

A WARRIOR STUDENT

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REAT men rub elbows on the crowded pages of history: soldiers, statesmen, naturalists, scientists, scholars, and so on. Of the entire classification, however, the most peculiar and the most interesting are the scholars. A great soldier, statesman or scientist finds fame through a combination of circumstances; scholars and philosophers create these circumstances. They mold the minds of men, and as men think, so they live. It is not surprising then to find in the field of Thought men whose influence has already outlasted, and will continue to outlast, the power of the other favorites of Fortune. For instance, there is the dapper little physician at the court of Philip of Macedon, named Aristotle, whose profound mind laid the foundations and formed the channels of men's thoughts down the centuries. There is Immanuel Kant, a scholar who spent his whole life in Regensburg, a tiny town in Germany. Yet his influence is felt today in every modern university. Scholars—molders of men's minds—may be named by the dozen. We name but one. His name is John Henry Newman.

Fashions change. Less than a hundred years ago the fashion was entirely *à la Newman*, but the wheel has turned, and the fashion has changed. Ask a student today to identify *J. H. N.* and you will meet with a vague, and perhaps polite, answer. A few decades ago it was so tremendously different that it is hard to find words to express the change. John Newman was a national figure in England; a citizen of the world in the latter part of his life. As a youth (he was born in 1801) he had shown signs of unusual intelligence. He went to Oxford, the city of books, and even there where knowledge was worshipped so devoutly and where intellect was so enthusiastically fostered, he created a sensation. His mental proportions were gigantic. When he had finished his brilliant course he became a cleric in the Anglican Church. When he walked through the dusky campus on his way to the chapel where he was preaching so zealously and eloquently, students would halt, positively thrilled to see him pass in the

flesh, and whisper in awed tones, "There's Newman." He was at this time busily engaged in writing the *Tracts for the Times*, of which we shall make mention shortly. Newman was the campus idol, the pride of his friends and of the University, a credit to the Church that had mothered him. He was a true scholar, of excellent mental equipment, and hard work had no terrors for him. His light shone brighter and brighter, not in the darkness of solitude, but in the searching daylight of brilliant contemporaries. Yet in one day this beloved figure, this idol of the great center of learning, found himself labelled a pariah, a traitor, an unworthy son of a worthy mother, a trickster, a fraud, a cheat.

Honest men abhor sham and hypocrisy. There were sincere, honest men at Oxford, many of them Anglican ministers, who found it intolerable that such an all-important thing as religion should have become to so many of their communion such a meaningless trifle, for trifle it had indeed become. They set about, those modern prophets, improving matters, thus setting in motion (1833) the famous Oxford Movement. The Oxford Movement was a challenge hurled into the teeth of sceptical Liberalism, then rampant in England. Liberalism was the rage: a style of thinking that called itself modern, inasmuch as it desired for its god only Science. Since religion could not be distilled in a test-tube, nor discovered under a microscope, it was *passé*, a ridiculous remnant of the Dark Ages. Against this modern dragon advanced the Oxford Movement. Its aim was to revitalize the Anglican religion, to tear from it the smothering influence of 'state' direction, and to exhibit it proudly to men as a moving, gloriously vital power. Newman, the leader of the movement, wrote: "Growth is the only evidence of life." Religion itself should, he thought, measure up to this test. If it were the true religion, should it not produce holy men, modern Pauls and Augustines, instead of *blasé*, indifferent church-goers who lent their presence to services only because custom and society demanded it of them.

The Oxford Movement was a modern crusade against apathy in religious matters. It was launched by means of Tracts—vigorously worded articles calculated to stir men to thought. They did. Their aim to counteract the prevalent tendencies towards Liberalism and Romanism by reviving what was considered the Catholic character of the Anglican Church. In time the Tracts won for themselves a reading public that vied with that of a great newspaper. They succeeded in capturing national interest. The Tracts proceeded from a belief

in such doctrines as Apostolic Succession, the Sacramental system, Scripture and Tradition, and their immediate goal was to convince men that the Church Christ had founded should be independent of state influence. Newman sought to trace out a middle course which would avoid the 'extremes' of Romanism and Protestantism, and this he called his *Via Media*. The keystone of his system was Antiquity, the norm or rule by which he judged which doctrines were and which were not valid and in accord with the primitive Church.

Then, in 1839, when the Movement was in full swing and thousands of Britons were awaiting the next move of their leaders, Newman stumbled upon a fact that changed his whole future. The fact was that Antiquity, on which alone he could defend the Anglican religion, was also the impregnable stronghold for the primitive heresies. If the Monophysites of the fifth century were heretics, so were the Anglicans of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, for as he looked into the mirror of history, he beheld Monophysism and Anglicanism identified. Only Rome appeared immovable—like a rock—unchanged from the first century. And when he further perceived that Antiquity alone, without recognition by or connection with the living Church was useless, (as St. Augustine had pointed out to the Donatists) he saw his cherished system explode like a balloon pricked by a pin.

