**THE WOMEN IN NEWMAN'S LIFE - CONVERTS**

**from "EVER YOURS AFFLY" by JOYCE SUGG**

To-night I would like to talk about the women who were converts to Catholicism and who received support from Newman before or after their decision.

Single women had more difficulties to face in the 19C.

A census in 1837 revealed that in the over twenty age group, women outnumbered men and many articles and pamphlets appeared on the subject of single women and their problems. Such publicity made them feel like they were unwanted merchandise.

Two of Newman's friends are examples of very intelligent, unmarried women whose talents were not fully used and who suffered as a consequence.

**MARY HOLMES**

A governess with no money of her own and no influence, she was a teacher in the houses of the wealthy.

She entered the Church of Rome before Newman did, but had a great admiration for him and was in touch with him for most of her adult life.

Mary had a talent for writing letters and in addition to Newman, wrote also to Thackeray for a time (1852) and to Anthony Trollope.

Mary took Trollope to task over his presentation of a Catholic priest in **"the Way we Live Now"** and over his novel **"Lady Anna"** in 1874, in which the heroine falls in love with a tailor.

Newman urged Mary to become a nun, because he wanted her to become anchored. She was a rolling stone, moving from place to place and not staying long anywhere. Newman's advice to her was:

" If I were you, I should make it a resolution, as a matter of conscience, that when I get a situation, I on my part would do nothing directly or indirectly to close the engagement for at least two years."

Newman shared confidences and thoughts with Mary and appreciated her intelligence.

**EMILY BOWLES**

Came from a large, well-to-do family and the range of her friends and acquaintances, some of them very influential people, was considerable.

She became involved with the whole Cornelia Connelly saga . Cornelia arrived in Birmingham in 1846 and eventually founded the Society of the Holy Child, Jesus.

Cardinal Wieseman persuaded Emily to join Mrs. Connelly's venture. Emily became superior in Liverpool where a group of 4 nuns were sent to teach Irish children from the famine. Cornelia also wanted to start a Teacher Training College for women in Liverpool.

Emily, as superior, took it upon herself to borrow money from one of her brothers for building costs and more money from another brother to buy a house. The venture turned into a disaster when the Catholic Poor Schools Committee withdrew support and opted for another Congregation.

Cornelia's congregation were now left with large debts because of Emily's borrowing and a house no-one wanted to buy.

Newman visited Emily in Liverpool, despite the double strain he was under of being superior of Birmingham and Rector of the Dublin university.

Under Newman's guidance, Emily applied for dispensation from her vows and left the society of the child Jesus. From then on, she and her brothers harried Mother Connelly for full repayment and it was finally settled out of court.

Emily remained a lay woman, dividing her time between writing and visiting a prison and a large hospital.

She was extremely intelligent and energetic but emotionally insecure. She did not see Newman very often but like to think of herself as "his child"

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A link between Newman's old life and new was:

**MARIA ROSINA GIBERNE.**

Her story reads like a novel. She had good looks, a lively air, could speak French and Italian and had a talent for painting and portraiture.

She was received into the Church of Rome in Dec. 1845 by the Jesuit, Fr. Brownbill.

There was always the question as to how women converts were to spend their lives and be useful to the Church. Newman wondered if Maria felt called to religious life, but she went off to Rome and lodged first with the Colonna family and on another occasion with the Borghese family.

She returned to England in 1850, just as the Achilli trial was beginning. She wanted to be of some help to Newman and in 1851, he asked her to return to Italy to find some of Achilli's victims and bring them back as witnesses.

Maria found Elena and her husband Vicenzo. Other witnesses also joined her party. Long delays .....so Giberne had to bribe and entertain them. Finally reached London and Elena did fairly well as a witness but the trial was not going well for Newman and they had to remove the witnesses to prevent them perjuring themselves.

Giberne's own part in the trial was not inconsiderable and she came out of it well.

Newman was very grateful to her but his gratitude went to her head.

In 1852, there was trouble in the Oratory when a lay brother was overcome by an excess of what he called "spiritual love" for Mrs. Wotten.

Newman wrote: " I suppose Miss Giberne has encouraged him. Doubtless she has talked to him in the most idiotic way of her spiritual love for me!"

Giberne also took up the cudgels for Newman in Rome . She rebuffed Msgr. George Talbot when he belittled Newman's capabilities regarding the Dublin University and then went to Cardinal Antonelli and complained about Talbot.

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Newman was friendly with many married people and was concerned with all the events of family life both joyful and sorrowful.

**ELIZABETH BOWDEN**

She was a link between his Anglican and Catholic lives.

Her husband, John, was one of Newman's companions when they were undergraduates. Their nickname for him was: " The Great man"

Newman also related well to their 4 children:

John, Charles, Maryanne and Emily."

The husband, John Bowden, died of consumption in 1844. Bowden had told his wife to take Newman as a guide and at this very moment, Newman had to break the news to her that he was on the brink of joining the R.C. Church.

Elizabeth was distressed but affection and a desire to be open on each side preserved the relationship.

By March 1846, she was writing that she wanted to become a Catholic. Newman urged her to take her time. Her brother-in-law, Henry Bowden, was against it.

Elizabeth was received into the Church in July 1846 and 3 younger children followed.

