

DIVERTIMENTO FOR HARMONIUM¹

THE white gate at the end of the privet hedge is half-open, and you go up the path. Under the hanging wire basket of moss and geraniums in the porch, an Aberdeen cocks his head at you, his little legs stiff, his tail going in little jerks. Through the open doors of the garage the back of a car can be seen; an Austin Twelve, you decide, and this year's model. The dog moves aside, sniffs at your heels, prepared to be friendly. You scratch him behind the ear, ring the bell, and are shown into a room.

You notice a large map of Palestine on the wall, and examine a group over the fireplace, young men in high collars, tight trousers, and faces that make you think of *Three Men in a Boat*. There are two clergymen in the middle of the front row, an old one with gaiters, a younger one with a moustache holding a splay-legged fox terrier with two heads. A time exposure, presumably, and the dog must have moved. A coloured picture also catches your attention. A figure in a white robe against an Indian background; the face is mild, the hair long and golden. You remember the smells of the bazaar, the fierce eyes, the armoured car nosing its way carefully but authoritatively through the crowd. And what's this? a photograph of the statue of a Dominican. Yes, so it is, Giordano Bruno. And you smile as you think of the simple Romans who cross themselves reverently as they pass. Like the Holy Year pilgrims, with their rosaries in the temple of Mithras under the church of San Clemente.

It is a muggy afternoon, you were up late last night, and your thoughts float in a drowsy stream. You lazily observe other things; the pipes, you lay a wager with yourself that it's *Three Nuns* he smokes; the folder from a shipping company by the side of the typewriter, a sunshine cruise perhaps; the backs of the books, *Religion and*

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its Social Expression, by Ernest A. Smith, B.Sc., *A Baby's Book of Bible Stories*, by Mary F. Rolt, *Effective Evangelism*, published by the Lutterworth Press. Lutterworth, on the old Great Central Railway, where Wycliffe was born, or did he die there? fancy having to live there, still somebody must, and it wouldn't be so bad if you liked fox-hunting. In whose territory is it? and who was the old Catholic gentleman who used to affirm that the mistake made when the hierarchy was re-established lay in not making the new dioceses correspond with the various hunts? Archbishop of the Belvoir, how well it would have sounded, or Bishop of the V.W.H., how expressive in Latin. Then there was somebody who said, no, they should have corresponded with the territories of the various breweries, and he would chose to adminster the diocese of Tollemache. But he was a Distributist.

'Behold in me the Bishop of Bass'—it might go to the tune of *The Rajah of Bhong*. You hum a few bars, though your thoughts are wandering. You notice a *National Geographic Magazine*, some *Week-End Reviews*, that morning's *Daily Herald*. Clearly a man of progressive convictions, or can convictions progress? You pick up a biscuit-coloured review which tells you in pleasant old face Caslon caps. that it is *The Modern Churchman*, so different, you observe, from the jagged, angular, staring, Broadway and Braggadocio types used by the modern young journals of Catholic Action on the Continent. This is like old Handel compared with their Erik Satie, it is so balanced, so cosy and spacious, like the armchair. Replete with every modern comfort, you say to yourself; no, that's not fair, the room's not a worldly room, not luxurious, there's a religious aspiration somewhere about it, a sense of endeavour; nonsense, what are you talking about, pull yourself together, don't ramble, don't ramble, don't . . . but you do. Fall asleep.

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But you spring to your feet with an apology when the door opens and in comes a pleasant faced man in well-cut

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grey. His thinning fair hair shows a freckled pink scalp, there is a little patch of dried shaving soap just behind his left ear. He might be a doctor, only his handshake lingers too long for that; or a bank manager, only the set of the mouth is that of a prelate. You accept a cigarette, he fills a pipe from a crocodile pouch. You were wrong, he smokes some sort of mixture. You talk for a while about the weather, trade, and the Nazis. Then pulling out from his pocket an extremely grubby handkerchief, he looks at it, then pulls out another. Both grubby.

'Laundries,' he remarks, and his smile now looks skimmed.

'Yes,' you agree, 'they don't wash too well.'

'It's not that,' he shook his head, 'it's the Vatican.'

You make a polite little chirrup of a noise.

'Don't you know?' he explains gently, 'how nuns have come from France, and new Romanist centres set up which now have become permanent? *Laundries have been established throughout the country.*' He allows a few moments for that to sink in, and proceeds. 'And in many favourable centres nursing homes, both profitable since they are run for the most part without paid labour.' His tone hardens. 'But, most important of all, *cheap educational facilities for girls were offered at a time when little was provided by the English State educational system.*'

'Too bad,' you volunteer.

