

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN DENMARK

THE last few years have been marked by events which bring to light the new growth of the Church since she regained her liberty in countries in which she had suffered, first persecution, then suppression, and finally an obstinate, lingering prejudice, kept alive by a false tradition. Three years ago Catholics in England celebrated the centenary of their emancipation, and the few thousand Catholics of Sweden kept with great rejoicing the eleven hundredth anniversary of St. Ansgar's coming to their shores with the gospel of peace, which Danes had celebrated three years earlier, at the same time commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the religious freedom granted to them by the Constitutional Law of 1849. With great fitness the day chosen for these festivities was August 1st, the feast of St. Peter's Chains. Seven centuries after the coming of Ansgar, Denmark was torn away from the unity of the Church, and lost that contact with the world outside which had been like the freshness of the open sea and which she has only begun to regain in other ways during the last forty or fifty years. The doctrines of the Reformers came at a convenient time for the king and his ministers, and it was really by a coup d'état that the new régime was established in 1539. After a generation or two very little was left of the old Faith; it was carefully and thoroughly stifled in the minds and hearts of the people, though it must not be forgotten that there was still so much love for what it had given them, that it could influence their lives. The means employed for the suppression of the old Faith were not quite so extreme in harshness and severity as in England, perhaps because there was less resistance. By preserving certain outward ceremonies

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and ecclesiastical terms the Reformers hoodwinked the people into believing that they were keeping the old faith, but in a purified form. Thus, at the present day, the words ' Mass ' and ' High Mass ' are still used of the morning service in the Lutheran churches; there is an altar with candles upon it, but the benches are so placed and constructed that it is impossible to kneel except at the communion rails. Yet the Reformation was not achieved without the aid of the rack and of whipping in the market places, but the king and his government were not concerned so much with the establishment of the ' pure doctrine ' as with an excuse for confiscating the estates of those who would not accept it, and for seizing Church property, altar vessels, and ' treasure in money and kind,' to carry on a war with Sweden (which many Danes now admit to have been useless), and to fill their own coffers. In the next generation the new faith was already so firmly established that the people themselves did their best to stamp out the remains of the old one. In the metropolitan See of Roskilde, St. Laurence suffered a second martyrdom, the church dedicated to him being pulled down by the citizens, who no doubt wished to make use of the site for a market-place. It was one of the oldest churches in the town, but the tower, judging from what is left of it, must have been added about 1450. The beautiful bell hanging in it was cast by a famous founder, John de Fastenowe, and bears an inscription consisting of a prayer to St. Laurence. It is appropriate, therefore, that the first Catholic church to be built at Roskilde at the second dawn of the Catholic Faith should be dedicated to the martyred deacon. Long after the Reformation had been introduced into Denmark, a Franciscan friar, Peter Olsen, was still living in Roskilde, where he had remained after the monastery had been closed. He was a quiet historian, and collected materials dealing with the history of Den-

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mark and the city of Roskilde, usually old, original writings, some of which are now lost, while his own manuscripts are preserved in the library of the University of Copenhagen. From these records we learn that in May, 1563, when Frederick II was about to begin the war with Sweden, three of his emissaries presented themselves at the Cathedral Chapter of Roskilde with a royal warrant, informed the Canons that His Majesty had learned that a great treasure was hidden in the chapter house, and that it was to be surrendered at once. The King's messengers further informed the Dean and Chapter that if anything were kept back he would 'order each of them to be stretched upon the rack until he was a foot longer.' The sacristan, on being questioned, confessed that some of the treasure, which in olden days had been given to the Church by kings and princes, was walled up in a chimney in the sacristy. A canon, long since deceased, had confided this to him on his death-bed. The King's messengers ordered a mason to be sent for, and a wonderful treasure of gold, silver, precious stones and jewels was found in the hiding place. The terrified canons dared not even ask for the money representing its value, being thankful to escape with their lives. Furthermore, the King's men seized a chest standing in the sacristy, containing four thousand Daler, some gold coins, and a bag with other, old Danish coins. This, together with the chest, was sealed up and taken to Copenhagen.

Only four days after this they came back with a message to the Chapter, that still another chest of jewels was said to be hidden in the chapter house, and that this secret had been divulged to the King by one of the members of the Chapter, 'whom may God forgive,' adds the old author.

This is but one instance of the work of the Reformers, who were, on the whole, careful in their methods. The people were led to believe that they had every-

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thing to gain and nothing to lose by leaving the Church of their fathers, and when the priests gave way under coercion or were sent into exile, there was not much choice for the laity. Little by little the religious houses were closed and the churches fell into decay. The old priests died out, old customs were forgotten, not one family kept the Faith, everything vanished. The Tomb was sealed up and a great stone placed outside it in the Good Friday year of 1539.

