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CATHOLICITY IN ENGLAND.

Paper Read by Mr. F. W. Russell Before the Members of the Truth Society—The Penal Laws—State of England When the First Relief Act Was Passed—Progress Made Since.

As promised in our last issue we give herewith the paper read by Mr. F. W. Russell before the members of the Catholic Truth Society at their meeting held at their Hall on Water street on Monday of last week. The routine business having been transacted the president (Mr. A. H. Kennedy) called on Mr. Russell who spoke as follows:

At the last meeting of our society, held a week ago, I was asked by resolution to prepare a paper to read here this evening, and with much diffidence and many misgivings as to my ability to do justice to the occasion, I, being pressed and willing to sacrifice my own feelings for what the majority might think to be in the true interests of the society, finally accepted the invitation. When I did so I knew full well the difficulty which would confront me at the very outset, viz., the selection of a subject, and truly my fears in this respect were more than realized. However, after much casting about I decided that I would, with your permission, try to entertain you for a very brief period with a few reflections on a subject which is very near and dear to my heart, namely the state of Catholicity in my native country, England, and in considering this subject I shall ask you to bear with me while, in the first place, I indulge in a hurried and necessarily incomplete historical retrospect, from which we will pass on to a brief review of the present state of affairs, winding up with a short consideration of the points involved in the momentous question which is so often asked, and which meets with so many different answers: "Will England ever return to the Catholic faith?" During the past few months this subject has been widely discussed in England and many of the leaders of Catholic thought there have dealt with it, and in plain language given their views to the public. We shall therefore have the advantage of considering it from the standpoint of their published writings and speeches, and I will ask you to bear in mind, that I shall endeavor not only to give you my own ideas, but so far as it is possible within the limits of my paper, a faithful presentment of the opinions of those who must be accepted as the most reliable authorities.

In the first place then it is my intention to ask you to go back with me in spirit something over one hundred years, or, to be more exact, to the year 1778, when the first Relief Act to the Catholics of England was passed. For more than two centuries all the Penal laws enacted against Catholics in England had been pressing with the utmost severity and cruelty on the remnant of the faithful, who amidst all these trials preserved and handed down from generation to generation the priceless legacy of the Catholic faith; and in order that the position of affairs at this period may be properly understood, it is necessary that we should have before us a brief outline of what the Catholics had been passing through in the way of persecution for Christ's sake. It was in the year 1535 that the Papal supremacy was by law of the English king abolished, and thenceforth any one who defended it or refused the oath declaring the king to be the head of the church was guilty of high treason, and condemned as a traitor to be hanged, drawn and quartered. To this act the Catholics in England owe many of their glorious martyrs. It was high treason for any one to become a Catholic or for any Catholic priest to land in England. All laymen educated in foreign colleges, who did not return to England and acknowledge the king to be the head of God's church in England were guilty of the same crime. Every Catholic in England refusing to embrace the new religion had to pay to the king twenty pounds a month, and two thirds of his property was confiscated. Every Catholic was required to receive the sacrament in the Protestant church and his refusal was punished by a fine of £20 for the first year, £40 for the second year and £60 until he conformed. Every Catholic who harbored, relieved or had

