

ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

IT is a misfortune for those writers who base their character sketches on historic fact that they are tempted so often on to ground where it is necessary for the success of their artistic effort that they should form some conception of the reactions and background of the Catholic mind. In the recent past no difficulty was experienced in England in this matter. That reasoned and subdued religious temper which was the legacy of the matured Anglican tradition provided a secure fortress for the spirit from which the ecclesiastical archaeologist could sally forth on those delectable voyages of Victorian discovery. It was a time, too, in which historical episode had to bend itself to the slow movement of the lych gate and attune itself to the dust-laden sunshine of a rector's study, to the ink wells and the long quill pens, to the Bible and the calf-bound books of sermons, and sometimes to those early, temerarious volumes of an Anglo-Catholic theology, before it could hope to reach the light of print. The broad lines of political history might be seized by some Whig historian, fashionable and remote, but how completely and with what slow content did this clerical atmosphere pervade the Tory camp. But it was never a purpose of the influential Whigs to concern themselves with monks and the old Church life and the Elizabethan priesthood, and it was in the vicarage gardens of the English country that such trees of knowledge grew.

These historians held in their own opinion a firm grasp of the essentials of the Roman Church. They had watched, often with much less dismay than later Catholics are inclined to picture, the first secessions of the Oxford group. They were aware that the knowledge gained by the slightly adventurous travel of that period, when hotel keepers might occasionally hesitate about even a commercial knowledge of the English tongue, had strengthened their already formed convic-

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tions. The press of Louis Veuillot, the devotional literature of the time, the ubiquitous *curés* with their untidy and ill-regulated snuff, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the spirit which was to raise at Montmartre the *Sacré Coeur*, all these confirmed them. If anything were needed to set the seal of finality on their impressions, it was provided by the behaviour of those men of their own upbringing and acquaintance who had set out on, what was to them, an adventure so repellent and unworthy. It was impossible for them not to realize in the light of the contented social landscape, with that Tory background on which their values rested, that the devotional customs of F. W. Faber, those intimate practices which rumour brought to them so quickly, were embarrassingly painful in one who had received the benefit of their own tradition, the chaplain's son at Bishop Auckland, brought up with the solid and calm reason of Van Mildert's lengthening days. Again, there was something urban about this new movement, and they would think with a dislike, nearly kept in control, about Dr. Manning in London, ascetic and careful, with the Duchesses kneeling before him, subsiding crinolined. But these robust and old-fashioned clergy had for their share the wide spaces, the hunting and the life of the fields.

The sanctities of domestic life, the only ritual which the countryside protected, had warmed by their own wide hearth stones this sense of good fortune, when they contemplated the unpleasing spectacle of the celibate priests. Before their minds lay the map of the counties where family livings fell as closely as rain in Leicestershire; while the spiritual and cultural traditions had been focussed in this age of reasoned progress. A sense of serene well-being and a deep security guarded such convictions. It is not surprising that we find a certain uniformity and an historical optimism, very touching, in this somewhat pre-Galileo sky.

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The signs are so familiar ; the earnest declaration of Christian principles, termed Protestant in the early portion of the period, with a growing distaste at later stages for that expressive word, the demands of a rigorous patriotism conceived along strict nineteenth century models and the firm moral code applied with great precision. The circle of this influence spreads wide, including even in their moments of reaction the earlier children of the Cloth, Mr. Froude and Miss Strickland. Names dotted about the countryside rise like ancient carp in these placid waters, Lew Trenchard and the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould, the courteous exordiums of Canon Jessop, the careful wisdom of Archdeacon Hare. It was a constant delving among the bones of those who had followed the Catholic teaching, but in each case the ' Roman Communion ' would be judged. A comment in the life of the Blessed Henry Walpole sums up this standpoint, for it is a truism with Canon Jessop that Catholics are the followers of ' a religion so much less pure than ours.' Through the sieve of such subjective comment all historical data had to pass ; but the sieve is now broken. This is an attitude, consistent, beautiful in its sincerity, uncomprehending, dead.

