisis at the Court for a grown-up Greville to settle.

He very soon entered upon public affairs. He became Secretary of Jamaica, but this post never took him there. The work was performed by a deputy-secretary. His grandfather, who had given him this sinecure, also arranged for him the reversion of the Clerkship to the Privy Council.

When in 1821 he entered upon this Clerkship, a possibly very great career was diverted into a backwater. He might have become a man wielding great power, he remained always a man of considerable influence. The *D.N.B.* remarks that his official position afforded him unusual opportunities for continuous observation behind the scenes. And as he was an exceptionally fair minded man, the judgments arrived at by a keen and trained intelligence working on exceptional powers and opportunities of observation were usually very sound—within the limits of the almost unavoidable barriers of preconception or misconception in affairs of religion or race.

An idea of the honesty of the man may be conveyed to the reader by a remark of his: 'it is the business of every man who keeps a journal to contradict on one page what he has written in the preceding.' After all, most of us find at times new data to deal a mortal blow to the most cherished of intelligent anticipations. When Greville resigned his office of clerk

An English Diarist and the Church

to the Privy Council in 1859, his channel of official information dried up. For a diarist with an eye frankly on posterity, hearsay was a poor substitute for being 'in the know.' The diary was closed in 1860, and its author died in 1865.

With this introduction we may enter upon considering a few selected extracts from the famous Diary. In 1830 Greville was doing the inevitable Grand Tour of Europe and writing the inevitable journal describing the sights and appropriate sentiments. Very properly he was in Rome for Holy Week.

ROME, April 4th, 1830.—'To the Sistine Chapel for the ceremonies of Palm Sunday. It was only on the third attempt I could get there, for twice the Papal halberdiers pushed me back, and I find since it is lucky they did not do worse; for upon some occasion one of them knocked a Cardinal's eye out, and when he found out who he was, begged his pardon and said he had taken him for a bishop.'

This may be true, and yet it may not. Possibly the young man fell a victim to the somewhat grim and often startling humour of the Romans. Anyway the story bears a family resemblance to more recent examples of ecclesiastical humour emanating from the Eternal City.

On April 9th he notes a rather mysterious form of Papal largesse: 'Till the Pope appears, the bands play and the bells ring, when suddenly there is a profound silence: the feathers are seen waving in the balcony and he is borne in on his throne; he rises, stretches out his hands, blesses the people—*urbi et orbi*—and is borne out again. A couple of indulgences were tossed out, for which there is a scramble; and so it ends.'

One wonders about the couple of indulgences and what the scramble was really for.

On Easter Day he went to High Mass at St. Peter's, which he found crowded: 'I walked about the church

Blackfriars

to see the groups and the extraordinary and picturesque figures moving through the vast space. They are to the last degree interesting: in one place hundreds prostrate before an altar—pilgrims, soldiers, beggars, ladies, gentlemen, old and young in every variety of attitude, costume and occupation.'

Of Pope Pius VIII, Greville observes: 'Nothing can be more melancholy than his life as described: he gets up very early, lives entirely alone and with the greatest simplicity. In short, it shows what a strange thing ambition is, which will sacrifice the substantial pleasures of life for the miserable shadow of grandeur.'

Here we have complete failure to understand. He perceives the impersonal quality of Papal pomp, but his mind is closed to the fact that the Pope's simplicity of life is admirable in its sense of proportion as between the man and his conception of his office. Incidentally we know of Pius VIII that he made any relations holding Papal appointments resign them at his accession. Greville, it is regrettable to relate, accounted this amiable and gentle Pontiff an 'old twaddler.'

We can forgo the usual descriptions of the ceremonies of Holy Week, but there is one delightful side-remark in an account of a religious procession he witnessed in May. Taking part in the procession was 'a long file of Jesuits, whose appearance was remarkable, so humble and absorbed did they look.' Greville's powers of observation were, as we have said, very sound.

Leaving now the entries in the diary made in Rome, we can see what he has to say about a great Roman figure eleven years later.

