

# Catholic England

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“THAT’S what I call good beer,” said Old Moffat, smacking his lips. “Don’t often come across beer like that these days.”

Ellis put down his tankard.

“You’re right, Moffat, that is good beer. It’s what they call singing beer. It does you good, that brew. Haven’t had anything like it since I did a job up at the monastery a couple of months ago.”

“Monastery?” said Moffat. “Do you mean to tell me that monks know anything about beer? I can’t imagine monks drinking beer. I thought they were singing hymns all day.”

“That’s what I used to think,” said Ellis, “until I started going up there. Had a plumbing job that took me best part of three weeks. I got to know the monks pretty well. They gave me a room in what they call their guesthouse and, believe me, I altered all my ideas. I got to reading at nights. There was nothing else to do. I started reading some history books. I thought I’d go barmy at first. I only brought a couple of Edgar Wallace’s with me. When I finished them, I thought I’d had it. But one of the monks gave me some books on history. Believe me, it’s just as good as Edgar Wallace.”

Moffat didn’t look very convinced.

“I don’t get a lot of time for reading myself,” he said. “Did you find out anything interesting?”

“Interesting?” replied the other, “I’ll say I did. Did you know that this country was full of Catholics at one time? There were monks all over the place and the only reason why they turned them out was because old King Henry VIII wanted to give their lands to his pals.”

“You don’t want to believe all the stuff the Roman Catholics tell you,” said Moffat. “It’s a lot of propaganda. That’s what they were giving you.”

“That’s what I thought at first. But the book I got most out of wasn’t by a Roman Catholic at all. It was by a bloke named Cobbett. He was a Protestant himself. And he gives you all the facts about the Reformation. You’d be surprised what England was like in those days.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” said Moffat, “that everybody was monks?”

“Don’t be daft. Course they weren’t all monks. But all these ruined abbeys were once full of monks.”

Old Moffat looked thoughtful.

“Well, if monks can brew beer like this, there’s something to be said for them, after all.”

Round Trip.

This was the first day of their holiday. Ellis and his wife and Old Moffat had joined a party that was going to do a bit of touring. Mrs. Ellis wasn't exactly Old Moffat's style. She had a cousin who was a parson and gave herself airs.

You'd think she was a parson herself the way she used to keep Ellis on the straight and narrow. The only reason why he was sitting down now having a glass of beer with Old Moffat was because his wife was having a hair-do and would be safe for a couple of hours at least.

The next morning was Sunday. When Old Moffat got down to breakfast, he found Mr. and Mrs. Ellis half way through their bacon. Old Moffat never felt too good first thing in the morning. He hoped they wouldn't expect him to be sociable. He propped the News of the World against the teapot and looked at the test-match score.

Mrs. Ellis gave a little cough. Moffat groaned inside. This is it, he thought.

"Now I've got to be nice and polite. Why didn't I stay at home instead of coming on this trip?"

"I suppose we're all going to church this morning?" said Mrs. Ellis, with a glitter in her eye.

"Church?" said Moffat. "Church on a glorious day like this? I'm going for a walk. I don't suppose they've got one of my churches here, anyway."

"This is a very up-to-date town," said Mrs. Ellis. "They've got every kind of church here. There's a High Church and a Low Church. There's a Chapel. What more do you want?"

Old Moffat gritted his teeth.

"I'm on holiday," he said. "I can be led, but I won't be druv. And another thing. I heard a bunch of women arguing last night about church. So far as I could gather, the parish church was too low for the Highs and too high for the Lows. So I reckon people would be better off taking a stroll in God's fresh air, same as me."

Mrs. Ellis rose stiffly.

"It's better to go somewhere than nowhere. Every Christian ought to go somewhere on the Lord's Day, Mr. Moffat."

When she had gone, Moffat poured himself out another cup of tea and filled his pipe.

Young Nobler.

Poor Ellis, he was thinking. Fancy getting dragged off to church like that. It's a good job I never got married. He looked across the dining-room and saw the young fellow named Nobler. He was in the party, too, but he seemed to be the only one on his own. Old Moffat sat sucking his pipe wondering whether he ought to go up and say a word to him. He seemed a nice kind of young fellow. May as well. Perhaps he'll come and have a pint with me down the road.