To the old Anglican writers the detail of contemporary Catholic custom was quite uncongenial, for they knew all that they cared to know of Pio Nono and Rome. They believed in immutable doctrines and principles, which no longer find favour, and they gazed through a Tennysonian mirror at the Catholic life of Shalott. But the web is broken, and a modern mood is content with the fragments. Circumstances had given historical study very largely to the clergy and their circle. These men, revering the principles of the moral law, impatient of detail and impervious to irony, had measured the followers of the Universal Church by their own standards. This result may in-

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deed have been unfortunate ; but by what standards do the Neo-Georgians judge ?

Difficult as it is to analyse, there is value in attempting to discover the manner in which the new outlook develops, and for this purpose it is simplest to consider that period which is the most lately established as history and to observe what shafts it receives. After examining the standpoint of the Victorian clergy of 1856 towards the earlier Catholics, a comparison of the attitude of later writers to Continental Catholicism of that year enables us to make, by boomerang methods, yet another valuation. By taking an episode in 1856, which has attracted recent attention, we can consider where the present interest lies and what the reactions of the Victorian clergy would have been and then observe where both fail when confronted with a situation which pre-supposes an understanding of the Catholic philosophy.

In the first place, it is now the detail that pleases and this must be considered. An event to which a modern writer has drawn attention will serve the purpose well, namely those regulations issued by the Royal Government of the Two Sicilies to guard the railway line. Benediction was ordered to be solemnized in a chapel built within the station at Caserta, where the creeping, top-heavy train from Naples was stopped by the piety of a royal decree. The scene presented such a contrast as the modern world has grown to love, the chapel opening from the platform, the heavy brocaded altar frontal, the southern voices echoing the *Tantum Ergo*, the heavy creaking of the bell-funnelled engine, the heartfelt prayers of the kneeling peasants that God would preserve the monster safe from harm. Outside, it was the hour of the evening *Angelus*, and beyond the avenue the gaudy but inexpensive household of the Bourbon Throne was assembled in the royal chapel of that eighteenth cen-

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tury palace, with the massed, looped red curtains against the windows, and the ornate crystal of the chandeliers. The King, whose devotion had inspired this act of homage, a sovereign domesticated and military, with fierce moustaches, *Il Re Bomba*, knelt now beside his Queen, that stiff Archduchess, a gift from Metternich. And through that rich Campania, under the already faintly tempered light, the bells of the town churches and of the chapels lost in vineyards took up the ringing; waves of sound which travelled out from the greater centres where some punctuality might be observed, moving outwards from Caserta and from Capua until they reached the last remote cluster of the farms. Everywhere they found an echo of the Christian peace in those communities which in their ancient systems had hardly changed since the days of Angevin and Hohenstaufen: the mediaeval calm was on them still, and a name from their own country could still link religion and the seasons, Raymond of the Vines of Capua.

And when the prayer was over the new iron carriage moved shakily again upon its way along the ill-laid metals. After this first prayer-guarded journey there were many changes for the country people carried up along this road, a *plebiscito* and a parliament, commercial travellers and election agents, but it can hardly be said it brought them peace.

The reaction of the Victorian clergy to this scene would be a rather contemptuously passing mood of honest indignation. They might not care much for Mr. Gladstone; but at least he had told them all they need to know about the precious King of Naples and his Government. *The Times* newspaper had provided them with an account of the liquefaction of Saint Januarius' blood. The picture in their minds was most repellent, a spectacular absence of all self-control, and

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it was said that, even in the churches, you were not safe from prosperous, ululating Magdalens.

To a more modern opinion, however, the scene presents an appeal based upon the presumed attempt of the antique religion to harness by its benison this new ungainly power. A pleasantly ironical flavour pervades the whole, the rather ridiculous attempt at pomp after the eighteen-fifty manner, the quaint and ingenuous mechanism, the mediaeval peasant mind, the southern colour. And now, after the tale has been somewhat too much adorned, it is necessary, in three episodes, to point the moral.