'August 12th, 1841: The day before yesterday I met Dr. Wiseman at dinner, a smooth, oily and agreeable priest. He is now head of the College at Oscott,

An English Diarist and the Church

near Birmingham, and a bishop, and accordingly he came in full episcopal costume, purple stockings, tunic, and gold chain. He talked religion, Catholicism, Protestantism, Puseyism, almost the whole time. He told me of the great increase of his religion in this country, principally in the manufacturing, and very little in the agricultural districts. I asked him to what cause he attributed it, to the efforts of missionaries, or the influence of writings, and he replied that the principal influence of conversion was the Protestant Association, its virulence and scurrility; that they always hailed with satisfaction the advent of its itinerant preachers, as they had never failed to make many converts in the districts through which they had passed.'

The smooth, oily and agreeable priest had been met in Rome by Macaulay only two and a half years before, and by him described as 'a young ecclesiastic, full of health and vigour, a ruddy, strapping Divine in purple vestments.' Notwithstanding Wiseman's unqualified testimony to the Protestant Association as a Romanizing force, Greville seems to have fallen before his genial fascination—'He invited me to visit him at Oscott, which I promised, and which I intend to do.'

In 1850 Greville bestows blame all around for the No Popery excitement arising from the re-establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in England. Rome, Wiseman, the Government, the Puseyites, and the English Protestant mob all come in for their share of cōndemnation. Of the last mentioned he writes: 'A more disgusting and humiliating manifestation has never been exhibited; it is founded on prejudice and gross ignorance.' On the other hand, 'the Pope has been ill-advised and very impolitic, the whole proceeding on the part of the Papal government has been mischievous and impertinent, and deserves the

Blackfriars

severest censure, while Wiseman, who ought to have known better, has aggravated the case by his imprudent manifesto.'

The excitement in Parliament and in the country lasted a couple of years, and Catholics in Rome and in England may well have wondered if the change had been quite as opportune as had been hoped. Wiseman found it necessary to present a loyal address from the new hierarchy, and consulted the Clerk to the Privy Council as to the form it had better take. Greville advised that the Bishops should sign with their names only and omit all allusion to their sees. To this Wiseman agreed. All ended well, but the country had been quite ready for a mad stampede back to penal days. It was only in the course of the year 1852 that we find Greville entering this in his journal: 'Aberdeen told me the whole country (Scotland) was on fire, and they would like nothing so much as to go to Ireland and fight, and renew the Cromwellian times, giving the Papists the option of going to Hell or Connaught. As Ireland is equally furious, and the priests will send sixty or seventy members full of bigotry and zeal, all ready to act together under the orders of Cullen and Wiseman, we may look for more polemical discussion, and that of the most furious character, than we have ever seen before, even during the great Emancipation debates.'

An interesting event in 1855 was the visit of the King of Sardinia to the Queen of England. Greville has this shrewd entry: 'The Queen was wonderfully cordial and attentive; she got up at four in the morning to see him depart. His Majesty appears to be frightful in person, but a great, strong, burly, athletic man, brusque in his manners, unrefined in his conversation, very loose in his conduct, and very eccentric in his habits. When he was at Paris his talk in society amused or terrified everybody, but here he

An English Diarist and the Church

seems to have been more guarded. It was amusing to see all the religious societies hastening with their addresses to him, totally forgetting that he is the most debauched and dissolute fellow in the world; but the fact of his being excommunicated by the Pope and his waging war with the ecclesiastical powers in his own country, covers every sin against morality, and he is a great hero with the Low Church people and Exeter Hall.' Any atheistical bandit from Mexico or Spain can be equally popular with certain religious people in our commonwealth now.

During the Chartist troubles the Clerk to the Privy Council was cognizant of Government anxiety and of the extent of the public clamour. News came in daily of Chartist manifestations all over the country, especially in London, and of the repeated assemblings and marchings of great bodies of men. The Home Office reports of the state of the country were very serious. Disaffection was being stirred up by eagerly sought-after and eagerly read publications of an inflammatory character. Greville makes this note about it all:

'June 3rd, 1848: Lately accounts have been received from well informed persons whose occupations lead them to mix with the people, clergymen, particularly Roman Catholic, and medical men, who report that they find a great change for the worse among them, an increasing spirit of discontent and disaffection.' Here is a casual unconsidered compliment, the relation as a matter of course of a bare fact with no conclusions drawn from it, with no axe to grind and no log to roll. Times have not changed in this respect. The Catholic clergy are still expected to know their people and the troubles of their people. And they do.

JOHN PREEDY.