

"Unplanned and Undesired"

MR. BELLOC ON THE CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION.

The people of England had no intention of having a breach with Rome. The change was unplanned and undesired.

Anne Boleyn was the author of the divorce and not Henry.

The step was taken not through hatred of the Catholic Church. It was taken dynastically.

The real motive never changed—the determination to keep the Abbey lands. Those who had the principal part in the Government, if they kept the land, cared little for what else might follow.

"Apostle of Anti-Humbug."

Above (says the *Universe*) is Mr. Hilaire Belloc's summary of the early history of the Reformation in England, which he gave in the course of a lecture on "How England Lost the Faith," at the Town Hall, Newcastle, recently, when he spoke in aid of the Catholic Workers' College.

There was a large attendance, including a number of priests interested in the study circle movement.

It was announced that the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle (Dr. Collins), who was to have presided, was seriously ill.

The chair was taken by Canon Magill, who, in introducing Mr. Belloc, described him as the apostle of anti-humbug and a clear exponent of Catholic principles.

Mr. Belloc, whose reception was most cordial, referred to the subject as a very difficult one to deal with. In no book in any European language he knew of was there to be found the story of the loss of the faith in England. All they had in history were the steps in the process—dates and events.

There were well known explanations as to why individuals lost the faith, though they hardly ever saw a case of the individual who was a Catholic becoming definitely Protestant. But, when a whole Catholic Society could be transformed into a Protestant Society it was difficult to understand.

The First Step.

"The transformation was so profound that the modern Englishman, if put back into the ages of the faith would feel that he was in a foreign country.

"How did so prodigious a change take place; a change which was a complete revolution in the history of Europe?"

"The question is so difficult that I have only a tentative answer to give, the result of a lengthy examination of it.

"There was no intention to have a breach with Rome, and the battle lasted 70 years. The effective dates 1535 and 1605 might be given as the two terms of the movement.

"The change was unplanned and undesired. Anne Boleyn was the author of the divorce and not Henry, and the breach with the Papacy was the first step.

"Other steps were the suppression of the monasteries, the looting of parish churches and cathedrals, and the failure of the restoration of the land under Mary.

"The transformation was complete when James I. went right over to the anti-Catholic side under the advice, and more than advice, of Robert Cecil. The step was taken not through hatred of the Catholic Church or love of Protestantism. It was taken dynastically.

"The Government of the time was never fundamentally Protestant in its outlook or design. That is a very important point.

Henry VIII's Object.

"In the Tudor period everyone knew the power of the Executive, which determined the actions of men, as well as the general policy of the State.

"The game of Henry was to have his own way in politics, and to get money from the monasteries; in the case of Seymour it was merely the getting of money; in the case of Mary an attempt—which failed—to restore the Catholic Church, and in the case of Elizabeth and the Cecils it was dynastic.

"In no instance was it sympathy with the Protestant atmosphere.

"The third reason was motive. This seeming motive often changed, but the real motive never changed—the

determination to keep the Abbey lands. That ran through all the changes of the revolution. Those who had the principal part in the Government, if they kept the land, cared little for what else might follow.

"Breach with Rome was unthinkable to Henry, and it was no more than political."

Mr. Belloc went on to give two examples to prove that Henry left more Masses to be said for his soul than any other English King. When he was a very diseased man near his death, the doctors told him to listen to the Mass sitting down, yet he tried to kneel at the Elevation and stumbled forward, saying, "I would rather suffer anything I have to suffer than show lack of reverence to the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament."

Wealth of the Monasteries.

"The man lived and died simply steeped in the process and thought of Catholicism. His breach with Rome was a terrible example of how doing the thing one ought not to do leads to things beyond our conceptions. The suppression of the Monasteries was prompted by the desire to possess the wealth of the Monasteries which, at that time, were something like the great shipping lines, coal mines, and railway mines of to-day. They possessed immense wealth. There had been no little tampering with that wealth before the Reformation took place.

"When the wealth of the Monasteries was swept away, the economic basis of the Church was swept away, and the people were deprived of the full liturgy of the Church which was performed in all its magnificence and preserved in the Monasteries."

In the succeeding stages, Mr. Belloc mentioned the seizure of the Abbey lands, and their distribution among courtiers and others. To these men wealth was a great attraction, and at the King's death they saw the opportunity of becoming immensely wealthy, and they took it.

"It was Seymour who first got rid of the Mass and introduced services in the vernacular. He thought to get rid of the sequence of the Mass, of its order, and all that it contained. When there was no Mass there was no use for altars, and the loot of the churches was swept into the pockets of the new landlords.

"That revolution was not as great as the suppression of the Monasteries, but it came next.

Why Mary Failed.

"Mary tried to bring back the Mass and the hierarchy, and it was immensely popular. It was in the habits of people. But, before Mary died she became unpopular. The violent persecution which she introduced was repugnant to the people, and created a reaction.

"It is ridiculous to say that Mary's reign was repugnant to the people because they were Protestant. It would be as correct to say that the people of England to-day are teetotallers—sheer nonsense!

"If instead of the persecution, Mary had restored as far as could be the Abbey lands, that would have been immensely popular, but it was not done.

Cecil and the Gunpowder Plot.

"In 1605, quite half England strongly sympathised with the Catholic faith; of the remainder, only a portion had definitely adopted the Protestant religion.

"Then Cecil brought to a head the Gunpowder Plot. Whether Cecil suggested the plot or only heard of it, he certainly knew all about it, and made it mature at the right time.

"Its effect upon the people was that by 1668 the Catholics had dwindled to an insignificant body. The faith was practically stamped out."

"We have now," he said, "come to this situation: that either the negative forces around us will kill us or we shall transform them. It is to transform them that we are assisting the work of the Catholic Workers' College."

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