

The Oxford Movement



THE Oxford movement which took place in England during the early years of the Victorian era, achieved unexpected results and became world-wide in its influence. The movement proper or the stage that is known as Tractarian lasted for a period of twelve years. It began with Keble's famous sermon on National Apostasy in 1833 and ended with Newman's defection in 1845. But the movement went on under other leaders and men, it gradually grew and gathered fresh strength until it vivified and transformed the English Church. The chief causes of the movement were as follows:

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked an epoch in religious thought. The Deism of the preceding century had induced a deadness in all spiritual matters. The church of England presented a picture of utter worldliness and corruption. Religion was a little better than cold morality; a great reaction was therefore inevitable. The greatest difficulty seemed to lie in the search for authority; some saw the divine in persons, places and things while others regarded all nature as God. But with the birth of the Oxford movement in England came the appeal to the authority of the Catholic Church. It was not, however, until Newman determined to force upon the public in a way which could not be offset, the article of the Creed, "I believe in one, holy Catholic and apostolic church," that the movement began. His effort as well as the efforts of the other leaders was to make the church of England more truly Catholic of those elements of Catholicism already inherent to her constitution.

The immediate cause of the movement was the suppression of ten Irish bishoprics by the Reform Government in 1833. This state of affairs induced a number of Oxford professors to start a reform movement. A short time afterwards appeared the publication of the "Tracts for the Times." They were short but concise statements bearing upon the polity worship and doctrine of the church. The Oxford tracts were therefore the motive of the movement and its leaders were soon known as tractarians. Concurrent with these issues of the tracts were Newman's four o'clock lectures on the Via Media. Many men read the tracts and listened to the sermons; thus was an atmosphere created in which were weighed and discussed the great issues of the hour. To-