As the life of an individual man is reckoned by days and years, so the life of a nation may be reckoned by centuries, and 'on the third day,' in 1849, the day of resurrection dawned. During those three hundred years the Catholic Church was extinct in Denmark. There was a death penalty for sheltering priests, and Catholic services were forbidden, though with two exceptions. These had to be made, one in Copenhagen, out of consideration for the members of the foreign embassies: the other, in Fredericia, a small town on the east coast of Jutland, because of the Austrian mercenary troops stationed there. In the minds of Danes, therefore, the Catholic Faith, under the influence of Lutheran preaching, gradually came to be understood as something foreign, or belonging to the 'darkness of the Middle Ages,' so much so that in the time of Holberg, the Danish Molière, the word 'Catholic' was actually a synonym for 'crack-brained.' Even at the present day there is still a great deal of prejudice against Catholic faith and practice, although it is being counteracted by the writings of Johannes Jørgensen, Peter Schindler, and others. It is at least a hopeful sign that Catholic books are read with interest by those outside the Faith, and that the members of a reading circle belonging to a Lutheran church in Copenhagen chose for their last winter's reading the *Letters of a Danish Carmelite*, a book which has been widely read and with the greatest interest. The very

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fact of a Danish woman becoming a Carmelite nun is in itself remarkable, and she is not the only Danish member of that Order.

In view of this inherited prejudice, the present 'second spring' is all the more wonderful, and, looking back on the arid desert of 1849, when Protestantism had to a large extent shrivelled into a dry rationalism, the progress of the Catholic Church has been most encouraging. In 1849 there were two Catholic churches in the whole of Denmark, and these were only tolerated because they were a concession to foreigners. There are now, in Copenhagen alone, four parish churches and eight churches belonging to various religious orders. Some of the latter are fairly large, such as the beautiful church of the Sacred Heart, adjoining the boys' school served by the Jesuit Fathers; the church of the Order of Perpetual Adoration; St. Joseph's Hospital Church; and the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the last-named adjoining the convent for novices of the Order of St. Joseph of Chambéry. A large number of the nuns of this Order are Danish, and are engaged either in teaching or in hospital work in Copenhagen and in the Provinces. Most of the larger provincial towns now have a Catholic church, and many of the smaller ones too. To English-speaking Catholics those of greatest interest would no doubt be St. Alban's at Odense and St. Laurence's, already mentioned, at Roskilde. The former is dedicated to the proto-martyr of Britain, as a commemoration of the earliest church in Odense, built by Saint Canute the King (grandson of Canute the Great), and dedicated by him to Saint Alban, some of whose relics he had brought to Denmark from Ely. In the case of St. Laurence in Roskilde, in Catholic times the metropolitan see, the connection with England lies in the fact that the first Bishop, Gerbrand, was an Englishman.

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Amongst the religious orders represented in Denmark are : the Sisters of St. Joseph, numbering about five hundred, and having over twenty-four houses, either schools or hospitals; the Jesuit Fathers, in Copenhagen and Aarhus; the Redemptorists, in Copenhagen and Odense; the Marist Brothers, in Copenhagen; the Compagnie de Marie and the Daughters of Wisdom, in Roskilde; the Sisters of Saint Elisazeth, Copenhagen; the Sisters of St. Hedwig, Odense; the Premonstratensians, at Vejle in Jutland; the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul and the Lazarist Fathers at Elsinore; the Dominicans on the island of Bornholm.

There is now a growing number of Danish priests, but Danish Catholics owe a debt of gratitude to the foreign priests, German, Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, and, in the case of Elsinore, Irish, who have devoted themselves to the task of bringing Danes back to the faith of their fathers, of St. Canute the King and St. Canute the Duke, the latter the type of heroic chivalry in the history of Denmark; the faith of the great Queen Margaret, of Queen Philippa, the brave daughter of Henry IV of England, who by her energy and prompt action saved Denmark in the Hanseatic attack of 1428: the faith also of St. Kield and St. Thöger, and of many others who were not less Danes because they were of the Faith that is not a foreign intrusion, a picturesque curiosity at home in Italy or Bavaria, but the faith that Ansgar brought to the Vikings, that was held by the warrior bishop Absalon, whom Danes are proud to honour as the founder of Copenhagen. These were all of the faith that is world-wide, and that should unite all nations, the faith in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, and which all have an equal right to regard as their true home.

INGEBORG LUND.