

**'A GREAT IDEA EXTINCT'**

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**C**ATHOLIC Emancipation in 1829, which paved the way for the re-establishment of the Hierarchy twenty-one years later, brought no relief to the Religious Orders of men. Indeed it considerably increased the disabilities to which they had been so long subjected. Referring to Jesuits and members of other Orders, the Act states that 'it is expedient to make provision for the gradual suppression and final prohibition of the same'. It goes on to enact that every member of such an order actually in England must register with the local clerk of the peace within six months, under penalty of £50 for each month of unregistered residence. Any member landing in England thereafter is to be deemed guilty of a misdemeanour and banished for life. It is made an offence, punishable by fine and imprisonment, to receive the vows of Religious in England or Ireland, and the person making vows is liable to banishment for life. An attempt to repeal these clauses was made in 1846, but without success. It is difficult to realise that when the Oxford Movement was in full flood the great Religious Orders were outlawed and doomed to extinction.

Time was to show that these vicious laws were still-born and would never be invoked. It is easy to be wise after the event. The years between 1829 and 1850 that achieved so much for the Church were, for the Religious, a time of grave anxiety and uncertainty. Their strength lay in their schools. It was only here that they could attempt any degree of community life, and it was from their schools that they hoped to draw recruits. The French Revolution had driven to England the schools that had for so long rendered distinguished service beyond the seas. Long before Emancipation the Benedictines were firmly established at Ampleforth and Downside. Although restored as a society only in 1829, the Jesuits were already well established at Stonyhurst, and in 1850 they numbered ninety priests, twenty-eight scholastics and twenty-six lay brothers, a total of nearly two hundred.

The Dominicans had been less fortunate. Their College at Bornhem, in Flanders, had been suppressed in 1795, and a school was opened at Carshalton in Surrey. For a time it flourished with

some fifty boys. But in 1797 they bought back the Bornhem property and re-established the school. The strain of running two schools was too much for their dwindling numbers, and both of them failed.

Carshalton had to be closed in 1810, and the end of the Province seemed in sight. Most of the disheartened brethren were for migrating to the newly-formed American province, but there was one determined opponent in Fr Albert Underhill. Rather than see the Province die he undertook to run a school himself. Amid the cares of a parish he opened his little school. He was then sixty-six and in failing health. Four years later he arrived at Hinckley with the fruits of his labour—five postulants for the Order. They were the first English subjects to join the Province for twenty-four years. Two months later he died, but his school lived on, and indeed still lives on in Laxton. Nor did his missionary work suffer. His parish, which he governed alone, was St Anne's, Leeds, subsequently the Cathedral, and the Catholics of Leeds now have twenty-five churches and more than sixty priests.

In 1825 a school was opened at Hinckley, but was restricted to twelve boys. It had a chequered career. The staff never numbered more than three Fathers, and in addition to teaching the boys, they were responsible for the training of the novices and of the professed students. Also they could not forget the urgent needs of a missionary country. They not only ran the parish of Hinckley, but founded and maintained missions at Atherstone, Nuneaton, Market Harborough and Nevill Holt. Whatever the other fruits of their labours, they were not very fruitful in vocations. Between Emancipation and the restoration of the Hierarchy, only four joined the Order. During the same period ten Fathers died, and the future looked darker than ever. It is not surprising that when Newman in 1846, as a recent convert, turned his eyes to the Dominicans he saw them only as a 'great idea extinct'. At Florence he found them 'manufacturers of scented water'. In England it is doubtful whether he found them at all.

Thus in 1850, when the Church in England had breathed the air of freedom for twenty-one years and had made giant strides, while the Benedictines and Jesuits were steadily consolidating, the Dominicans were in desperate straits. This year was their nadir. Apart from the aged Fr Angier, who was dying in Flanders, there were only six members of the Province, and only three of

them were qualified to vote in the affairs of the Order.

The three men to whom it fell to make a grave decision were Frs Augustine Proctor, aged fifty-three, Dominic Aylward and Thomas Nickolds, both in their forties. The first two were products of Fr Underhill's school at Leeds. These three shared the burden of the office of Provincial from 1834 till 1870, a period of thirty-six years.

The story has more than once been told of how, in the summer of 1850, these three Fathers met for the Provincial Chapter at Hinckley. During their anxious discussions a recent convert, Mr William Leigh, came personally to ask them to take over the church he had built at Woodchester, with the obligation of full choral office. This tempting offer was at first rejected but finally accepted. On October 8th, 1850 the Dominicans took formal possession of the church and house. On the previous day, Cardinal Wiseman had issued his famous pastoral, 'from outside the Flaminian Gate', announcing the restoration of the Hierarchy. For the Order, as well as for the English Catholics generally, a new era had dawned.

The re-establishment of Dominican conventual life in England, after a break of three centuries, began inauspiciously amid the clangour of No-popery provoked by Wiseman's 'papal aggression'. In many parts of the country, and particularly in the West, where Woodchester lay, Guy Fawkes' day in 1850 was celebrated with quite exceptional enthusiasm. The Pope, Wiseman and the rest of the Hierarchy were burnt in effigy. At one place a brass band played the Doxology to the accompaniment of bursting crackers, and the service ended piously enough with the 'Morning Hymn'. Presbytery windows were broken and priests pelted with stones. The roseate dream of the Oxford Converts, of a mass return to Catholicism, was seen to be no more than a dream.

The courageous decision to accept Woodchester was the turning point in the fortunes of the Province. Regular observance was inaugurated on January 25th, 1851. The Master General lent two young Irishmen, not yet ordained, to help out the tiny community. One of these was Brother Tom Burke, later to be a celebrated preacher. The regular round of prayer and study, with Matins at midnight, and great stress on the liturgy, made its appeal. Life was frugal and austere in the extreme, and it brought a blessing. Numbers began to grow. Two were professed in 1854, and two

more in 1855, and when six were professed in 1856, the Province had nearly trebled its size.