He leans forward and taps your knee. '*Many thousands of women have been acclimatized in this way, and a considerable proportion has become definitely attached to Roman Catholicism.*'

'They would,' you begin; 'after all, it's said that it's only women who keep it going. Look at the elections in Spain.'

'Yes, it fascinates,' he says. '*Fascinates, and continues to make converts, if not of the very distinguished, at least in the peerage and among persons of a certain literary standing.*'

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The way he said 'peerage' reminds you of oysters and racehorses and the stage door of the Gaiety in the days of King Edward. He rises to his feet, one hand in his coat pocket, and addresses you as if you were a public meeting. *'It is not generally realized how large is the income which has accrued to the Roman Church through the employment of sisterhoods in the work of elementary education. The teachers receive their salaries, but as they can have no income'—the other hand echoes each word on the table—'the cheques are passed on elsewhere.'*

Visions pass before you of men with purple at their throats and leather satchels in their hands, streams of them, ceaselessly passing backwards and forwards from Westminster. You wonder, do the motor-bandits know, the snatch-and-grabbers? Or, can it be possible, are most of them Romanists? Chicago, after all, and the I.R.A. You feel reassured, so that's all right, another indication that you belong to a catholic church.

A change has come over the room, there's a ripple and a chuckle in the air, you don't see them or hear them, but they're there. A white mouse with a bell round its neck comes out of the ceiling, runs down the electric light wire and curls up asleep in the bulb; an eyelid flutters down and up to lighten the stone features of Giordano. The voice seems to proceed from a gramophone with a cushion thrown in the horn.

'A skilfully engineered, vast reaching conspiracy lurks all round us. *Piety is exploited by Papal policy. Why is it that Roman Catholic piety seems invariably to be associated with Roman Catholic propaganda?* It is because it seeks to subjugate, subjugate in imitation of the Caesars.' He pauses for a phrase. 'Rome,' he says, 'prefers Imperium to Evangelium.'

Your attempt at the etymology of evangel he brushes aside. 'A new Vatican state has been set up, *the flag of which now flies regularly over all its ecclesiastical outposts among us.*'

'Mr. Vanheems,' you begin

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'I do not know the name of the responsible Papal agent,' he says stiffly, 'but I do know this, that under *the adroit statesmanship* of Archbishop Bourne, this foreign body is working in our midst, a hostile body. *The interests of the Vatican are anti-English, for England still represents a world-power of Protestantism.*'

You remember the empire builder coming back from the East devoutly serving the bearded French missionary's Mass in the saloon of the boat. But you keep silence, and just as well.

'*The Foreign Office itself,*' he adds, '*is reputed to be attached predominantly to the religion of Rome.*'

You try to look concerned. But he sweeps on.

'Societies are formed, there is a campaign afoot, *completely camouflaged by persistent press manipulation.* Not only has it now become almost impossible for anything to be published likely to tell against the influence of the Roman Catholic Church; *the Press voluntarily gives large prominence in picture and print to its activities and claims.* We are blind to the danger. Too little is done by the Church of England to protect itself and its followers. We have been indulging in insubordination or in sleep. *The Church of England does not lack intelligence, but it lacks intelligence officers.*'

The military analogy pleases him. He continues. 'Modernism is already doing its work by driving mines beneath the position of the attacking forces. *But the Chestertons and Bellocs and even less weighty champions are allowed to play Goliath unchecked. Yet the Church is not without Davids who are capable of using their slings.*'

'Let me give an outline of the position. *It was in 1570 that Roman Catholicism in England originated.*' The voice is now that of the lecture room. '*The Roman question is of no recent growth, it goes far back behind the period of the Reformation.* In 1213 John was forced to deliver his crown and kingdom, and *England became the milk-cow of the Papacy.* However, Henry VIII repudiated the jurisdiction of Rome, but let us remember that what Rome lost through the morals of one king she

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had won *through the vices of another*. The Romanists shrunk to a scanty remnant. But in 1822 famine descended upon Ireland, vastly overpopulated as to its peasantry. A beginning was made of that emigration into England which created what is for the main part an Irish Roman Catholic Church in England. *The Irish Romanists who form the major part of the modern Roman Catholic community have no vestige of title to the ancient buildings or endowments of the Church of England. Cardinal Bourne, who not infrequently gives utterance to suggestions of this sort, is a victim of romantic fallacy.*

The white mouse quivers its whiskers, sneezes, and curls up the other way round.