"I'm Moffat," he said, going up to young Nobler's table. "Are you going to church or are you coming for a walk?"

Nobler said: "Me for a walk every time. I went to church at 8 o'clock this morning before you were up."

"I didn't know there was any service as early as that," said Moffat. "I heard them saying that the first one was at 10 o'clock. Good job Mrs. Ellis didn't know. She'd have had young Ellis up half the night."

Nobler laughed.

"Oh, mine wasn't that kind of service. I'm a Catholic. I've been to early Mass."

Old Moffat's eyes lighted up.

"I didn't know you were R.C. Ever been in a monastery?"

"Yes, I've been in a monastery tons of times."

"What was the beer like?" asked Moffat with a wink.

"Beer! Did you say beer?"

"Yes," said Old Moffat. "Beer. I didn't know anything about monasteries till yesterday. Young Ellis was telling me that they make the best beer in the world in monasteries."

"I think you've got the word wrong," said Nobler, smiling. "You're thinking of breweries, not monasteries."

"I'm thinking of monasteries. Ellis tells me that before the Reformation, there were monasteries everywhere and they made singing beer. I'm going to have a look at some of these monasteries. They must be a bit of all right."

"You don't really think," said Nobler, "that the main thing about monasteries is their beer, do you?"

"Course I don't," said Moffat. "But come to think of it, if those monks made beer they must be sort of human. Never struck me before that monks could be human."

"Oh, they're human enough," said Nobler. "Why shouldn't they be? They are men the same as you and me."

"Then why do they go and lock themselves up in monasteries? Why couldn't they settle down and marry like everybody else?"

"Nothing to stop them," said Nobler. "But I suppose they reckon they can do their job of work better by not settling down and getting married. In the old days in England most of the teaching was done by the monks. They would build churches and till the land. And there was no need for workhouses. Anybody was welcome in a monastery."

"Yes. So Ellis was telling me last night," said Moffat. "He told me a lot of interesting bits. I wonder where they came from in the first place?"

"Why, they were practically always here. When the Roman soldiers were in England, there were some Christians among them. But they didn't last. The Angles and Saxons made short work of the Romans. But then, England got converted all over again. Let's have a stroll and I'll tell you about it as we go along."

Old English Churches.

Moffat went upstairs and got his hat. Then he and Nobler went out past the parish church into the country. They had a good walk and a couple of half-pints. By the time they came back to the hotel

Old Moffat felt he knew all there was to be known about the history of England. As luck would have it, in the lobby coming in he met Mrs. Ellis in person.

"What did you learn at church this morning, Mrs. Ellis?" he asked, winking at Nobler.

"Should have come yourself, then you'd know," Mrs. Ellis replied frigidly.

"Tell you what," said Old Moffat. "I bet I learnt more about religion this morning on my walk than you did in your church. Tell you one thing I learnt I bet you don't know. Do you know who built that church you were in this morning?"

"How should I know who built the church? It doesn't matter who built it. It's who goes there that counts."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Old Moffat, ignoring her reply. "That church was built by the Roman Catholics."

"Don't be perfectly ridiculous," said Mrs. Ellis. "That church is a thousand years old."

"That's what I mean," said Moffat. "There weren't any Protestant churches in England a thousand years ago. All these churches were built by the monks. Tell you something else I learnt. Who was the most famous monk in English history?"

Mrs. Ellis smiled. She'd show this ignorant old man that she knew a thing or two. She'd read a lot of books her cousin the parson had given her.

"Saint Augustine, of course," she said.

"That's right," said Moffat. "Did you know that he was a Roman Catholic?"

"You've been drinking beer," said Mrs. Ellis. "How could he have been a Roman Catholic? He was the first Archbishop of Canterbury. I've seen his chair in Canterbury Cathedral. Whoever heard of an Archbishop of Canterbury being an R.C.?"

This was more than Nobler could stand.

"Are you being serious, Mrs. Ellis? He asked. "Didn't you really know that Saint Augustine was a Catholic monk sent by Pope Gregory the Great, who was a monk himself?"

"Surely you must know that until the Protestant Reformation everybody in England was a Catholic?"

