A CENTURY OF CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL LIFE

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OBVIOUSLY enough a short article on the history of Catholic thought in England in the last hundred years can only suggest a few thoughts of a general nature, for a mere date list without detailed historical interpretation would be useless, and several volumes would be needed for the latter task. A hundred years ago Catholic thought in England was broadening under the influence of Wiseman and Newman. It is, however, a mistake to think that they created it, for behind them lies the solid historical and spiritual interests of the priests of the penal days: strong controversialists, such as Milner, historians of the type of Lingard, and writers like Butler and Challoner, were all massively English in their virtues and prejudices. Their thought was unspeculative, concrete, and strongly, though not deeply, based on the Latin Fathers.

With Wiseman and Newman, new influences were brought to bear which served to constitute the pattern of Catholic thought for the next fifty years. Wiseman with his generous, though somewhat undisciplined, imagination brought Catholic England into contact with the thought of the Munich circle and of the French Liberal school. For Wiseman these movements involved a vision of the restoration of the faith, but a glance at Ward's *Life* makes it clear that his hopes rested on an inadequate intellectual synthesis, in that it was too strongly influenced by theological Traditionalism and implied a naive view of Liberalism. It was, in short, a Catholic variety of the early nineteenth century theologies of feeling. This statement serves to stress the interesting, though often forgotten, fact that the thinkers of the Catholic Restoration knew little of the intellectual heritage of the Middle Ages, and what they did see they tended to misunderstand as they saw it reflected in the blurred mirror of Romanticism. Even men like Ullathorne, who had been formed in the tradition of the penal days, were almost unaware of its riches. Their philosophy was drawn from Reid or Locke or even from the Cartesian school.

It is more difficult to define the influence of Newman, for he

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stands for a movement and, too, exercised a unique personal influence. The Oxford movement, to take it first, was responsible for a great influx of cultured Englishmen into the Church, who brought with them both new contacts and a fiery enthusiasm. Its effect was to bring the ancient Church into contact again with English life, particularly English upper class life, but the forms it took ranged from the Liberalism of Simpson of the *Rambler* on the one hand, to the rigid, yet intensely practical ultramontanism of Manning on the other. It involved both Gothic fantasy and Baroque exaggeration and found its typical intellectual expression in countless works of ecclesiastical controversy. It cannot be said that the latter had great permanent value, but they did serve to stimulate an historical and liturgical interest which has steadily grown. By the nineties the movement was almost spent, the final controversy regarding Anglican orders being its swan song.

Once the excitement provoked by the first generation of converts had died down, it could be seen that the real effect of the movement had been to broaden the old historical outlook of the English Catholic, for though the emotional note had changed from pessimism to optimism, the intellectual emphasis in general remained the same. Very typical of this historical interest as it gradually deepens is the work of the Downside school, with such names as Gasquet, Butler, Chapman and Connolly. Controversy, grafted on to the old tradition, here produced real scholarship. The same deepening can be observed in liturgical work as it advances from antiquarian treatment, through the scholarship of such men as Edmund Bishop, to its present state. In saying all this we must not overlook the alliance between some of the converts and the Catholic Whigs, of whom Acton was the spokesman. Here we find a moment of half revolt in which the spirit of the age clashes with the paradosis of the Church. Historically it supplies the link between the odd figure of Geddes and the Modernists. Yet it would be unjust to overlook the fact that Acton's love of freedom did play an important part, while his heavy scholarship set a standard.

What then of Newman? It is perhaps only today that we are beginning to see the man apart from the movement. The subtle thinker, with his vast patristic learning and unique power of indirect and cumulative argumentation, stands out as the dominating mind of nineteenth-century English Catholicism and as a

theologian whose work is of permanent value for its own sake. Newman alone does not date.

The next fifty years are more complex. The historical stress remains dominant, as has already been suggested, but it has become more scientific and its basis is wider. An excellent example is found in the work of Mr Christopher Dawson, the first English Catholic to deliver the Gifford lectures. His work represents both English historical writing at its best and an integral Catholic outlook. Another example is found, though in a more limited context, in the remarkable work of the Ward family. This very typical mode of expression found its organ in the *Dublin Review*.

One might risk a generalisation here. English Catholic thought has remained historical for the last hundred years, but it has done so with a leaning towards cultural interpretation. This has been accentuated with the dying down of the Anglican controversy. The Catholic writer today is not so much concerned with the details of the Reformation debate as with the very bases of a culture which can be called Christian, and here the Catholic writer, rightly, makes increasing demands on the theologian.

Out of this tradition there have emerged, from time to time, spiritual writers of distinction, such as Bishop Hedley, whose work bears the mark of their background in that it is solid, conservative and concrete. This is by no means the whole picture. The Scholastic Revival began at the turn of the century to influence English Catholic life through such works as those found in the Stonyhurst Series and, clashing with the outlook stemming from that of the Higher Critics, it provoked a strong reaction. Tyrrell was the leader of those who, in rejecting Aristotelian categories, cast out reason, and a substantial part of tradition, in the name of what at the best was a highly subjective faith. In spite of the uneasy brilliance of its leader, English Modernism was derivative. Tyrrell was a persuasive writer and a controversialist of genius, but Loisy was the mind of the movement and the ammunition came from Germany. Once the heretical basis of the movement was seen, English Catholic thought, after a period of fireworks, flowed on so calmly that it is now difficult for the historian to capture the crisis mood or to appreciate the dead corpse of English Liberal Modernism, though its study is of great psychological interest to the Moral Theologian.

It has been said that Modernism in the English Catholic body

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was derived from continental sources and the same remark applies to the Scholastic revival in England. This has been to a large extent stimulated and directed by the work of French writers, and it is significant that the best works on the subject in English are translations. There are, indeed, signs that this phase is coming to an end as several valuable works have been produced in the last few years, none the less it must be admitted that the English mind has shown a resistance, not always of a high mental character, to Scholasticism. This is perhaps understandable if we remember the strength of the empirical tradition in England, but it has had serious consequences. It has prevented the formation of that type of outlook which is necessary in the training of first-class dogmatic theologians and has implied that English Catholic thought has been too dependent on continental manuals not always of the first quality. This has reacted on apologetic writing, for since the vital science of Dogmatics is not brought to bear directly on the subject matter presented in English Catholic life, there has tended to be either a certain remoteness from the immediately relevant in apologetic writing, or else a vagueness regarding the great revealed dogmatic positions.

The English Catholic body today needs above all else a school of dogmatic theologians writing on Dogma, for it is from such a source alone that the framework can be derived into which the rather isolated positive studies, characteristic of this country, can be fitted, and from which they may derive a deeper meaning. Such a development would react favourably on both the renewed biblical studies of so many, and on the general standard of preaching. For what is Dogma but the accurate conceptual formulation whereby we are brought into contact with the living magisterium of the Church?

One last note: one of the most striking features of English Catholic thought has been the number of highly personal accounts of adventures in faith and conversion. These have exercised an invaluable and quickening influence and have, as the case of Chesterton shows, stimulated the social consciousness of the Catholic body. But invaluable as they have been as introducing the non-Catholic to the faith, their effect might have been deeper and more lasting if they had been supplemented by a more vigorous and objective Dogmatic.