'Then the secession of Newman and others following the Oxford Movement, gave Rome *an entrance into a social class* which formerly had been outside its influence, and it is in the element provided by succeeding secessions that Roman Catholicism has found and still finds its most active agents, although the Papal declaration upon Anglican Orders in 1896 produced nothing like the landslide that had been anticipated—and anticipated so far that Leo XIII caused a *Converts' Aid Society to be established to succour expected convert ministers.*

'The Oxford Movement and the Irish immigration have made Roman Catholicism what it now is *under the deft handling of Cardinals Wiseman, Manning and Vaughan, and last but certainly not least of Cardinal Bourne*. It has increased in organization and public influence; the Press, the problem of unemployment, the medical profession, all are used to help its attack on the country at large. Take the Romanist press. *The more popular weekly papers have unpleasant characteristics which are doubtless appreciated by those for whom they are written*. The Scroll, for instance, was once conducted with real distinction and literary talent. It is now under the direction of Mr. Alb——'

'Hush,' you say, 'libel, you know.'

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'During this period,' he continues with scarce a break, 'there has been a considerable invasion of the old Universities. *Oxford in this way has become a very different place from Oxford of thirty years ago.*'

'Yes,' you agree, 'you should see the Parks in the afternoon. Black-coated clerics prowling round in couples. Hockey teams almost entirely composed of religious, friars disguised in the pink-white-and-maroon of the Oxfordshire Exiles and sweating and shoving in the scrum.'

'Good Heavens!' he exclaims. 'I didn't know that. But let me tell you how Rome is trying to profit by the present social situation. *The flooding of England and Scotland with surplus Irish stocks continues at an alarming rate,* and as is well known, lower racial stocks drive out the better stocks. The Roman Catholic authorities are now envisaging the settlement of these Irish on small holdings up and down the country, and Land Associations are being formed for that purpose. The Archbishop of Liverpool has lately urged that England could provide for twenty million or more persons settled on small holdings.'

'Unpatriotic,' you remark.

'Yes,' he agrees, 'it's all in the interests of a foreign potentate. And another thing. On the marriage question, *Roman Canon Law is secretly over-riding English Law,* and is being used as a *engine to compel submission,* despite the skilful overthrow of the Bishop of Liverpool by Archbishop Downey in public controversy in 1931.'

'Yet,' you quote mischievously, 'we are not without Davids who are capable of using their slings.'

He does not hear you. 'In the work of discovery of mixed marriages, *Roman Catholic medical men, who are coming over in no inconsiderable numbers from Ireland, play their part, as they do also in reporting cases of the lapsed.*'

He brightens. '*The problem of the lapsed in England is the greatest problem that Roman Catholicism has to face. The converts do not all remain, and it is said that*

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some difficulty is experienced in keeping up-to-date the somewhat pretentious Catholic Who's Who. It is not improbable that there are half a million persons in this country who were Romanists, and who are so no longer.'

'What are they now?' you ask, 'Christians still?'

Something in your tone makes him look at you sharply; 'Are you by any chance a Roman Catholic yourself?'

'Yes,' you say.

'Irish, I suppose.'

'No, definitely no,' you reply, quenching a temptation to come out with, 'Shure, and me name's Cafferty O'Rafferty, and what yez be after needing is Father Brady with his blackthorn belabourin' yez for an ould spalpeen.'

'I beg your pardon,' he says, turning to his imaginary audience, '*It is far from improbable that not a few of us here have had the privilege and pleasure of acquaintance with members of the older Roman Catholic families, either at the Universities or in the Services or in the ordinary affairs of social life. Regard for them naturally entails respect for their religious convictions.'*

At that moment, the white mouse straightens itself, and in an unexpectedly deep bass voice begins to recite, 'Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died away.' An invisible orchestra breaks into *La Mancornadora*, the typewriter joins in the rhythm of the thrumming guitars and clapping gourds, the man in grey croons a few bars, puts a dahlia in his mouth, sways three or four times with his hands on his hips and says, 'Must go, must go. Must watch the Begum of Bhopal splitting the atom.' He vaults the table and disappears into the wall.

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Through the door comes a sturdily built clergyman, about fifty, with a weather-beaten face and iron-grey hair. 'Sorry I've kept you waiting,' he says, 'I'm glad you've called, I was going to ring you up. My boy John has been talking to me about having a play in the parish hall. Of course, there'll be no difficulty about that.'

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He settles himself in the chair. 'I see you've been looking at the October *Modern Churchman*. It prints the papers read at our last annual conference at Cambridge. There's one there your Father Robertson wouldn't like. I don't agree with it myself. Personally, I don't believe all this talk of the new Popish Plot.

'I rather enjoyed it,' you answer. Then feeling confused. 'I mean to say, I don't think he'd mind it.'

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