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Ellis. "But I've been to church and I don't want to start quarrelling. Anyway, we're on a holiday. Let's forget arguments. I'll ask my cousin all about the monks when I see him."

The rest of the day, they spent in sightseeing. They went out to an old castle with a dungeon and pieces of rusty chain still hanging from the walls.

"This place gives me the creeps," said Mrs. Ellis, shuddering. "They ought to close these places down."

"Come on," said her husband. "You know you wouldn't have missed this for worlds."

The Pageant.

The next day they were all up bright and early because it was Bank Holiday Monday. They had to get to a little village forty miles away where they were going to see a pageant. The party was in good spirits. There wasn't a cloud anywhere. Just the day for a drive. They did it in just under the two hours.

They had a picnic lunch on the village green and rested while they waited for the pageant to begin. Everybody seemed happy except Old Moffat. There was a perfectly good pub in the village and he thought he could enjoy himself there better than at a pageant. He whispered into the ear of young Ellis:

"Can't we slip away?" he said. "I know what these pageants are like. They ought to be held in church. I didn't know this tour was going to be all religion."

Mrs. Ellis was looking hard at the pair of them. Old Moffat subsided. Better stick it out, he thought. It won't last long, anyway. And they're open again at 6 o'clock.

Sure enough, Old Moffat's worst fears were realised. Out came the Vicar to announce Scene One, and what should the first scene be but Saint Augustine with a lot of monks trooping after him singing hymns.

"What did I tell you?" he whispered to Ellis under his breath. "My day's ruined."

But, as Moffat discovered, it wasn't half as bad as he had expected. In fact, he got quite interested. They showed you Augustine founding his Church at Canterbury. Then they brought on King Alfred, cakes and all. Then they showed you Edward the Confessor starting to build Westminster Abbey.

The next man in was William the Conqueror. He was a great big fellow and might have been the village blacksmith. As he came on, he waved to his wife, missed his step and fell down. His armour was so heavy he couldn't get up again. He would have stayed there all afternoon if Edward the Confessor (who was supposed to be dead) hadn't come out and picked him up. Old Moffat laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. Not even a look from Mrs. Ellis could keep him quiet.

Next, they saw Richard the Lionheart going off to the Crusades and they saw his brother, John Lackland, sign Magna Charta.

Then came the War of the Roses.

Henry VIII.

About two o'clock King Henry VIII strolled on. He was so fat he could scarcely move. With him was Anne Boleyn.

"Doesn't she look cute?" said Ellis.

But it was his unlucky day. His wife heard him. He knew he'd have to pay for that later on. He decided to keep his mouth shut for the rest of the pageant.

Next came Cardinal Wolsey and Archbishop Cranmer.

In the same scene there was a Bishop called John Fisher and the Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More. Old Moffat found it a bit hard to sort it all out. Young Nobler had told him that Cranmer was a Protestant and Fisher was a Catholic. But there on the village green they all seemed to be pals. On the whole, he wasn't sorry when the Vicar announced the interval.

Young Nobler, Ellis and Old Moffat could scarcely believe their luck when the Vicar came up and told Mrs. Ellis that he'd been a curate with her cousin. They were soon lost in conversation. This enabled the men to slip across the road just before they closed.

"Thirsty work, watching pageants," said Old Moffat, as they sat down.

"True enough," said Ellis. "But I wouldn't have liked to be old Henry, stuffed out with all those pillows."

"Bad lot that Henry," said Moffat. "I see they said nothing about him and the monks. What's the real story, Nobler?"

Nobler finished his half-pint and put the tankard down with a flourish.

— "I thought everybody knew about old Henry. Don't they teach them anything in school nowadays? Here's the way it happened. King Henry wanted a boy to succeed him on the throne. His own sons had all died and the only child alive was a girl. As a matter of fact, he'd got fed up with his Queen whose name was Katherine and he'd fallen for a pretty little bit named Anne Boleyn. So, he said that he really shouldn't have married Katherine in the first place. He said that having no sons was a judgment of God on him for having Katherine."

"How did he get away with that?" asked Old Moffat. "He was married properly, wasn't he?"

"Oh, he was married all right. But she'd been married first of all to his own brother. When the brother died, she married Henry. Now a Catholic can't marry his sister-in-law without permission. It's what Catholics call a dispensation."

