

EDITORIAL

WE have decided to make this month's BLACK-FRIARS a Catholic Emancipation Number in remembrance of the Act which was passed in April exactly one hundred years ago. Even the inattentive reader will notice that we by no means present an exhaustive account of this interesting subject. Names and events will be missed clearly worthy of honourable mention. But it is not possible in a brief space to tell the full story, which indeed would mean providing a concise history of the Catholic Church in England from 1558 to 1929. Since it occurred to us as not unlikely that others too would do honour to this year's centenary by writing about it, we have tried as far as possible to collect aspects of the subject which should not be too obvious and commonplace and thus avoid needless harping on the same string and the telling of the same tales twice or the ungracious act of singing other people's songs.

There is a type of philosophical historian who, in his quest for an ordered scheme of cause and effect in the haphazard of human affairs, loves to fix on some tiny, trivial cause and see it produce an enormous effect. Pascal, speaking of the inscrutable causes and the terrifying effects of human passion, ends with the image of a woman's nose and the superb hyperbole: 'If only Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the universe would have been changed.' In another place the same Pascal describes how Cromwell might have undone all Christendom, destroyed the royal family, and made his own family for ever powerful '*sans un petit grain de sable qui se mit dans son uretère*'. Rome herself would have trembled beneath

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his sway, but this little grain of grit killed him : his family was reduced to nought, peace was restored, and the King put back on his throne.' Gibbon, whom like Pascal we look to rather for poetic imagery than for reliable history, is fond of the same idea. 'Perhaps,' he says, 'the Greeks would be still involved in the heresy of the Monophysites, if the Emperor's horse had not unfortunately stumbled. Theodosius expired, his orthodox sister succeeded to the throne.'

Yes. Perhaps. . . . And if Adam had not sinned . . . and as many repetitions as you like of that powerful word, *If*, with which you can do anything—even put Paris in a bottle.

Similar reflections may occur to the evolutionary historians who are anxious to investigate the causes that led to the Act of Emancipation. If Daniel O'Connell had not been born ; if he had not won the Clare election ; if the Vicar Apostolic of the Midlands had been someone else instead of John Milner, 'the champion of God's ark in an evil time,' as Newman called him ; if America had not won her independence, if there had been no French Revolution with the wave of 'liberalism' and democratic idealism that followed, then there might have been no such thing as Catholic Emancipation. In fact, if there had been nothing, there would not have been anything. Truly the 'If' school of history tends to reduce all things to absurdity.

The only evolution of history is to see in it the unfolding of the Will of God : the only philosophy of history is to view it as the working out of God's providence. That is the supreme epic of this world and the next, the story of God governing the works of His own hands—a story which God Himself has told, not in written words, but in the Word made Flesh. And the story of the Church is the story of Christ, because the Church is the Bride of Christ and Christ's mystical

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Body. It is a story of defeat and death, and victory and resurrection. This is the only view that makes ecclesiastical history intelligible or of any practical use in the conduct of our lives. We are free to-day, but we may be in shackles to-morrow.

During the long night of the penal times our forefathers gave up all things to follow Christ. They gave up their lives when asked to make the sacrifice; they gave up wealth, not only material riches, but those dearer treasures of the mind, the sweet pursuits of literature and art; they were cut off from the sources of learning, shut out from those homes of humane culture which Catholic thought and the Catholic Faith had made; their religion was shorn of all its external beauty; they had no ritual chant or solemn liturgy; everything had to go in order to keep the one thing necessary.

In the past hundred years Catholics have been slowly winning back their lost heritage and by degrees entering into their newly-acquired opportunities. Some will appraise the progress and the gain; the less optimistic will perhaps think that we are still hampered by our history and have done less than we could; but the wise man will reserve his praise for God in a sincere *Te Deum* and keep his criticisms for himself.