Then came "Satan's Masterpiece." The Tractarian Movement, holding as it did so many doctrines in accord with the Catholic Church, had met with furious opposition as being entirely too close to "Romanism." Newman, conscientious man that he was, wrote a Tract, the ninetieth of the series, which burst upon England with the effect of a bomb dropped in the night, for in it he minimized to the vanishing point the difference between the Englishman's 'Bible,' the Thirty-Nine Articles, and Catholic doctrine. In other words, he showed that the Thirty-Nine Articles, so long looked upon as the antithesis of Catholicism, could be honestly interpreted in a Catholic manner.

Tract Ninety was the signal for a tempest of national wrath to descend upon Newman. If Byron awoke one morning to find himself famous, Newman the famous awoke one morning to find himself notorious, branded, stigmatized by popular disapproval. He was silenced, told to preach no more. His resignation from his church was accepted, formally and coldly. Britannia, so to speak, drew aside her skirts at the very mention of his name. For had he not, of a sudden, proved himself to be in the pay of Rome—an envoy of the

Pope, as well as a turncoat, a traitorous seducer of his followers! So raged the storm for many months. But far away at Littlemore, his *Via Media* discarded as an unworkable theory, his doubts and difficulties regarding doctrinal development resolved by much prayer and study, Newman was receiving a ray of the 'Kindly Light' that brought him (1845) into the Catholic fold, and the joy caused by that act assuaged to some extent the bitterness of his sudden unpopularity.

John Newman shortly became Father Newman, the Catholic priest. But his martyrdom was a daily affair. On the one hand, his new friends among the clergy distrusted this newcomer, whose stormy career they had just witnessed; on the other, he was not forgotten by the vindictive pens of the many enemies his act had won for him. He was a ready subject for caustic criticism and editorial ravings. He suffered in silence. There came an opportunity to found an Irish University and Newman was placed in charge (1852). But the sublimity of his ideals and the lack of whole-hearted cooperation did not make a strong mixture, and the project met with scanty success.

Next followed the affair of Giovanni Achilli, a genuine ex-priest, who was enthusiastically acclaimed in Birmingham. It was his extravagant mouthings that brought him to the notice of Newman, at the time giving a course of lectures on the Protestant mind.¹ So one evening, in less than a quarter of an hour, he explained to his audience just who Achilli was, exposed some of his lurid crimes against his vows in their ugliest light, commenting upon them and the man who could commit them with such savage irony and devastating thoroughness that his hearers were breathless and Achilli wild with rage and fear. He had either to leave England or sue Newman for libel. He chose the latter course, and once more Newman was headlined in the papers. But justice went blind. Newman the exposé of Achilli was still remembered as the disappointing rejuvenator of the Anglican Church, and was adjudged guilty of libel to the extent of thousands of pounds. But sympathy stretched forth a hand, and from America, from the Continent, even from England came a golden stream of monetary contributions which enabled him to clear his name of debt. Later, more sober thought convinced many that Newman was justified in denouncing Achilli. For the present, the injustice of the verdict rankled deep; and he was still, in the eyes of all England, the discredited leader, the libellous preacher.

¹ *Present Position of Catholics in England.*

Fortune seldom reinstates her favorites. Newman is one of the exceptions. For many years after his conversion writers could always get by their dry days by directing a few verbal shafts at Newman. So the stage was set for Kingsley, an Anglican arch-enemy. He began by saying that truth is not always a characteristic of the Roman Church, offering as proof of such an astounding statement a text in one of Newman's sermons. O long-desired opportunity of vindication! At this direct attack Newman flew to his own defense; he began his *Apologia*. He wrote it standing, with tears streaming from his eyes. He traced in it his mental development and sincere search for truth from his earliest days until the momentous penning of the famous Tract Ninety. He left out nothing; he opened his soul, exposed his most interior thoughts for the inspection of the world. How the world reacted! The *Apologia* was printed as it left Newman's pen, and the ink was scarcely dry on the papers before it was read in the city, in the country, in the schoolroom, on the street and in the home. Newman began writing it a condemned man. When the last issue had been read he had accomplished a titantic feat; he had changed England's way of thinking. He had been disgraced; now he was respected and revered. He had vindicated himself, he had cleared his name of stigma, he had reascended the heights of popular esteem and regard.

This is a picture of Cardinal Newman. We have mentioned only a few of the great events in his life, like one describing the highlights of a great contest, for his life was actually a contest. He was a strange paradox—a warrior student—who wielded his pen as a mighty sword in defense of his ideals and convictions. We have neglected to detail his achievements as a churchman, but that they were great may be inferred from his title of Cardinal. We have only endeavored to show that Cardinal Newman while being one of the world's great, was a very human man, with many friends and many enemies. But as the evening of life descended upon the scarred and battered Newman, he could lift up his head crowned with victory.