

MEETS ENGLISH CATHOLICS

Dr. Pace, of the Catholic University Tells of the Blackburn Conference of the English Catholic Truth Society which he Attended. His Impression of the Good Work Done.

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The Catholic Truth Society of England held its conference this year at Blackburn, Sept. 24 and 28. It was the eighteenth annual meeting of the society and it attracted representative Catholics from all parts of England. The presence of His Grace, the Archbishop of Westminster, the active share in the proceedings taken by the bishop of Salford and other members of the hierarchy and the discussion of papers read by eminent scholars both clerical and lay, showed that the occasion was one of great importance to the Church in England.

An interesting programme had been prepared by the secretaries, Mr. James Britten, K.S.G., and Rev. W. A. Colgan; and arrangements had been made by local committees for the reception and entertainment of those who attended the conference. Two days were occupied by the regular business sessions, and the closing day was devoted to excursions in the neighborhood of Blackburn.

The Catholic Truth Society, originally established by the late Cardinal Vaughan during his rectorship at Mill Hill College, owes its present organization to the zeal and energy of its secretaries who have devoted themselves to the work for the last twenty years. The society aims "to disseminate among Catholics small and cheap devotional works to assist the uneducated poor to a better knowledge of their religion; to spread among Protestants information about Catholic truth and to promote the circulation of good, cheap and popular Catholic books." With these objects in view it is not surprising that the society should have received the approval and support of ecclesiastical authority and the recognition of the Holy See. It has also served to unite, for a common purpose, the intellectual and moral forces of the clergy, the religious orders and the laity. With a membership of about 1,500 it may rightly be considered the foremost Catholic organization in the Country.

The leaders and members of the society have realized that the press is the best means of attaining their object. They have carried the truth to the people through a large number of publications which are sold at a nominal price. Thus, in one series, there have been issued fifty-nine volumes at one shilling each; and there is a whole library of penny pamphlets and leaflets. These publications, large and small, are decidedly up-to-date. They deal with questions of actual interest, thus placing in the hands of the people a prompt reply to the erroneous statements regarding the Church which are so freely circulated by active opponents. Each of these publications, moreover, is the work of a writer whose ability is recognized. The leading scholars of England gladly contribute to this popular form of English literature. The result is that though they have to struggle against tremendous odds in point of number, influence and means, they, nevertheless, secure a hearing, and, to a great extent, counteract such movements as the Rationalist Propaganda.

The interest taken in the work of the society, not only by its members, but also by the whole Catholic body, is partly due to the fact that the conferences are held now in one place, now in another. Since 1888, the society has met in fourteen different towns. Its proceedings are thus brought to the attention of the people in various sections, and are noticed by the press, both secular and Catholic.

The choice of Blackburn for this year's conference was peculiarly happy. The town has a history which is full of interest for Catholics, and which goes back to the Saxon days. Here St. Edmund, King of England, was martyred by the Danes. Alfred the Great claimed a fee from Blackburn as a Royal Manor; and St. Edward the Confessor actually received from his Manor of Blackburn an annual income of thirty-two pounds.

In the hard days of the Reformation Blackburn had its full share of suffering and more than one of those who died for the faith belonged to the town or the district. The first resident priest in Blackburn after the Reformation came there in 1781. In 1819, there were 1200 Catholics in Blackburn and the neighboring villages. At present there are in the "Hundred" of Blackburn 65,000 Catholics with forty-three

churches and 102 schools. Near by is the famous Stonyhurst College, which celebrated its centenary in 1894, though its records go back to 1592, the year of the foundation of St. Omer. Whalley Abbey, Mitton church, and Houghton Tower are all within easy reach of Blackburn and are full of historical associations.

The programme of this conference included papers on "Catholic Missions" by Bishop Nolan and Rev. T. Jackson; "Our Duty as Citizens" by Miss Zanetti; "Boarding Out," Miss Leigh; "Rescue Work on Family Lines," Mr. Norman Potter; "Socialism," Mr. Devas; "The Rights of Minorities," Rev. Joseph Rickaby, S.J.; "The Catholic Truth Society," Mrs. V. M. Crawford.

From this list it is clear that the society is giving special attention to problems connected with the social work of the Church. The discussion, in fact, which followed the reading of the several papers showed that the Catholics of England are keenly alive to the importance of such questions. And it was encouraging to see how deeply the lay members were interested in this practical side of the Church's activity.

The paper, however, which possessed the greatest significance was that which Archbishop Bourne read on "The Education Question." Those who are familiar with the educational movement in England during the last few years will realize the importance attached by all parties, Catholic and Protestant alike, to the utterance of His Grace of Westminster. And those who heard him at Blackburn must have been impressed by the attitude of calmness and the breadth of view with which he surveyed the situation.

In the annual report submitted by the secretaries of the society, there is a rather significant paragraph under the heading, "A Catholic News-Agency." It is there pointed out that one of the principal causes of the prejudice against Catholics is the misrepresentation of the Church by the press. Some of the fables are home made; others come from abroad. The needed antidote has been supplied by the Catholic Press Bureau in Germany and France, which furnishes the Catholic papers with accurate information and runs to the ground each false statement as it appears. The work is to be taken up in England by the Truth Society and there can be no doubt as to the good that will thus be accomplished. The press will thus become not only a source of fresh and interesting news, but also an auxiliary of the Church in the field of popular education.

[Rev.] E. A. PACE.

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ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND HIS PROTESTANT ADMIRERS

The London "Saturday Review" (Oct. 14), commenting on a recently published book, "Homes of the First Franciscans," by Beryl D. de Selincourt, gives expression to some thoughts which are strikingly like those which Catholics entertain on the same subject. "We confess," says our London contemporary, "that we are getting not a little weary of the making of these many books on St. Francis, by people devoid of the scholarship, devoid of the understanding and imagination, which could bring them into real touch with the Middle Ages. M. Sabatier is in a measure responsible for this plague of books. He started a fanciful St. Francis which has taken the fancy of a host of people who revel in the phantasy of the Middle Age, but have no stomach for its realities."

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That is an excellent stroke. The sentimental admiration of St. Francis which M. Sabatier started, which is very popular with Mr. Sabatier's fellow-Protestants, but which never gets any closer than admiration—never steps, for instance, from admiration to imitation—is something with which Catholics may be pardoned for having little sympathy. In fact, if we lose patience with it once in a while, it is hardly to be wondered at. St. Francis was a Catholic, a common-sense Catholic, a faithful Catholic. Our Protestant friends, who have, within the past few years, established a sort of Franciscan cult, would make of the good saint a misty figure, stripped entirely of his sturdy Catholic character.

But let us see what the London "Saturday Review" has to say further of the book under discussion. It praises the author for having hit upon a vital

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quiring the services of no fewer than 70 blowers. Judging from this, the Winchester organ came from a German model, for in that country, until much later, the wind was provided by a species of treadmill arrangement where on the blowers tripped a bar, each working two pairs of bellows, like those of our smith, with their feet.