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**NEWMAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ENGLISH  
LIFE AND LETTERS**

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Scarcely more than half a century has passed since the mortal remains of Cardinal Newman were laid to rest in the little burying ground at Rednal. Yet, today his name is on the lips of millions of Catholics throughout the world who beseech God to speed the day when, by the infallible decree of Holy Church, he will be enrolled among God's heroes.

Although Newman's contribution to the field of letters is indeed very great, it is in the role of a great spiritual leader that we love to think of him. In order to appreciate fully his influence on the spiritual life of England, it is necessary to consider the false philosophies that animated the vast majority of his contemporaries. Rationalism, liberalism, and skepticism were rampant. Materialism was the new god of England. Scientists were affirming that the only explanation of any phenomenon was a purely natural one. In short, the prevailing spirit of irreligion was threatening to sweep away the last vestige of Christianity. Surely to nineteenth-century England can be aptly applied the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "With desolation is the land made desolate because there is none that considereth in his heart." Yet, dark as this picture is, it would be much darker if it had not been for the reaction of certain distinguished men, chief among whom was Newman, who labored indefatigably to stem the tide of infidel thought. It happened that Newman himself had a scientific and slightly sceptical turn of mind and was thus able to appreciate the gravity of the situation. He was firmly convinced that science was compatible with Christianity, and that religion alone constituted the panacea for the moral and intellectual maladies that were sapping the spiritual strength of his countrymen.

In 1828, while he was Anglican Rector of St. Mary's, Oxford, there came to him the conviction that he had a definite mission in life. He felt that God was calling him to wage relentless warfare against the subversive forces that were destroying the ancient institutions in Church and State. Henceforth, God's will was to be the lode-star of his life. He saw that he must erect an ark of safety against which the floods of rationalism and liberalism would beat in vain. He firmly believed that the Church of England was a continuation of the Church founded by



Christ, but realized that a new spiritual life would have to be imparted to it. In order to restore the primitive Church in all its purity he became the leading spirit in the Tractarian Movement. Of the ninety tracts that were published Newman wrote twenty-four. The powerful sermons he delivered at St. Mary's gave further impetus to the movement, and within a few years he found himself at the head of a movement which was widely accepted, and which had already raised the spiritual and moral temperature of English life to a very marked degree. The Oxford movement stirred the English religious world to its very centre, and, to a certain extent, checked the rising tide of imperialism.

That Newman was able to exercise such a tremendous influence on English life was owing in large measure to his deep sincerity, his charming personality, his great power of utterance, and his rare intellectual acumen. He knew the problems of the day and he grappled with them in an effective manner. The problem of reconciling faith with reason and science with religion was not an easy one in Newman's day. He met rationalists on their own ground and proved to them that it was a violation of reason not to believe in the existence of God.

In order to prove that the Church of England was a continuation of the Church established by Christ, he delved into the writings and heresies of the early Church. Through that study he gradually came to realize that the claims of the Church of England to Apostolic Succession could not be substantiated. Led gently onward by that "Kindly Light" which he so well invoked in immortal verse, he finally made his submission to Rome, and in 1846 he was ordained a priest. Immediately there started a flow of conversions to the Catholic Church. Those who thought at all realized that a spiritual and intellectual genius had made a thorough investigation of a problem of universal interest. As a result a religious consciousness was aroused which had not existed in England for a long time.

But Newman's hour of trial had come. By Protestants he was regarded as a traitor, and by Catholics he was held in suspicion. The next twenty years of his life were years of apparent failure, but failure that eventually triumphed. By his perseverance in well-doing in the face of continued opposition he has given to the world one of the sublimest of lessons.



The work that was dearest to Newman's heart was the formation of truly educated minds that would be capable of resisting the tide of liberalism. With this end in view he gladly accepted the invitation of the Irish hierarchy to establish a Catholic university in Dublin. He fondly hoped that its influence would be felt in his own beloved England. He failed in his efforts, however, owing partly to the opposition of the Catholic Bishops. But the good seed was sown and it was later to blossom and fructify.

With the failure of this attempt he turned to other ways of meeting the problems of the hour. He accepted the invitation of the English Bishops to edit the new English version of the Scriptures, but after the expenditure of much money and infinite energy, he had to abandon the project owing apparently to the apathy of Cardinal Wiseman. It was for him a time of darkness and gloom, but his spiritual life found always perfect peace and contentment in the Catholic religion.

Realizing that the education of the Catholic mind was essential for the effective defense of the Church, he next tried to guide the thought of the intellectual Catholics who, under the editorship of the late Lord Acton, were conducting the Rambler Review, but he again met with powerful opposition. In 1859 he became its editor, but was asked to resign after his first number, and was delated to Rome for heresy after his second.

In 1864 came Charles Kingsley's attack on the Catholic priesthood. Newman's answer was the **Apologia Pro Vita Sua**. He welcomed the opportunity of vindicating his whole life and the cause of the Catholic Church. The effect was electric. From the day of its publication he won a place in the hearts of his countrymen which he never lost. The spiritual autobiography established the strength and sincerity of the convictions which had led him into the Roman Catholic Church. English Catholics soon found themselves in a position that they had not enjoyed since the Protestant Revolt. Newman gave a set to the Catholic mind that would have been impossible without his conversion.

The **Apologia** is a masterpiece of spiritual logic, but it is also a masterpiece of prose. In the field of prose Newman towers far above his contemporaries. Perhaps his motto, "Cor ad cor loquitur," reveals the secret of that



eloquence which constitutes his work one of the greater glories of Victorian literature.

Three other works of Newman will ever remain as an intellectual monument to their author—**The Development of Christian Doctrine**, **The Grammar of Assent**, and **The Idea of a University**. In **The Development of Christian Doctrine** he explains the reasonableness of religious beliefs. He pursues this idea further in **The Grammar of Assent**. In a delicate psychological analysis he outlines the mental processes which ultimately lead to apprehension and assent. Both of these works are of immense philosophical importance. Newman's extraordinary power of psychological analysis and his deep insight into the workings of the human mind increased his persuasive powers and enabled him to exercise a tremendous influence.

In opposition to the tendency of his age to separate theology from all educational institutions, Newman maintains that a university can properly fulfil its function only if it includes theology in its courses. A university education has for its object knowledge for its own sake, but all knowledge is ultimately a defence of the Christian faith. Although his ideas have not been universally accepted, they have contributed much to the thought of our own day.

The Victorian Era has passed away, but Newman will live on in his influence. Enough has been said to show the extensive and varied nature of the tasks undertaken by him during the long period of his labors. Enough has been said to show that he was one of the noblest children of the Church, one of England's wisest sons, and one of the truly great men of the nineteenth century. For, if the mark of a great man is "a pure and upright life spent in behalf of the spiritual and temporal happiness of his fellow-men," I know not where a better example can be found than JOHN HENRY NEWMAN.

—Contributed

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There is no reason why the Church should not approve of the chief power being held by one man or more provided only it be just, and that it tend to the common advantage—"Civil Government" by Pope Leo XIII.