

'MY WORLD FROM WITHIN'<sup>1</sup>

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THE woman who is abreast of current thought, who knows the topics of the moment, religious and secular, and who follows her daily Mass in her Missal, and the news of the world in her morning paper . . .'. These words might be a self-portrait of Mrs Boland, the efficient boxtender who organised the sale of pamphlets in Westminster Cathedral from 1912 onwards and who in 1924 founded the Boxtenders' Association.

Nowadays we are familiar with the Catholic Truth Society cases in our churches, and are inclined to take this contribution to present-day propaganda for granted. The origins of the C.T.S. go as far back as 1884—there were various developments—the first meeting was convened in the house of Lady Herbert of Lea, under the chairmanship of Dr Herbert Vaughan, then Bishop of Salford, who had already started a similar project in his own diocese. The date of the foundation meeting was carefully chosen—the fifth of November. This is no place to deal with the history of the C.T.S., it suffices to say that the scheme withstood the consequences of two major wars. Mrs Boland died in 1937 but there was no break in the continuity of the boxtender's apostolate. That an organisation not twenty years old could rally under such difficulties, when the instigator herself was no longer at hand to plan and encourage, is a sure sign of wise beginnings. But the real fundamentals on which the Boxtenders' Association was built must surely have been the serene, cultured atmosphere of the childhood of Eileen Moloney, who later became Mrs J. P. Boland.

The heading of this sketch needs an explanation—fifteen years after Mrs Boland's death an unfinished *Memoir* of 80 pages was accidentally discovered. From what her family remember it was probably written in the early 'thirties. The typescript was then printed by her husband—for private circulation—and given the

<sup>1</sup> Comments and quotations from the *Memoir* of Mrs Eileen Boland—handprinted for private circulation. The author is indebted to Mr J. P. Boland for his help in supplying the material.

title *My World from Within*. As it now stands the booklet gives a complete account of her youth, but unfortunately there is no reference to her active life after marriage, or indeed any mention of the work with which we connect Mrs Boland, public speaking, the Catholic Truth Society etc. Although the final chapter 'Back from Australia' tells of her meeting with her husband and gives a slight reference to her eldest daughter, we are not told about the way in which she combined the duties of wife and mother—she had six children between 1903-1922—or her public life outside her home.

All that the *Memoir* relates of Eileen Moloney's childhood stresses the importance of her early experiences. Her paternal grandparents were from County Clare, and had sailed from Cork at the time when Fr Mathew was at the height of his fame. James Moloney had heard the great Capuchin preach, urging his listeners to accept the discipline of temperance; the young farmer took the pledge and kept it all his life.

On arrival in Melbourne the immigrants went up country and prospered as farmers. They did not allow their three sons to forget about the homeland. James Moloney loved books and devoted Sunday evenings to reading aloud from his *History of Ireland*, occasionally he broke down and was unable to continue the session. The boys had a good education and did well in life. Patrick completed his medical studies and married Ellie Quirk in 1876. The following year on 21st March, St Benedict's day, their only child, a girl was born. She was christened Eileen.

Shortly before Eileen's fourth birthday they moved to a new house, already the child had an alert and intelligent mind. . . . from the *Memoir*. . . . 'Some months before this event (4th birthday) I had learnt to read, I have no recollection of the process, nor can I remember a time when I could not read, but my great difficulty was to tell the time. I was quite old before I mastered the clock and was terribly ashamed at my ignorance, but try as I would the whole business seemed meaningless.'

For a short time Eileen went to a day school, but says all she remembers of it was singing 'Dear Angel ever at my side . . .'. Another striking factor of this time was being told the importance of making Acts of Contrition. Eileen made these wholeheartedly though she did not understand their importance.

When eight years old she made her first confession, at that time

she attended the school of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Once again the importance of sorrow for sin cropped up. . . . 'We were carefully instructed and above all it was made clear to us that though we had to be sorry for our sins, we need not necessarily *feel* sorry. However, I thought it best to take no risks and set out to *feel* sorry. The saddest thing I knew was grandmother's death, so I examined my conscience and having got the material for contrition, I went back over the sadness of Grandma's death, and worked myself into a state of misery. Then when I was utterly depressed, I suddenly switched on to my sins and added to the general gloom. At any rate I was thoroughly unhappy if not contrite.

'This plan worked very well and then one day it didn't. It was a lovely day and there were good times ahead. Grandma was dead which was very sad and I missed her. But there were compensations. Cheerfulness, in short would keep breaking through and I can still remember my horror at myself as a kind of monster whom neither death nor sin could subdue to a fitting depression.'

Eileen does not mention at what age she was able to follow Mass in her Missal, but her pamphlet, *How to use the Missal for the Laity*, is so very clear and direct, one feels that she herself had a real understanding of what was going on at the altar, and was aware that there was a need for it to be explained in plain English.

In 1886 the Moloneys came over to England, the voyage was not without event. Eileen tells of the embarrassment her nurse caused her; each evening she took her charge on deck and said the Rosary out loud:

. . . 'I used to try my best', writes Mrs Boland, 'to make my response sound like normal conversation, putting a query in "Pray for us sinners", or a note of surprise into "the hour of our death"'. . . .