Ellis leant forward.

"Well, hadn't Henry got this permission?"

"Course he had," said Nobler. "He wasn't really worried about his marriage at all. He knew it was a marriage all right. His trouble was that he'd got tired of Katherine and he wanted the Pope to let him marry Anne."

"And what did the Pope do?" Ellis asked.

The 'Divorce' or Annulment.

"What could he do? The Pope can't go against the Bible. He couldn't give an annulment and certainly not a divorce. And Henry knew very well he couldn't. That's why the Pope and King Henry fell out. That's when the fun began. Henry decided he'd have to make his own Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury had died so Henry put in a pal of his own named Cranmer. This Cranmer promised to do anything Henry wanted. So he didn't kick up any fuss when the King made Parliament pass an Act to say that the Pope was no longer head of the Church but there would be an English Church and the King would be in charge.

"Next he told Cranmer to say the Pope shouldn't have given him a dispensation to marry Katherine. That was O.K. by Cranmer, so Henry went off and married Anne Boleyn."

"That sounds all very well," said Ellis. "But my wife told me last night that the Pope was always interfering in England and that's why they had to get rid of him. She says that her cousin told her the Church of England was never part of the Church of Rome. She says that hundreds of years

before the Reformation the Pope and the King of England used to be fighting. The Archbishop of Canterbury was always an Anglican.”

“Now don’t start talking rubbish,” snorted young Nobler. “Everybody knows that the Archbishop of Canterbury always got his power from the Pope. Henry wasn’t really serious when he said that he could be head of the Church. Henry really wasn’t a Protestant at all. He was really a Catholic.”

Old Moffat wasn’t listening. He was thinking of something else. He banged the table.

“We’ve just got time for another one, boys, before we go back to that pageant. I didn’t follow all you were saying. But I must say it’s news to me what young Nobler said. I never heard anybody say that King Henry VIII was a Roman Catholic.”

“Who’s paying for this beer?” asked Nobler, suddenly.

“Leave that to me,” said Moffat.

“No, it’s my turn,” said Ellis.

“Tell you what I’ll do,” put in Nobler. “Do you bet me I can’t prove to you that Henry VIII was a Catholic? If I can’t, I’ll pay for the beer. But if I can prove it, Ellis can pay instead. You keep out of this, Moffat. You’ve done enough already.”

Defender of the Faith.

Nobler pulled out of his pocket a handful of coins and put them on the table in front of him.

“Every one of those coins,” he said, “is a proof that Henry was a Catholic because on every coin you will see this.”

He picked up a penny and showed them what was written round the King’s head.

“See that ‘Fid. Def.’? That’s the Latin for Defender of the Faith. Have you ever asked yourself what that means?”

“Can’t say I have,” said Moffat. “You tell us.”

“It means that the Pope gave to King Henry and all the Kings of England to come after him the title of Defender of the Faith. When the Protestant Reformation was started in Germany by an ex-monk named Martin Luther, King Henry wrote a wonderful book to defend the Faith. So the Pope, whose name was Leo X, rewarded him by giving him the title.”

“Well, I must say,” said Ellis, feeling for his money, “I never knew that before. I wonder if my wife’s cousin knows it?”

The beer and the sun had gone to Nobler’s head. He was getting quite excited.

“There’s an awful lot of things that people ought to know in this country,” he said, “and one of them is that our ancestors in England all called the Pope the Holy Father, the same as English Catholics do to-day. All the bishops in England were appointed by the Pope. You call the Archbishop of Canterbury the Primate of All England. He was called that nearly four hundred years before the Reformation. As a matter of fact, the first Archbishop to get that title was Archbishop Richard [archbishop from 1174 to 1184]. He was given the title by the Pope.”

Ellis was getting a bit excited, too. He somehow felt that his cousin’s honour was at stake.

“Are you trying to tell me,” he asked Nobler, “that the Pope used to appoint English bishops just the same as the Prime Minister does now? It doesn’t seem right. After all, the Pope has to be an Italian. What does he want to start interfering with England for?”