in his service a person who did not go to the Protestant church for a whole month was fined £10 for every month. Every Catholic man that married a woman not an heiress was fined £100; if the woman was an heiress her Catholic husband could neither inherit or receive any benefit from her property. No Catholic woman could have dower in the lands of her husband, whether Protestant or Catholic. Every Catholic parent refusing for one month to have his child baptized in the Protestant church was fined £100 for every month's delay. For every Catholic buried elsewhere than in Protestant ground and with Protestant rites a penalty of £20 was inflicted. Every Catholic widow who did not conform to the established religion and receive the sacrament therein within a year of her husband's death forfeited two-thirds of her jointure and all her husband's property, whether realty or personally. Every married Catholic woman was compelled to receive the Protestant sacrament of the Lord's Supper within three months after her being discovered to be a Catholic, or suffer perpetual imprisonment until she did so; but if her husband paid to the Crown £10 for every month she refused and surrendered to the king one-third of his estate she could remain at liberty. King James I is said to have received in fines in this way no less than £36,000 a year—a sum equal to about \$400,000 to-day. No Catholic could be trustee, administrator, guardian for minors, attorney or doctor, and the Protestant husbands of Catholic women labored under the same disability unless all their children above nine years of age and all their servants conformed to the newly established religion. No Catholic was allowed to go five miles from home on any business whatever without the written license of four justices of the peace and that of the Protestant bishop and the lord lieutenant of the country. If he did so he forfeited all his goods and chattels, money and property for life; if these altogether were not of the value of £20 he had no alternative but to turn Protestant or quit the country and go into exile for life. No Catholic was allowed into the king's presence under the penalty of £100 for each offence; and later a further penalty was added which disabled him from holding any office of profit or trust, civil or military within the realm, from sitting in either house of parliament, from receiving a legacy, or taking any legal proceedings to recover his lost property or reputation, the fine for every such offence being £500. No Catholic was allowed to stay within ten miles of London under a penalty of £100. His house could be searched any hour of day or night for "Popish books, relics, pixes, beads, crucifixes, pictures," and when found they were to be burnt or defaced. For a priest to say Mass the fine was at first 200 marks and imprisonment until he paid the fine. Later on by a subsequent act passed in the reign of "Good Queen Bess" any Catholic priest or bishop convicted either of saying Mass or of exercising any part of his sacred ministry had to suffer death and the reward of £100 was given to the infamous spy who gave information where any such bishop or priest could be found. Every Catholic who heard Mass was subject to a fine of 100 marks and a year's imprisonment. Catholic books were strictly forbidden either to be kept, read or printed. Any person bringing into England "Agnus Dei, crosses, beads or such like vain, or superstitious things blessed by the Pope," and any person receiving or wearing such things, was condemned to death and all his property confiscated. Any person bringing into England from beyond the seas or selling any Popish primers, catechisms, missals, breviaries, lives of saints, or rosaries, was fined 40 shillings, and the article was to be burnt.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION was entirely disallowed. A Catholic schoolmaster was liable to perpetual imprisonment, and for every day he had taught a fine of 40 shillings was imposed, and he was required to conform to the established church. Whilst Catholic parents were not allowed to educate their children at home, they were debarred from sending them abroad or sending an alms to the support of any foreign college. Any Catholic sending

his child for education abroad was fined £100 and forfeited all his goods, and such child was disqualified from inheriting any property in England. No Catholic could enter parliament without subscribing a declaration denying Transubstantiation and the Papal supremacy, and asserting that invocation and adoration of the Virgin Mary and the other saints and the sacrifice of the Mass were idolatrous and superstitious. By the Corporation and Tests acts no Catholic could hold any office in the realm without abjuring his religion. Catholics were not only debarred from public life in England, they were also forbidden to take service in foreign countries. No child was allowed to succeed to his Catholic father's estate without turning Protestant, and if the eldest son refused to apostatize the estate went to the next son on that infamous condition. All legacies left to Catholic priests for the support or building of Catholic colleges, abbeys, schools, churches, convents, etc., were confiscated by the king. In a word the exercise of the Catholic religion was absolutely prohibited, and the Protestant religion was made compulsory on every subject of the realm, or as the Lord Chancellor expressed it: "Catholics were not presumed to breathe in the empire without the command of the Government." After experiencing the full force of more than two centuries of such laws as these it is not surprising that the year 1778 when, as I have said,

