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My R. F. D., Pa., Correspondent and English Converts

Last week I was speaking of a letter received from an R. F. D. address in Pennsylvania. "Interesting and informative." The correspondent is evidently one of a group of Catholic laymen who make a study of the works and personalities of Hilary Bell, Eric Gill and G. K. Chesterton. "To me," says my correspondent, "Bell, Chesterton and Gill are 'The Three.'"

That is interesting. But he is also informative. He says that Eric Gill wrote the book review of Chesterton's Autobiography published in the *Dublin Review* for April-June, 1937. He says that the current British penny stamp, with an image of the head of George VI, was designed by Eric Gill. He says further that in his book "As I Was Saying" Chesterton speaks of Eric Gill as "England's first workman" — protesting against the inhuman term "worker." "Could you mention these things," concludes my correspondent, "in some future article on Gill and Chesterton? They were some pair of this our day."

I do not feel at present qualified to write anything new about Eric Gill. I have, of course, in late years read a good deal about him and from his own pen. But it would be churlish not to respond in some manner to the request of my interesting correspondent.

NUMBER OF CATHOLICS

There is food for thought in his remark. "These (Gill and Chesterton) were some pair of this our day." They were, certainly. Both were converts. Ever since the days of the Oxford Movement there have been many eminent converts in England. This fact has given a wrong impression to many Catholic writers in this country. The impression made was that there has been a proportionate increase in the number of Catholics in England. But that is not so. That it is not so is proved and has been proved by Catholic writers from the statistics. They have, for instance, taken the number of Catholics in England in 1840 and compared them with the number of Catholics in England today; and they have shown that the percentage of the Catholic population compared to the whole population, was as great in 1840 as it was in 1930. This is all the more significant if we remember that the great immigration of Irish Catholics to England (and Scotland) began after the year 1840. Moreover, in the past fifty years, there has been a considerable influx of Catholics from the Continent. In fact, practically all immigrants from the Continent in that period have (if we except the Jews) been Catholic. There are today large congregations of Italians in Liverpool, Manchester, London and other cities. The converts have greatly raised the prestige of the Church, that is of the Catholic body in England, but not the number in proportion. In proportion to the whole population it has been stationary.

My correspondent's phrase "they were some pair of this our day" is accordingly significant. Up to a comparatively recent date, English converts were from what in England is called "the upper classes." And in these classes especially from the intellectual classes. This is clear from the history of the period, and to see it you have but to turn over the pages of the English Catholic *Who's Who* and notice the antecedents of the Converts who have become eminent enough to be listed there—graduates of the "public schools" (the "college-tie" men), of the Universities, Anglican Clergymen, officers in Army and Navy (select and exclusive classes), professional men in medicine and law, writers who had already made a name for themselves, etc.

ADD TO PRESTIGE

This class of converts did, as already noted, raise immensely the prestige of the Catholic Church in England. They have done much to break down the anti-Catholic tradition in literature and history which derived from the Reformation period. They could not be ignored as Aliens. They could not be treated with contempt as "mere Irish" or as representatives of "the Italian Mission," as an Anglican Bishop, followed by a school of writers, had designated the Catholic Church in England. The Church does owe them an immense debt—not only for what they have done in the field just mentioned, but also for their positive exposition of Catholic doctrine, mysticism, asceticism, and devotional practices. In these same fields of activity we in this country owe them a great

debt. They have written many of our best books.

But on the other hand they had little influence on the mass of the English people. Their antecedents and family traditions marked them as a class apart from the common people. These traditions were so potent that few of them would bring the members of their own families to follow them into the true fold. Cardinal Newman, for instance, was not followed by a single member of his own family which had many ramifications by marriage. They remained his friends. By his own request, his niece, Miss Mowbray, edited his Anglican writings. Only his brother Francis, who became an Albigensian, attacked him in public. This same was true of Newman's cousin, son of an Archbishop. His mother and brother remained his friends, and always spoke affectionately of "Hugh." One of his brothers wrote his "Life." But none of them became a Catholic. Also, between most of them and the Irish Catholic population there was never sympathetic collaboration, although, according to Bell and Father Bede, Garret, Irish Catholics by birth or descent, constitute 2 out of 7 in the whole Catholic population in England and Wales. (The percentage in Scotland is much greater.) This was natural and inevitable, though regrettable. By their class and family tradition they were Tories, Conservatives (in politics), Unionists, politically anti-Irish and anti-Home Rulers. Their organ in the press, "The Tablet," was anti in all these respects.

But, as my correspondent notes, converts "of this our day" are different. Since the turn of the century, and especially since the World War I, the converts have been (with few exceptions) in full sympathy with the aspirations of the common English people, with the Irish element in England and with the aspirations of the Irish in the Home Land. They have been, too, in full sympathy with every movement for social justice and for every truly progressive movement to ameliorate the lot of the toiling and propertyless masses. Eric Gill and Chesterton are illustrative examples of these facts. They are, indeed, "some pair of this our day."

There are some other passages in my correspondent's letter which are interesting enough for further comment. But this is enough for today.

'Christian Culture Series' Opens Oct. 4

WINDSOR, Ont. — The ninth season of the "Christian Culture Series" of radio programs sponsored by the Assumption College Lecture League will be opened on October 4. Twenty-three forums with 35 speakers have been arranged. Seven of the forums will be held in Detroit.

The Rt. Rev. Magr. Fulton J. Sheen, of the Catholic University of America, who has opened every season, will open this season as well on Sunday, October 4, with two lectures, in the afternoon in Detroit and in the evening in Windsor. Other speakers will include Dr. Herman Rauschnig, author of the "Revolution of Nihilism"; Helen Iswolsky, Russian author; Francis J. Sheehy and Maizie Ward, Mortimer J. Adler, Miss Silvercruys, Prince Loewenstein and Dr. Frederick Foerster, great European exile and educator. In January, in Windsor, there will be bestowed the third Annual "Christian Culture Award" on some outstanding lay-exponent of Christian ideals. The first two awards, for 1941, and 1942, went to Sigrid Undset and Jacques Maritain.

Pope Receives Medals Of Pontifical Year

VATICAN CITY.—His Holiness Pope Pius XII has received from His Eminence Luigi Cardinal Maglione, Papal Secretary of State, the first copies of the gold, silver and bronze medals of the Pontifical Year.

The medals, the work of Aurelius Mistruzzi, bear, in the form of Angels ascending from St. Peter's Dome, representations of the radio messages delivered by the Holy Father.



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