“Your trouble,” said Nobler, is that nobody’s told you anything. Hasn’t anyone told you that there’ve been Popes of every nationality? We have had an English Pope. There’ve been German Popes and French Popes and all sorts of Popes. But it’s not a question of race. It’s a question of religion. Why do you say the Prime Minister ought to appoint bishops? Why should Chamberlain have appointed bishops of the Church of England? He never believed in it. He was a Unitarian. Old MacDonald before him was a Presbyterian. It doesn’t make any sense to me.” [Neville Chamberlain was Prime minister from 1937 to 1940. Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister in 1924 and 1929 to 1935.]

The Change of Religion.

Old Moffat had fallen asleep. He felt happy. He thought that his friends had forgotten all about the pageant. But he did not sleep for long.

A small boy ran up to the table.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” the boy said. “A lady up at the pageant told me to tell you you’re to come at once.”

Nobler was, if possible, more annoyed than Old Moffat. He had just begun to tell them how the English people hadn’t realised what was happening at the time of the Reformation.

“When Henry started calling himself head of the Church, the people thought it was just politics. They didn’t realise there was going to be any change of religion. But when they saw what it was all about they started getting nasty. In 1534 the King had made Parliament pass the Act making him head of the Church. It took a couple of years to sink in, but in 1536, there was a terrific rebellion. There was a rising of nearly forty thousand men. That was a huge number for those days. The rising was called the Pilgrimage of Grace. They weren’t going to stand for any change of religion. They were Catholics. But the King was too clever for them. He persuaded the men to lay down arms and then he executed all the leaders.”

But Nobler didn’t have any time to say all this; at least, it wasn’t all heard by Ellis. Nobler and he knew there’d be no peace for anybody if they upset Mrs. Ellis. So back they went to the pageant.

When they got there, they found Queen Elizabeth on the stage. The Virgin Queen looked as if she was enjoying herself. She was a nice little red head. But Ellis had learnt his lesson and only said to his wife:

“What a lovely dress she’s got on.”

Mrs. Ellis didn’t seem to mind that so much.

Nobler was so busy thinking about his grievances that he didn’t take much notice of the pageant. Old Moffat fell fast asleep. He missed the Merry Monarch, Charles II, and Queen Anne and all the rest of them. He woke up only just in time to see Queen Victoria having her jubilee. That was the end of the pageant except for a little speech by the Vicar. He congratulated the actors and said how much everybody had learned of the glories of the past.

That night after supper, Mrs. Ellis went to bed and the other three were sitting round a table in the saloon bar. Young Nobler had quite recovered his spirits.

"It's about time I paid for something," he said. "What are you going to have?"

The other two thought they would stick to the beer, though it wasn't quite so good as the singing beer at the other place.

During supper, Ellis had had rather a hard time with his wife. He'd been telling her all he'd heard from young Nobler and she'd primed him with a few questions.

"My wife," he began, "says she's never heard of the Pilgrimage of Grace."

"So what?" said young Nobler. "Does that mean the Pilgrimage of Grace never happened? Perhaps she's never heard of the 'rising in the West'? Tell her this one when you go to bed."

The Rising in the West.

"There was a great rising in the West in 1549. The men of Cornwall were slow thinking, but when it had penetrated their thick skulls that the Reformation meant a change of religion and that they were going to lose the Mass, they rose like one man. You ask her about that. Perhaps they don't put that bit in Protestant history books."

"This beer," said Old Moffat, "is better than the last lot. This must be something like the old monks used to make."

The other two weren't listening, so he added quickly:

"Sorry I've interrupted. What was that you were saying about the rising in the West, Nobler?"

"Well, it's rather a long story. But if you want to hear it, here goes."

"When Henry died, the new King was young Edward VI. He was only a child, so the Government could do what it liked. Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the first Protestant bishop. He hated the Mass because the Mass is what means most to Catholics. So between him and the politicians they decided to get rid of it. The first thing the Government did was to abolish all the Chantries."

"All the what?" asked Moffat.

"Chantries," said Nobler. "People used to die and leave money to the Church. This money was to support a priest who would offer Masses for their souls. Well, the Government wanted that money, the same as they wanted the lands belonging to the monasteries. A lot of people got rich quick out of the money and land they stole from the Church. You know Somerset House in the Strand? You know, the place where they keep the registers of births, deaths and marriages. Now, there's a place built out of the money belonging to the Church. It was built in the young King's time by Somerset."

