CORRESPONDENCE

ENGLISH CATHOLICS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

SIR,

In a review of Cardinal Gasquet's *Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (BLACKFRIARS, May, 1922), when referring to Cardinal Erskine's mission to the Court of St. James' (1792-1806) Fr. Bracey says: 'The curious diplomatic relations between England and Rome here revealed will come as a surprise to many. . . George III and Queen Charlotte receiving a Papal Envoy "with great cordiality," the Prince of Wales presenting him to "his friend, Mrs. Fitzherbert," the Oxford dons dining with the Roman prelate in hall at Christ Church, Burke, Windham and Thurlow jocularly toasting him as the "Devil's Advocate,"' &c.

The good fellowship as well as high honour which was extended to the Catholics during the above period, 1792-1806, doubtless appears very extraordinary to the majority of people who are under the impression that the Penal Laws and Disabilities had reduced the Catholics in England to the condition of pariahs.

But the annals of the country-houses belonging to the old Catholic families could tell a very different tale. If there was a period during which one would have imagined that Catholics were under a social cloud it surely would be in the eighteenth century, during which time the Rebellions of '15 and '45 took place, but in the library of my grandfather's, now my brother's, house Burghwallis Hall, Doncaster, is to be found an old Racing Calendar for Yorkshire whose records run from 1721 (only six years after the first Rebellion) to 1777. No Catholic of course could legally own a horse worth more than £5—a very wise precaution from the Government point of view to prevent them from furnishing cavalry to the Pretenders—nevertheless in 1726, Mr. Charlton of Hesleyside, my great-great-great-grandfather, ran a horse for the King's Cup. In 1745 (the year of the Rebellion which ended with Culloden) Michael Anne of Frickley, and Burghwallis, my maternal great-great-great-grandfather, won the King's Cup of 100 Guineas with a horse named Badsworth. About 1754, Mr. Charlton of Hesleyside, my great-great-grandfather, husband of Teresa Swinburne, started racing, and evidently

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owned a number of horses, the best of which Dumpling was sold by him to the Duke of Cumberland, the 'hero' of Culloden. The great north country owner of racehorses from the fifties to the seventies was Mr. Fenwick, of Northumberland, who raced in partnership with another Catholic—a Yorkshireman—Mr. Stapleton, of Carlton Towers. They had many years of good luck on the turf. Sir John Swinburne, of Capheaton, and his son, afterwards Sir Edward (brother of the traveller), both raced, and were fairly lucky, while the names of Clavering, Shafto, Salvin, and many other old Catholic names appear as more or less successful owners. In short, the leading votaries of the turf at that time appear to have been mostly Catholics, while by law they were prohibited from owning any horse which suggested anything superior to a knacker's yard. This Racing Callendar also gives a list of the names of those who subscribed during three years to the York Assembly Rooms, which were terribly exclusive, but contained a list of the names of at least 100 old Catholics who from generation to generation subscribed to this centre of fashionable life. Charltons, Swinburnes, Annes, Cholmeleys, Meynells, Stourtons, Vavasours, Constables, Selbys, Gasgoignes (now extinct), Leybournes, &c., &c.

The fact of the matter is that the Catholics for some reason which it is not very easy to understand held a very much higher, social position before Catholic Emancipation than they have ever held after it—there was no division between them and non-Catholics on religious grounds or otherwise. The estrangement came with the new Marriage Law in Cardinal Wiseman's time, when marriages taking place in Catholic Churches were legalised, and the Church no longer tolerated the sons being brought up in their father's religion and the daughters in their mother's. But although, during the early part of the nineteenth century the Catholics were no longer the *leaders* of Society as they had been during the eighteenth century yet they were certainly never reduced to the abject condition depicted by Cardinal Newman in his sermon, 'The Second Spring,' where we are represented as having had hardly spirit enough to apologise for our existence!

Perhaps if instead of being a College Don the Gentle Saint had visited the York Assembly Rooms during a 'race' or 'hunt' ball, or the 'ring' at Doncaster during the Leger week he might have modified his impression that we were in the unenviable position of the Early Christians in the days of the Catacombs!

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