Whilst in England schooling was continued at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Roehampton, and although the three 'Rs', plus a fourth, Religion must have been in the curriculum, the nine-year-old girl from the antipodes recalls nothing of this period except the novel experience of bathing from 'machines' at Brighton during the summer.

One might have thought that an only child would have rejoiced at school life and the companionship of other young people, but Eileen enjoyed a remarkable harmony with her parents,

especially her father who spent hours introducing his daughter to all manner of subjects, mythology, poetry and literature. Appreciation of art was also stimulated, the hall of their house being lined with Arundel prints.

... 'These we would study by the hour, reading appropriate bits from Ruskin and Pater, searching out the symbolism, finding portraits of contemporaries disguised as saints and onlookers in biblical scenes, or going back to Dante to get the right Italian atmosphere.'...

All this early training was the background on which in later years Mrs Boland based ideas for the striking pictorial covers of the C.T.S. pamphlets. In her work of Boxtender in Westminster Cathedral, she was very keen about colour schemes. It was she who introduced picture covers on a large scale, and there still exists albums of picture-postcards of Old Masters, which had been collected from all sources so as to facilitate the selection of covers for Saints' biographies, devotional pamphlets, etc. Mrs Boland also supervised the designing of special covers.

This interest in art was fostered during the years after the crash in Australia when the Moloneys returned to Europe and travelled. They showed their daughter all that was worthwhile in the countries they themselves had come to value. In 1900 they spent three weeks in Kerry (later Eileen was to marry the Member for South Kerry). Then there was a term at a finishing school in Paris, a winter in Florence and Rome for the end of the Holy Year; Venice, Paris again and Norway.

When over here Mrs Moloney and her daughter had their clothes (except suits) made in Paris, even simple items such as 'une robe pour la Messe de sept heures'. One of the things Eileen's mother made a point of was that her clothes never betrayed that she went in for 'good works'.

For many years Mrs Moloney was threatened with blindness, and consequently her daughter devoted herself to travelling around with her mother, visiting a specialist in Switzerland who gave hope of a cure. In an age when careers were beginning to be opened to women, Eileen Moloney never gave a thought to a life of her own—it was just natural for her to make herself useful to her mother. However, in 1902 Mrs Moloney's sight improved, there was a proposal and Eileen married an Irish M.P., Mr John Boland.

Hitherto Eileen's life had made her conscious of the universality of the Church, Holy Mass being the same sacrifice in Melbourne as in Lucerne, the same in Paris as in Killarney, but now settling down as a married woman she was introduced to another aspect of Catholicism—namely Parish Life. Mrs Boland's first home was in Ashley Gardens, she was therefore a parishioner of Westminster Cathedral.

Married life might have presented practical problems to the young woman who had spent so much of her life in continental hotels, but from the first she had no difficulty in running her home and at the same time taking an interest in the things 'needing doing' around her. In 1910 James Britten asked her to join the C.T.S. committee, regardless of the fact that she already had three small children.

Then she and elderly Mrs Pollen got together and decided they must have a case installed in Westminster Cathedral. This was done in 1912. From the start Mrs Boland was in charge, there were three helpers—the pride they took in their work is evident: one of the boxtenders apologised saying she could only manage to dress the case *three* times a day. A scheme was evolved for being on duty a month at a time. Mrs Boland wrote *How to run a Church Door Case* in order to let others profit from her own experience. She also wrote *The C.T.S. at work in Westminster Cathedral*, which gives many thrilling stories of enquiries and conversions connected with the pamphlets.

In 1924 Mrs Boland founded the Boxtenders' Association. She then frequently called meetings of the members and made a special point of telling fellow workers about new pamphlets *in preparation*, so as to make the boxtenders feel they were really part of the C.T.S. organisation. At the time of writing there are no fewer than 2,500 boxtenders.

When Mrs Boland's husband took over the secretaryship of the C.T.S. in 1926 she volunteered to act as editor of *Catholic Truth* and *Catholic Book Notes* (these are now published as a joint quarterly). Occasionally Mrs Boland wrote special articles in the periodical and of course reviewed books. All this was in addition to attending monthly executive meetings and the four quarterly meetings of the C.T.S. general committee.

These were not her only activities. She was a member of the Catholic Women's League and very closely associated with Miss

Streeter in this work, taking an active interest in a debating class they ran in the early days of the C.W.L.

Mrs Boland lectured a great deal, which she did very well, having troubled to take lessons in public speaking from the famous Elsie Fogarty. I clearly remember hearing her address us at school, once on Boxtending and at another time on 'The Catholic Novel'. It was these interesting and well presented talks, heard many years ago, which made me aware of her personality and infectious enthusiasm.

She also helped other new ventures, for instance, when The Grail first came to London Mrs Boland compiled a very fine article on this modern lay-apostolate; it was published in *The Month*, in the spring of 1933, and stands out as one of the rare occasions this periodical used coloured illustrations. There was a strong connection between the C.T.S. and *The Month*, many of the contributions in the latter, especially by Fr Thurston, S.J., reappeared as pamphlets. It was from the Jesuit Fathers at Farm Street, Mayfair, that Mrs Boland drew her spiritual direction.

Many years have now passed since the erection of the first church door case in the Cathedral, records may show profit or loss, but experience has taught the truth in the text from St Paul, chosen by the boxtenders for their motto:

'Neither he that planteth is anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.' (1 Cor. 3, 7.)