These new recruits came from widely different *milieux*. The old Catholic families had a representative in Paul Stapleton. Lewis Weldon, Antoninus Williams, Aloysius Dixon, Thomas Greenough and Pius Cavanagh were cradle Catholics: Francis O'Brien was born in Ireland. The Oxford Movement was represented by Dominic Trenow, a convert Oxford clergyman, while other converts were Raymund Palmer, Henry Bartlett and Albert Buckler, who was later joined by his two brothers.

It was impossible to use all this varied talent to the full. All were immersed in missionary work, and none had leisure for serious writing. Even the Provincial was a parish priest. If they could not vie with Newman and Faber in literary output, it was for lack of leisure and not of ability. Fr Alyward was a classical scholar, musician and poet. His translations of liturgical hymns are polished and graceful, and many of them were published posthumously in *Annus Sanctus* by Orby Shipley, in 1884.

But for the most part their writings were strictly utilitarian. Fr Aylward produced three manuals for Tertiaries. This was doubtless necessitated by the rise of the Conventual Third Order, but even so it is surprising that two of them should have reached a second, and one a third, edition within twenty years. Several of the other Fathers used their pens in the defence of the Faith or for the edification of the faithful. Their works have long passed out of fashion or sleep in the pages of long-forgotten periodicals.

There was an exception. Fr Raymund Palmer was given the task of collecting materials for the history of the Province from its earliest days. Besides publishing a *Life of Cardinal Howard* and some seventy articles in learned journals of the time, he left nine folio volumes of transcripts, written in his beautiful hand, that must serve as the basis of all future work. Even judged by the more exacting standards of today they are a work of superb scholarship. Other volumes of his transcripts are in the British Museum and in the archives of the Master General in Rome.

Fr Antoninus Williams will always be remembered as the great builder. He was responsible for the churches at Newcastle and Haverstock Hill. These large stately churches would be a triumph in more prosperous times: in those days they required the vision of a seer and the faith that moves mountains.

The amazing developments of the last hundred years remind one of the first flowering of the Order under St Dominic. In 1859 the Dominicans began in Newcastle: in 1861 in London. In 1885 the school, after its many vicissitudes was firmly established at Hinckley and has never looked back. In 1894 came the great House of Studies at Hawkesyard, and in 1901 the priory of Pendleton, Manchester. In that same year the Province was entrusted with the island of Grenada in the West Indies, which now has some fifty thousand Catholics. In 1918 as similar foundation was made in South Africa, and the mission there has now a formal priory, with a full course of philosophical studies, and is on the way to becoming a separate province.

Under the inspiring leadership of Fr Bede Jarrett, the Order of Preachers returned to its traditional place in the old Universities—to Oxford in 1921, to Edinburgh in 1931, and, since his death, to Cambridge in 1938. Meantime growing numbers in the school have necessitated its removal first to Hawkesyard and then, in 1924, to Laxton. There it has flourished as never before, and in 1947 doubled its numbers by opening a Junior School at Llanarth, itself a traditional Catholic centre through the centuries.

The progress of what Newman called their 'dominant, imperious theology' is sufficiently known. Dominican literary output has kept pace with the other developments. The *Rosary Magazine* is now eighty years old, and still popular. BLACKFRIARS is now in its thirty-first year. More recent arrivals, *The Life of the Spirit* and *Dominican Studies* illustrate other aspects of the Dominican apostolate. Besides these periodicals there has been a steady flow of books, and finally *Blackfriars Publications* exists to extend the purpose of the reviews through publishing books.

But the apostolate of the pen has not impaired the apostolate of the word. Retreat work and preaching have increased proportionately, and the parishes continue to thrive. The barren years of war have left the Province short of young priests, but the Studentate is filling up again, and with men many of whom have matured with the responsibilities of war.

In May of this year the Dominican Chapter met at Oxford for the first time since the fifteenth century. There were representatives from all the priories and from the mission fields, and one was privileged to survey the multifarious activities of the Province as a whole. There must have been many whose thoughts went back

to that Chapter at Hinckley just a hundred years ago, when three men held the future in their hands, or back further to that old and ailing priest at Leeds, where two of those Dominicans had received their first religious training. Fr Underhill's epitaph in the church at Hinckley was nearly worn away in 1863 when Fr Palmer tried to copy it. Perhaps it should read: *Ut sapiens architecton fundamentum posui.*

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## MR DAWSON AND CHRISTENDOM

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**A**MONG the historians of Christian culture alive today, two stand out with particular distinction: M. Etienne Gilson<sup>1</sup> and Mr Christopher Dawson.<sup>2</sup> They are both prolific writers, and neither is always equal to his own standard; but their best work is of a very high quality indeed. These qualities differ, however, and it is interesting to compare them. Both men are scholars through and through, and both possess to a very unusual degree the real historian's gift of generalising from particular data. But their points of view differ, and their data. M. Gilson is a connoisseur of ideas; of other men's ideas, in studying which he discovers his own. He knows much about many human minds, precisely in so far as these minds have become articulate in conceptual thought, and expresses this thought in words and writing. An expert in philosophies, he is scrupulously careful to respect his documentary data; but he wrings all he can out of it. For he makes it his business to discern and define what is individual and original in each thinker he studies; to study therefore each case in and for itself before passing on to another one. Then, having so treated a number of cases, he

1 *Etienne Gilson: Rencontres* (Blackfriars; 10s 0d).

2 *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*. The Gifford Lectures for 1948 (Sheed and Ward, 15s 0d).