THE FIRST OF THE RELIEF ACTS was passed, found the Catholics in England reduced to a mere handful, in fact, it is astonishing when we know with what severity the Penal laws were enforced to the very letter, that any should have been found remaining faithful to the ancient religion. We read, however, that it is probable they numbered at this time about fifty thousand, and that there were so many may surely almost be regarded as a proof of the divinity of the church and her imperishable nature. They were a people without churches, who practised their religious duties and handed down the legacy of the Catholic faith to their children at the risk of their lives, and who were ministered to by priests who visited them in secret and with a price set upon their heads; yet there is no doubt that it was their heroic example and their beautiful, self-sacrificing lives, that gradually forced, as it were, the government to strike the chains of persecution from their limbs and set them free. And now, skipping over the intervening years, let us for a few moments consider by way of contrast the position of Catholics in England at the present day; what amount of liberty they enjoy; what freedom for the practice of their holy religion, and what progress, if any, has been made during the past century. In the first place we may truly rejoice that the sword of persecution has been returned to its scabbard, and if English Catholics have not in their native land absolute fair play it must be admitted that they have at least a very large measure of liberty and justice granted them. They are honored and respected by the large mass of their separated brethren, they are receiving more and more every year evidence of a desire on the part of the legislature to consult their feelings and respect their consciences, and, be the motives what they may, the fact remains that Catholics in England are now treated with more consideration than they have been for three hundred years. There are a few would-be persecutors remaining, but it is very difficult now-a-days to get up a cry against the Catholics in England. In fact, it would not pay to persecute them nor attempt it, and it may be that to this must be attributed the fact that salaried slanderers of the Catholic religion, who seem to be in so much demand in some English-speaking communities, are daily in less request in England. It would not pay because Catholics there are more numerous than they were and not only have they a position in the country but they represent a great power as well. Like the early Christians they are to be met with every where, in the army, navy, at the bar, on various governing bodies, in the medical and legal professions, in the front ranks of science and art, on the press, in parliament, and in the cabinet. Whether considered in their social position, in their learning and intellectual power, in their moral worth, in their steadfastness to principles,

THEY COMPARE FAVORABLY with any other class of people in the country; so that the result is that Catholicity is daily rising in the estimation of the people of the country, and Catholics, who live up to their religion as most of them do, are regarded with honor as sincere and estimable Christians. To sum up, we may say that if some of the English martyrs of old were to rise from their sepulchres, and visit the land of their love, they would find the church growing year by year in number, in power, in grandeur; they would see the land covered with churches and chapels, schools and institutions almost as of old; they would admire a great hierarchy, active, energetic, vigilant, a race of men whose statesmanship tells of the mould in which they have been cast; and they would find, as I have said, Catholics holding high places in every honorable sphere of action. To-day the Catholics are represented by a Cardinal-Archbishop, and fourteen bishops. Where a little over a century ago there were no colleges, no convents, no religious houses for men, there are now no less than twenty of the first, four hundred of the second, and two hundred of the third. In London alone there are to-day 112 Catholic churches, whilst in the provinces every Catholic community has its Catholic church, the number in Great Britain being between 1,630 and 1,640, and the priests ministering in them number close upon 2,000. Priests and religious men and women are no longer afraid to shew themselves in public, and in political matters, whilst the Catholics of England are not yet able to elect members of parliament themselves, they are so thoroughly united, so well organized, so zealous, have such an excellent press, and so many earnest friends and sympathisers amongst Protestants that they are able to turn the scale in many a constituency; in fact, it is said, they are sufficiently influential to decide the result of a general election. To-day the number of Catholics in England is little short of two millions, a body taken on the whole, second to none in the world in their loyalty to the church, in their appreciation of the inestimable treasure of the Catholic faith, or more zealous for the promotion and the extension of the interests of our holy religion. Bearing these points in mind we may now go on to consider briefly the question

"WILL ENGLAND EVER RETURN TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH?"

