

# In the SPOTLIGHT

## Cardinal Newman Of "Kindly Light" Was An Oxford Man

When, a few years ago, an English newspaper expended a considerable amount of trouble to determine which hymn held first place in the affections of the British people, Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light," the evidence proved, was the greatest favorite, with Watt's "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" in second place.

John Henry Newman's world-famous hymn is within six months of being a century old. It was written in June, 1833, the same summer that John Keble preached an impassioned sermon on "National Apostasy," an event, it is said, which gave rise to the original Oxford Movement. "Lead, Kindly Light," asserted an eminent divine, was "a birth-pang of the movement." Certainly, with voice and pen, Newman labored hard to help and encourage the first so-called Oxford Movement, the great object of which was to counteract both the Romanizing and the dissenting tendencies of the time by restoring what he and his friends believed to be the catholic character of the English Church. Just as certainly, the familiar words of his immortal hymn, expressing radical reliance on Divine guidance, embody the spirit of the Oxford Group Movement as it is being expounded now, in Toronto.

### HOW NEWMAN WROTE HYMN

A number of stories are current about the circumstances under which the words of this great Christian song and literary gem were written. They usually commence: "Overtaken by darkness in a strange country, a traveller—," or "A man affected with blindness once—" Or something of that kind. Authentically, however, the hymn was not inspired either by physical darkness or atmospheric gloom, but was a child of the blue and sunny Mediterranean. To that pleasant playground Newman, then aged 32, went to recuperate following a long period of exhausting literary work. His trip was marred by

the onset of a fever, from which, at one time, recovery was despaired of. Transportation was a tardy business, a hundred years ago, and, despite his anxiety to get back to England, he was detained for three weeks in Palermo, colorful capital of Sicily, before a passage toward home could be obtained. At that, the best accommodation he could get was in an orange boat, bound for Marseilles.

For a whole week the fruit-laden vessel was becalmed in the Straits of Bonifacio. To beguile the tedious hours away, Newman wrote verses. "Lead, Kindly Light" was among the poetic efforts, "—lines which have since become well known," the author modestly stated in later life, writes Percy Ghent, contributing to the Spotlight.

#### BLIND SOLDIERS SANG IT

Well known indeed! It is doubtful if there is a Christian church anywhere, of no matter what denomination, where the words are not familiar. People, as a matter of fact, who never enter a place of worship know them by heart. Lines from this hymn, as from Gray's "Elegy," are part of everyday speech. Even Agnostics and unbelievers admire the verses as good literature and beautiful poetry.

Like the majestic spiritual song of Isaac Watt's "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," Newman's hymn seems to make vocal and articulate the deeper emotions of man. It was within Hampstead Cemetery, at the graveside of Sir Arthur Pearson, that two hundred soldiers—all of them blinded in the Great War—stood in line to pay their last respects to the man who, blind himself, had founded St. Dunstan's for the care and training of the sightless soldiers whom he loved.

When these gallant fellows sang:

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on!"

there were few tearless eyes among the vast throng. "After an experience like that," said a lady who was present, "who could believe that the grave is the end of all? There must be something more for those brave lads."

#### NEWMAN AT OXFORD

John Henry Newman, son of a London banker, was born in London in 1801. Educated at a private school, he took delight in reading the Bible and the works of Sir Walter Scott, then in course of publication. Matriculating at Trinity College, Oxford, in 1816, he entered into residence there, and in 1818 won a £60 scholarship, tenable for nine years. But in 1819 his father's banking firm failed and Newman was entered at Lincoln's Inn, London, as a student for the bar. Keen to do well, he broke down in health and only graduated from Oxford with third-class honors in 1821. Desiring to remain at Oxford, he took private pupils and read for a fellowship at Oriel College, which he won, being elected in 1822. Newman was ordained a priest of the Church of England on Trinity Sunday, 1824. He was admitted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, and, by Pope Leo XIII, created a cardinal in 1879. He was the author of many works on religious subjects.