

The English Movement

In England a movement began in 1908 which resulted in the formation of the Old Catholic Church in England. In that year the distinguished English priest, Dr. Arnold Harris Mathew, de jure Earl of Llandoff, who had left the Roman Church, was consecrated by the Archbishop of Utrecht assisted by all the continental Old Catholic Bishops, at the Cathedral Church of Saint Gertrude, Utrecht, on April 28th, and placed in charge of the English mission. On Saint Paul's Day, 1911, he was elected Archbishop and Metropolitan of Great Britain.

The Archbishop and his little flock in England soon found themselves in double danger. Added to the natural differences with their former brethren in the Roman Church was a campaign of persecution directed by certain elements among the Anglicans of the state Church of England, described by Dr. Willibroad Beyschleg, Professor of the university of Holland, and a noted Old Catholic historian, as those who emphatically desire to be 'catholic' but are at the same time wholly out of sympathy with Old Catholics. They were a small group of ritualistic churchmen of the established English Church on the way to Rome, while the Old Catholics were on the way from Rome.

Certain unprincipled elements of this Anglo-Catholic group exerted pressure on the Dutch Church to disavow the English Old Catholics, but without result. At one time they intended to besmirch the English Archbishop's character by elaborating on a statement made by a Roman Catholic editor that Bishop Mathew's credentials to the Dutch Church contained false statements, but the Bishops of Holland, after a thorough investigation themselves vindicated Bishop Mathew. The Roman priest himself recalled the original statement, saying that since he made it he had satisfied himself by a personal investigation that it was groundless.

The clique of English churchmen continued to use this disreputable stratagem against the Old Catholics in the English speaking world even after Bishop Mathew's death. Bishop Mathew, however, maintained a high standard of Christian tolerance and continued his work, unmoved by the persistent noisiness of his detractors who nonetheless caused him much pain.

As evidence of their confidence in Archbishop Mathew, the Dutch Bishops had him participate in every consecration of Utrecht establishing a new Episcopate on the Continent of Europe until his death in 1919. Bishop Mathew assisted at the Consecration of Bishop Jan Michael Kowalski and two assistant Bishops for the Old Catholic Church in Poland which from that period on was to have close historical and ecclesiastical relations with English-speaking Old Catholics.

A noted author and historian, Bishop Mathew had an excellent knowledge of the Orthodox Church and established the most cordial relations between the English Old Catholics and the Patriarchal See of Antioch through his Eminence the Most Reverend Archbishop Gearrasimos Messara of Beirut, Syria, who on August 5th, 1911, received the Old Catholics under Bishop Mathew into union and full communion with the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. Thus a genuine and practical rapprochement between the Catholics of the East and of the West was for the first time established after a breach which had lasted almost 10 centuries.

What distinguished the scholarly Archbishop Mathew and the Episcopate he established in Scotland and America from that of the continental Old Catholics was his insistence on the inviolable Episcopal authority of each national body of Old Catholics. This had been in the minds of the original Old Catholic congresses, but the German Episcopate, because of its preponderance of numbers and wealth attempted to create a small hierarchical system patterned on the Roman administration with the Archbishop of Utrecht in the position of ranking prelate or little pope. The English Old Catholics, seeing in this the possibilities of the former mistake of the Western Church with a Germanic, instead of an Italian, spiritual protectorate over the whole Christian world, restated the original Old Catholic principles

of autonomy and have received the support of their Orthodox friends in this respect.

Bishop Mathew's personal contribution to the Old Catholic Movement can be summed up as a broadening of the Catholic mind to an acceptance of the necessity of the unifying of Christ's Church on the basis of the original tenets of the Christian Faith as it was once believed by all Christians everywhere, and the recognition that this can only be accomplished by complete cooperation with Christians of the Eastern Churches, whose proximity in language, in tradition, and in mind with the early Christians, makes them the ideal vehicle.

After Bishop Mathew's death the small body of Old Catholics in England remained without legitimate Episcopal supervision of their own, and until a short while ago the Church remained in the protection of the Episcopate of the Old Catholic Church in Poland. Now, cut off from their Mother-house by the European War, the English Old Catholics have placed themselves under the jurisdiction of an American Old Catholic Archbishop.