There are some good people, and they have been very much in evidence in the Catholic press lately, who, evidently jumping at conclusions they form from the reception given the Pope's letter to the English people, seem to entertain the hope that the nation will return to Catholicism in a sudden and unexpected way, but the leading Catholic minds of the country hold that if England is to be converted we must expect nothing out of the ordinary, nothing sudden, nothing outside of the common methods of Divine grace, nor inconsistent with the free will of the people, but a slow, gradual and steady march of faith and charity throughout the length and breadth of the land. As a matter of fact those who have made a study of this matter point out that there are many obstacles to the progress of the truth in England. Prejudice not many years ago was considered the greatest of all, but that has of late years been to a great extent overcome. The greater knowledge which the Protestants now have of their Catholic fellow-citizens and are continually gaining has already removed a mass of suspicions, distrusts, and dislikes, and has even inspired confidence in their entire honesty and sincerity. The extravagant notions about the Catholics and the doctrines of the Catholic church which the "Reformation" in bad faith began to propagate, and which the children and grand children of the "Reformers" believed in and propagated, no doubt many of them in good faith, for upwards of three centuries, have been found out to be untrue, ridiculous, slanderous and impossible. The consequence is Catholics are now no longer looked upon as foreigners in England, and bigotry is now in that country almost universally considered as a mark of ignorance and vulgarity. I do not, of course, mean to say that bigotry is actually dead, for bigotry is the unhappy child of ignor-

ance and uncharitableness, and the reign of knowledge and of charity is still far from being universal in England; but bigotry is certainly gradually dying as ingloriously as it deserves to die. Prejudice is not now, therefore, the great obstacle to the return of the English people as a whole to the faith of their forefathers, but

THE TWO REALLY GREAT BARRIERS

in the opinion of leading Catholics now-a-days are undoubtedly infidelity and indifferentism. The latter is so far probably the most widely extended obstacle of the two, but, sad to relate, without doubt infidelity is gaining a strong foothold in England. The refusal on the part of the mass of Englishmen to obey any authority in religious affairs is without doubt the source of this evil, and though a wretched infidel may now number but a small proportion of the population, yet it is certain that year after year will chronicle a further increase. The people have, as a body, already disestablished the Anglican church from their hearts, and many millions of them are drifting into the worst forms, if not of actual unbelief, at least of indifferentism. These being the admitted two principal obstacles which bar the way to the country's quick return to the Catholic faith, have we any hopes which should be stronger than our fears? All Catholic writers and speakers who touch on the matter agree that one strong hope may be founded, in spite of what has been said regarding infidelity and indifferentism, on the deep Christian character of the English people. For nearly a thousand years the Catholic church was the blood and heart of England, her laws, customs, traditions, seas, universities, her glorious past, her kings and queens, were part and parcel of the church's power, and the whole land was bathed in a sea of supernatural light. And, now, although on the surface there is a great change, down deep below, as our Holy Father pointed out in his recent letter, the old spirit lives and protects and will—we may confidently hope—ultimately save the people of England. It may be added to this that the great mass of the actively religious Englishmen and women are weary of the dull, monotonous, cold and lifeless thing called Protestantism, as shewn by the delight with which they embrace the practices of Ritualism, in which they are able to imitate, at times very closely, some of our customs, and by means of which great truths are happily preached to thousands who otherwise never would have listened. Then, again, is not the present power and growth of the Catholic body as compared with the past a foundation and a hope of future glory? whilst last, but not least, for this, in the estimation of all Catholic leaders, must be one of our greatest sources of hope—

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

is the seed of the church, and the great English martyrs—those who suffered such terrible persecution and who after giving up all their earthly possessions willingly laid down their lives rather than obey the tyrant or his inhuman laws, will assuredly avenge their name and their blood, and through their intercession for their beloved country, the time will come again when the land will quickly bear fruit and the harvest will be plentiful. And, now, Mr. Chairman and brothers, let me, in conclusion, take the liberty of pointing out what I consider should be the duty of each one of us in regard to the matter of which I have attempted to treat to-night, and which is of so much vital importance not only to my dear native land and to my fellow-countrymen, but also I firmly believe, to the whole of that part of Christendom in which the English language is spoken. It is our duty, then, I hold, to comply with

OUR HOLY FATHER'S WISH

and pray and labor for the restoration of England to Christian unity, and therefore to the Catholic faith. Let our prayer be one of thanksgiving to God that the old days of persecution in England have passed never to return, and let our prayer of thanksgiving be united to this prayer of supplication that God, declining to punish the grand children for the crimes perpetrated by their forefathers in times past against the church, will shew upon them his greatest proof of love—the treasure of the Catholic