

# The Catholic Register.

"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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## TO THE ENGLISH PEOPLE

Leo XIII. to the English People  
Who Seek the Kingdom of  
Christ in the Unity of  
the Faith, Health and  
Peace in the Lord.

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION.

Sometime since, in an Apostolic letter to princes and peoples, We addressed the English in common with other nations, but We have greatly desired to do this by a special letter and thus give to the illustrious English race a token of Our sincere affection. This wish has been kept alive by the hearty good will We have always felt towards your people whose great deeds in older times the history of the Church declares. We were yet more moved by not infrequent conversations with your countrymen, who testified to the kindly feeling of the English towards Us personally, and above all to their anxiety for peace and eternal salvation through unity of Faith.

God is Our witness how keen is Our wish that some efforts of Ours might tend to assist and further the great work of obtaining the reunion of Christendom; and We render thanks to God, who has so far prolonged Our life, that We may make an endeavor in this direction.

But since, as it is but right, We place Our confidence of a happy issue principally and above all in the wonderful power of God's grace, We have with full consideration determined to invite all Englishmen, who glory in the Christian name, to this same work, and We exhort them to lift up their hearts to God with Us, to fix their trust in Him, and to seek from Him the help necessary in such a matter by assiduous diligence in holy prayer.

The love and care of the Roman Pontiffs for England has been traditional from the days of Our Holy predecessor, Gregory the Great. Religion and humanity generally, and especially the English nation, owe him a deep debt of gratitude. Although prevented by the Divine call to yet higher duty from himself undertaking the Apostolic labor "of converting the Anglo-Saxons, as he had proposed to do whilst a monk, his mind remained intent upon this great and salutary design" (Joann. Diac. in vita ejus) nor did he rest until it was accomplished. For from that monastic family which he had formed in learning and holiness of life in his own home he sent a chosen band under the leadership of Augustine to be the messengers of grace, wisdom and civilization to those who were still buried in paganism. And relying as he did on divine help, his hope grew stronger under difficulty, until at length he saw his work crowned with success. He himself writes of this in tones of triumphant joy in reply to St. Augustine who had sent him the news of the happy result.

"Glory be to God on high and on earth peace to men of good will. To Christ be the glory in whose death We live; by whose weakness We are strong, is the love of whom We seek in Britain these brethren We know

not, by whose mercy We have found those whom knowing not We have sought. Who can tell what gladness filled the hearts of all here to know that the English race, by the workings of the grace of the Almighty God, and by your labors, My brother, has been illuminated by the light of Our holy faith, which expels the darkness of error, and has with free mind trodden under foot the idols to which aforesaid they were subject in foolish fear" (Epistles). And congratulating Lillibert, King of Kent, and Bertha his Queen, in a letter full of affection in that they imitated Helena of illustrious memory and Constantine the devout Emperor, he strengthens them and their people with salutary admonitions. Nor did he cease for the rest of his life to foster and develop their faith in instructions dictated by holy prudence. Thus Christianity, which the Church had conveyed to Britain, and spread and defended there against rising heresy, after having been blotted out by the invasion of heathen races, was now, by the care of Gregory, happily restored.

Having resolved to address this letter to the English people, We recall at once those great and glorious events in the annals of the Church, which must surely be remembered by them with gratitude. Moreover, it is noteworthy that this love and solicitude of Gregory was inherited by the Pontiffs who succeeded him. This is shown by their constant interpositions in providing worthy pastors and capable teachers in learning, both human and divine, by their helpful counsels, and by their affording in abundant measure whatever was necessary for establishing and developing that rising Church. And very soon was such care rewarded, for in no other case, perhaps, did the faith take root so quietly, nor was so keen nor intense a love manifested toward the See of Peter. That the English race was in those days devoted to the centre of Christian unity divinely constituted in the Roman Bishops, and that in the course of ages men of all ranks were bound to them by ties of loyalty, are facts too abundantly and plainly testified by the pages of history to admit of doubt or question.