Newman's sister, Harriet, in a letter to Jemima wrote: "By the bye, I suppose you see in the papers that Mrs. Bowden and family have gone over to Rome.....though her words in our last meeting were against Rome, her heart I saw went the other way, so I cannot be surprised. Also JHN was staying with her, which I thought very suspicious on more accounts than one."

The eldest Bowden son, John, became a Catholic two years later and, after all the fuss, so did the brother-in-law, Henry Bowden and all his family.

Another very interesting family:

**William and Catherine Froude.**

William Froude got a 1st in Maths and became a railway engineer under Brunel, and later a scientific researcher.

He married Catherine Holdsworth, daughter of an MP.

William and Catherine corresponded with Newman regularly but his greater friendship was with Catherine because of their shared religious concerns.

Mrs. Froude became a Catholic but her transition took a long time. She was not easily satisfied about Roman practices, asking detailed questions about exaggerated devotions, indulgences etc.

Newman answered her queries at length and explained the difference between what was important and what was a matter of taste.

The Froude's had 3 boys and 2 girls.

The eldest - Richard, was received into the Church in 1859 @ 17.

The other children also came into the Church, except for Mary who died of T.B. at 16 years. When Newman heard the news of her death he said: " Dear child, she is gone to heaven and is safe."

The eldest girl, Eliza Margaret, known as "Isy" became a Catholic in 1859 and loved Newman. He was very fond of her.

Newman had a distinct following with little girls and growing girls. Among them:

* Marianne and Emily Bowden.
* Mary Monica Hope - Scott
* Isy Froude
* Charlotte Bowden who @ 15 sent cakes. Newman wrote her verse as a thanksgiving:

" Who is it that moulds and makes

Round and crisp and fragrant cakes?

As a welcome compliment,

And the best that she can send

To a venerable friend.

One it is, for whom I pray,

On St. Philip's festal day,

With a loving heart that she

Perfect as her cakes may be,

Full and faithful in the round

Of her duties ever found

Where a trial comes, between

Truth and falsehood cutting keen;

Yet that keenness and completeness

Tempering with a winning sweetness.

Here's a rhyming letter, Chat,

Gift for a gift and tit for tat. "

None of the Froude's entered religious life or the priesthood.

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**LADY LOTHIAN**

She was an aristocratic lady, a widow, who called at Birmingham Oratory just before Christmas 1851 when she was a new convert. She wrote of Newman:

***"He was most kind. I was nervous, but without cause, for he is so full of sympathy and Christian love that he is the last person one need be afraid of. That which struck me most was his childlike sympathy and humility, and next to that, the vivid clearness with which he gives an opinion. He is a very striking looking person. His saying of Mass is most striking. I do not know what makes the difference, but one is conscious of a difference. It appeared to me very unearthly."***

Newman never encouraged hasty conversions and wanted converts to act with delicacy towards their relatives.

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Was an English lady who had married a Neapolitan nobleman and was a convert of some years. She was still bothered by certain devotions.

Newman wrote to her: " I do not see that a person ought to force himself into the use of particular manuals or exercises which do not come natural to him."

But Newman was also wary of advising a minimalist theory; Converts were at least to pray the Rosary.

**JANE TODD**

Was a seamstress, poor and not up to long and intensive correspondence, but she wasn't illiterate. She had followed Newman's teaching from Tractarian days, venerated him and wrote: "My understanding has seen His truth in you and never in any other human being."

She sewed many accessories to keep him warm. In 1864 N. wrote to Jemima: "There is a lady I have never seen, who is ever throwing flannels and silks at me, in spite of my protesting and sometimes sending them back.

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**CATHERINE WARD.**

This was a lady who had changed her creed again and again:

* At 12 she sought to prove the truth or falsehood of Calvinism by reading the Bible and other books and comparing their statements.
* At 15, she had doubts about the Athanasian Creed.
* At 19, she tried to shake off all belief.
* She then made a kind of religion for herself - a kind of Bible asceticism.
* Catherine then rushed into Evangelicalism with all its committees and talk and bustle.
* From there to Calvinism
* Then to Millenarianism
* Then to Tractarianism
* Then to the English Church when she heard a sermon by Pusey on Absolution. Pusey bound her to be Faithful to the English Church until Christmas 1848.
* In June 1849, she became a Catholic.

Newman wondered: "Was she one who would ever be seeking and so would not find?"

Catherine Ward never wavered again.

**LAVINIA WILSON.**

Was a member of an Anglican sisterhood in Oxford, who taught children and visited the poor.

She wrote to Newman in 1864 convinced that she must become a Catholic.

Newman gave her guidelines:

* She must wait 3 months and do nothing.
* She must guard her right to liberty of action.
* She must behave honourably about her doubts to the other sisters.

Newman also wrote a compassionate letter to the Mother Superior.

At Christmas, Sr. Lavinia left the convent. Newman advised her to:

* Study the catechism.
* Get hold of two prayer books: " The Garden of the Soul" and the "Golden Manual."
* She was to do no fasting, even in Lent, because of the strain she had endured.
* In 1865 she was received into the Church and her sister, Fanny, also became a Catholic.

Lavinia then entered a Catholic Convent.