

THE LAY APOSTOLATE IN ENGLAND

Writing to his Grace Archbishop Redwood, Mr. Vernon C. Redwood (London) gives the following interesting account of the latest phase of Catholic religious activity in England:—

I have been fighting for the Crucifix. The members of the Catholic Evidence Guild were frightened, but I persevered, and Mrs. Eyston (Henry Vavasour's sister) gave a beautiful carved wooden crucifix about 2ft 6in across and about 5ft long—must have cost about £12 or £15—also a platform, so I had a three-legged stand about 10 or 11 feet high, made for it; and when we officially opened, I erected the crucifix in Hyde Park—the first time, it is said, for 400 years—as our banner, having some of our members near to protect it. No doubt we should have been refused if we asked permission, but I determined to trust implicitly to Almighty God, believing all would go right. A few extreme bigots yelled out at it and shouted "Idolatry!" and tried to upset our meeting, but failed, and all went well. The next Sunday they tried again, came close to us, and told their crowd to pull it down, but did not succeed. For about three more Sundays the opposition continued now and then. Thank God the crucifix will be now our banner, and I feel certain, in a few years, thousands of platforms will be spoken from under that banner, and all will teach the principles of the true Church, and this country, as well as others, will gradually come to be Catholic. The Jesuits, Dominicans, and members of other Orders that I have spoken to believe this. In the highways and byways God's truths will be taught. I have determined to open all meetings with prayer. Some of our men were in favor, others against; however it is now settled that we open with "Come Holy Ghost," the "Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father," and finish with the "Apostles' Creed"; and now the Protestants (many of them) say it with us. I believed that once we were speaking with the crucifix for our banner, and prayers to start and finish with, we should commence to get converts, and I have not been disappointed. We go on till dark, in the long evenings till after 10 p.m., and now till between 8 and 9. Then they come round for advice. Last Sunday week I opened at 3 p.m. and spoke for over an hour and a quarter on what the Catholic Church is and what she teaches. A grand crowd. I was followed by several other speakers. Then two of our men arrived from Brockwell Park—Mr. Syman and Mr. Moreley, and the former went on till after 7. As it was a fine evening, I decided, there being a good crowd, to give another lecture on the "Marks of the Church." I spoke for over an hour, I think the best effort I have yet made. As I walked away from the platform, a young man came up to me and said, "I am a Protestant, but after your discourse I am going to become a Catholic"; and he is now reading our books, which we give to many inquirers. He is most impatient to become a Catholic, and we sent him for instructions to the clergy. On the following Wednesday evening, just before our meeting, I was saying a prayer (before going to the Hall) in Westminster Cathedral, and a man came up and said, "I was at your lecture last Sunday, and I am a Lutheran, but now I want to be a Catholic; can I come with you to where you study on Wednesday evenings?" I said, "Well, it is not yet settled whether Protestants can attend our study classes, one way or another; so you may come this time." And now he is being instructed along with many others. So you can judge that our work has already begun to be felt, and some bad Catholics listening to us have become reconciled to the Church, who had not been to their duty for years. We teach, and do not enter into controversy, and allow no one on our platforms but those who are licensed. We do not criticise other religions, but speak straight out on all the principles of the Church, morals, etc. How the poor people thirst for knowledge! Not satisfied after we close down, they gather round us and ask questions,

till we are tired out. Oh, what a glorious work it is for God!

Every week our guild grows. A Mr. Bartlett gave us another crucifix, worth about £15, carved oak; and yesterday Lady Vavasour gave me another, and we are able from subscriptions to pay our way, and have now good platforms—portable ones—a patent. These platforms are very light, can be taken anywhere, and the speaker is three feet from the ground and can command his audience well. For big crowds in Hyde Park we shall have one made even higher. Two of our men have been to a small town named Ware, on Saturday afternoons for a few weeks. When we have the men and women in sufficient numbers, we shall have in big centres men and women speakers out every evening. The Cardinal has approved of women lecturers or speakers. The lay apostles will be licensed before they can speak, and must be obedient, and the Ordinary of the Diocese is president and can remove anyone. So we are governed by the Church. Our constitution is approved by the Cardinal.

Recently we had our first general guild meeting, presided over by Cardinal Bourne. It was a great success. His Eminence was very pleased, and said our progress was remarkable, and he asked the clergy of London to help us in the work. Father Bernard Vaughan would have spoken, but was engaged in the north. He wrote a beautiful letter to us and said he deeply regretted being unable to attend and speak. But we had another Jesuit, a Father Pollen, I think, was the name; and two Dominican Fathers—Pope and McNabb, two noted men, and they both said that this work, if earnestly supported, would be the means of making the truths of the Catholic Church known, of breaking down prejudice and of bringing the country back to the Faith, and that lay apostles or catechists, would do it. At the meeting before the general meeting I was elected Master of the Guild for the ensuing year. It is a great honor to be allowed to teach the truths of our glorious Faith, and every week I impress upon our members the necessity of leading very holy lives, to be fitted for the work. That is all-important, or we shall never have our work blessed by Almighty God.

The atheists in Hyde Park a few Sundays ago said that if there was any religion it was the Platform with the Crucifix, because if one listened to us we did not abuse others, but taught what the Catholic Church teaches, and that the Catholic religion had been doing so for 2000 years, that no other religion had any unity or authority. A naval doctor came and said to me, "I am going to be a Catholic, as your lectures have convinced me that the Catholic Church has authority—no other Church has." Dozens of questions are asked us on many subjects, and so far, thank God, we have been able to answer them all. The atheists and Protestant Alliance used to bother us, but now do not trouble us much. Some of our lectures are on subjects such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc.; but they are never so well attended as the lectures on the Church. The bulk of the people believe in God. One of the principal atheists is now reading one of the best works on Apologetics, and often comes and listens to us. We have now created a position of respect, and, no matter what insulting remarks extremists make, we always control ourselves. About 100yds or less from where we speak is the spot where a great number of Catholics suffered death for their faith. A slab is inserted near the street where the scaffold used to be (Tyburn), and near the spot is a Convent of Perpetual Adoration, where there are many relics of those that were put to death.

We are going to make a big effort to get a good number of speakers ready for the work as soon as possible. It is so hard now on account of the war. We want hundreds of speakers; there is unlimited work to be done. I am convinced it is the best way to convert this country to its ancient Faith."

(To be continued.)

Claude Ring Portrait Photographer, specialises in ARTIST PROOFS, finished in Sepia and in Natural Colors.

STEWART DAWSON'S BUILDINGS (take Elevator), CHRISTCHURCH.

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