But, in the storms which devastated Catholicity throughout Europe in the 16th century, England, too, received a grievous wound; for it was first unhappily wrenched from communion with the Holy See, and then was bereft of the Holy Faith in which for long years it had rejoiced and found liberty. It was a sad defection, and our predecessors, while lamenting it in their earnest love, made every prudent effort to put an end to it and to mitigate the many evils consequent upon it. It would take long, and it is not necessary to detail the sedulous and increasing care taken by our predecessors in those circumstances. But by far the most valuable and effective assistance they afforded lies in their having so repeatedly urged on the faithful the practice of special prayers to God that He would look with compassion on England. In the number of those who devoted themselves to this special work of charity there were some venerable and saintly men, especially St. Charles Borromeo and St. Philip Neri, and, in the last century, Paul, the founder of the Society of the Passion of Christ, who, not without a

certain Divine impulse, it is said, was constant in supplication "at the Throne of Divine Grace." And this all the more earnestly that the times seemed less favorable to the realization of his hopes. We, indeed, long before being raised to the Supreme Pontificate, were amply sensible also to the importance of holy prayer offered for this cause, and heartily approved of it. For, as We gladly recall, at the time when We were Nuncio in Belgium, becoming acquainted with an Englishman, Ignatius Spencer, himself a devout son of the same St. Paul of the Cross, he laid before us the prospect he had already initiated for extending a society of pious people to pray for the return of the English nation to the Church.

We can hardly say how cordially We entered into this design, wholly inspired by faith and charity, and how We helped forward this cause, anticipating that the English Church would obtain abundant assistance thereby. Although the fruits of Divine grace obtained by prayer had previously manifested themselves, yet as that holy league spread they became notorious. Very many were led to follow the Divine call, and among them not a few men of distinguished eminence, and many, too, who in doing so had to make personal and heroic sacrifices. Moreover, there was a wonderful drawing of hearts and minds towards Catholic faith and practice, which rose in public respect and esteem, and many a long cherished prejudice yielded to the force of truth.

Looking at all this, We do not doubt that the united and humble supplications of so many to God are hastening the time of further manifestations of His merciful designs towards the English people when "the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified." Our confidence is strengthened by observing the legislative and other measures which, if they do not perhaps directly, still do indirectly, help forward the end We have in view, by ameliorating the condition of the people at large and by giving effect to the laws of justice and charity.

We have heard with singular joy of the great attention which is being given in England to the solution of the social question, of which We have treated with much care in Our Encyclicals, and of the establishment of benefit and similar societies, whereby on a legal basis the condition of the working classes is improved. And we have heard of the vigorous and persevering efforts made to preserve for the people at large an education based on religious teaching, than which there is no firmer foundation for the instruction of youth and the maintenance of domestic life and civil polity, of the zeal and energy with which so many engage in forwarding opportune measures for the repression of degrading vice and intemperance, of societies formed among the young men of the upper classes for the promotion of purity of morals and for sustaining the honor due to womanhood. For, alas, in regard to the Christian virtue of continence, pernicious views are subtly creeping in, as though it were believed that a man was not as strictly bound by the precept as a woman. Moreover, reflecting men are deeply concerned at the spread of Rationalism and Materialism, and We ourselves have often lifted up Our voice to denounce these

evils, which weaken and paralyze not religion only, but the springs of thought and action. The highest credit is due to those who fearlessly and unceasingly proclaim the rights of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the laws and teachings given by Him for the establishment of the Divine Kingdom upon earth, in which teachings alone strength, wisdom and safety are to be found. The various and abundant manifestations of care for the aged, for orphans, for incurables, for the destitute, for reformatories, and other forms of charity, all which the Church as a tender mother inaugurated and from the earliest times has ever inculcated as a special duty, are evidences of the spirit which animates you. Nor can we omit to mention specially the strict observance of Sunday and the general spirit of respect for the Holy Scriptures. Everyone knows the powers and resources of the British nation and the civilizing influence which, with the spread of liberty, accompanies its commercial prosperity even to the most remote regions. But worthy and noble in themselves as are all these varied manifestations of activity, Our soul is raised to the origin of all power and the perennial source of all good things, to God our Heavenly Father Most Beneficent. For the labors of man, whether public or private will not attain to their full efficacy without appeal to God in prayer and without the Divine Blessing. "For happy is that people whose God is the Lord." For the mind of the Christian should be so turned and fixed that he places and rests the chief hopes of his undertakings in the Divine help obtained by prayer, whereby human effort is supernaturalized and the desire of doing good, as though quickened by a heavenly fire, manifests itself in vigorous and serviceable actions. In this power of prayer God has not merely dignified man, but with infinite mercy has given him a protector and help in the time of need, ready at hand to all, easy, and void of effect to no one who has recourse to it. "Prayer is our powerful weapon, our great protection, our storehouse, our port of refuge, our place of safety."

But if the prayer of the righteous man rightly avail so much with God even in earthly concerns, how much more will it not avail one who is destined to an eternal existence for obtaining those spiritual blessings which Christ has procured for mankind by "the sacrament of His mercy." For He "who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption," in addition to what He taught, instituted and effected, gave also for this purpose the salutary precept of prayer and in His great goodness confirmed it by His example.

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