As he knelt in the evening for this accustomed prayer, the peasant's mind returned on the day's doings. How often he had prayed, during the heats of the preceding summer, for the protection of God and the favour of San Gennaro for his vintage and that rain would come at last to save the vines. He asked, too, for aid in his son's marriage and for the successful purchase of the vineyard next his own, for which he had negotiated long. For several years the project had been with him, and he had vowed a pilgrimage to the Black Madonna of Pompei on its achievement. Little else troubled his placid mind, for he had no experience of wealth. Above him stood the administration office of the Most Serene House of Caracciolo-Giudice-Cellamare, to whom his stock had paid their feudal dues. A little sharp agent coming out in his gig from Capua was all that he saw of the Serene Administration, and above that stood the King; but how much nearer was religion, as he knelt before the little caged image of the Madonna with its guttering lamp, last lit upon her feast, and said that prayer for her protection, when the end of daylight had obliged him to leave the vine trellises and seek his sleep.

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The footman on the left side of the draped portal of the Chapel Royal lounged uneasily. He was not religious, and he was sickened by the coming and going of these *pretini*. Royal piety did not go with largesse, and it needed the intrigues of a *maîtresse-en-titre* to bring back the happy days; but it was now almost a generation since the Duchess of Florida, with her false ringlets and her little gay bonnet, had been driven austere from the Court. And when the service was completed and he unpadding his calves in the garret dormitory of the palace, dicing for *soldi* with his companions on the bare and unswept floor, he thought with boredom of the City. The stalwart and virtuous peasant maidens were no fit prey, but the railroad would bring from Naples a gayer freight. It always did: it went with progress. Still he would prefer a majordomship in the City, perhaps at the Palazzo Cellamare a Chiaia with its great cool cellars for the summer, the long servants' tables and the wine. He would become respectable then, for he had always guarded himself against the evil eye, and marry, and buy toy balloons for his children on San Gennaro's feast.

The third instance, that of King Ferdinand, is simpler, for his thoughts and acts have gone recorded. His Sicilian Majesty knelt on the heavy prie-dieu with his conscience fairly well at ease. He was a faithful husband, and God's grace had strengthened his will to resist the disturbance of his passions. He was sober and energetic, but here the thought troubled him of what the foreign politicians always said; the accusation of cruelty to his political prisoners, that the state of the cells was disgraceful. Well! it seemed to him that he was generous that they did not die. No criminals were so evil, the poisoners of the mind. He had received from God his high position, and this duty he would fulfil. To Syracuse, his foolish brother, with

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his Tricolour tie-pin and his Liberal opinions, these matters were never clear; but the King knew that he alone kept the wolves at bay from his charge, the people of God.

He had known the evils of the godless revolution, and, as his eyes rested on the Tabernacle, he thought of the altars profaned and the Sacred Hosts lying scattered. This revolution, he knew, would take away God from the children and destroy those innermost sanctuaries, the vows of religion, and he himself had brought back the Carthusians to the Tower of Calabria. It was his hope that his dead first wife would be raised to the altars, and he thought of her trust in God and her firm and calm charity. They accused him of being cunning, a wretched word for a King, and here his conscience pricked him a little; but it was surely caution and kingcraft, and could the dull plebeian lawyers follow that gift of the solitary mind which the thin Bourbon blood had transmitted? He would protect his people still: he would use all weapons. Only in Vienna was the cause of right ascendant, for there alone religion and true kingship blended. His mind went back to the Corpus Christi in that strong city, and he saw again the slow procession, the six cream Spanish horses for each imperial carriage, and the outriders and the Hungarian leopard skins, and then the act which gave its meaning to all this ceremony, the raising of the Sacred Host and the Kings adoring.

It is a misfortune to limit the faculty of appreciation, whether by a sober harnessing of the supernatural or by concentrating deftly on externals. Without some comprehension of the Catholic spirit, it is impossible to understand the Faithful Ages. There have been many Magi, all very human and some disreputable; many Magi, but still one Adoration.

DAVID MATHEW