"This is a bit beyond me," said Ellis. "I don't get it. What's this got to do with the rebellion? If the people who left the money were dead, who was left to rebel? Was it the priests who rebelled?"

"No," said Nobler. "It's really all very simple. The only way the Government could pinch the money was by telling the people that the Mass was abolished. They said it was a farce. It was just blasphemy. They said it wouldn't help anybody living or dead. Then they got Cranmer to write a new Prayer Book which didn't mention the Mass at all except to denounce it."

The Holy Mass.

“Now the men of the West weren’t going to have the Mass talked about like that. So that’s why they rose in rebellion.”

“How did they get on?” asked Old Moffat, who evidently thought it was like a cup final.

“Oh, they lost,” said Nobler. “So the Government pulled down all the altars in the churches.”

“Come off it,” said Ellis. “You can’t tell me that. There are altars in all the old churches.”

“Yes,” said Nobler. But they’re new ones. All the old altars — about sixty thousand of them — were pulled down and they put what they called a holy table in their place. To the Catholics, Mass was a sacrifice. In the new religion, there wasn’t any sacrifice, so there wasn’t any need for an altar. They just had this holy table for their Communion Service.”

“What I say,” said Old Moffat, who thought the party might break up and he’d get no more beer, “is that there’s good and bad everywhere. I expect they all meant well. As far as I can see, Protestants killed Catholics and Catholics killed Protestants. We’ve all got our faults. Didn’t Bloody Mary come along and put all the Protestants to death?”

Nobler looked thoughtful.

“Well, there’s no doubt about it, she did all she could to put back the Catholic religion where it belonged in this country and a lot of people got hurt in the process. Stands to reason that the people who had got rich out of the spoils of the Church wanted to overthrow Mary. So she bumped them off. But don’t run away with the idea that England was ever running with the blood of Protestants. Still, I’m not going to deny that some Protestants gave their lives for what they believed to be true. But the blood didn’t really start to flow until Good Queen Bess came on the throne.”

Queen Elizabeth.

“Now she was another real Protestant. At her coronation, she took an oath to protect the Catholic Church. But the first thing she did when she became Queen was to suppress the Mass again and bring back the Book of Common Prayer. If people wouldn’t go to the Protestant church, she fined them. If they still wouldn’t go, she put them in jail. And if they didn’t start going when they were released, she banished them from the country. Any priest found saying Mass was put to death.”

It was no good. Young Nobler simply couldn’t keep his temper. So he decided the best thing he could do was to go to bed. He gave Old Moffat a hearty good-night. But his good-night to poor Ellis was much less hearty. When he had gone, Old Moffat said to Ellis:

“Now listen. I’m nearly twice your age and there are two things you should never argue about — politics and religion. Now let’s forget it. Let’s forget religion for the rest of this week and enjoy ourselves.”

All through the week, the men were very good. They saw the sights, drank their beer, discussed sport. But they kept off anything that looked even vaguely like religion. But on the last day of the trip, it all started again. It wasn’t anybody’s fault really. On the last Saturday morning, they were due to be shown round an old priory church.

When they got there, they found a party was already being shown around. They must have come with the big bus that was standing down the road. The party was being led by a tall priest dressed in the habit of Benedictine. At the sight of him, Nobler turned excitedly to Old Moffat.

“This is it,” he said. “Here’s a real live monk for you at last. You go up to him and ask him about the old monks.”

Old Moffat wasn’t a bit shy. He went up to the priest and said:

“Excuse me, sir. Are you an R.C. monk?”

“Yes,” answered the priest. “At your service. Can I do anything for you?”

“Well,” said Old Moffat, “this young fellow’s an R.C. too, and he was telling me a lot about monks before the Reformation. I don’t know whether he was pulling my leg. Do you know anything about the old monks?”

The priest laughed.

‘I ought to,” he said. “After all, the Abbey I live in is much the same as the old abbeys that used to be dotted around this country. Anyhow, join my party if you like. I’m just explaining to my people, here, about what happened to these monasteries.”

The priest turned back to his party.

“Well, as I was saying, King Henry VIII pulled down a lot of these monasteries and the new rich looted them for lead, timber and stone and built country-houses for themselves. Now we’re standing just about the spot where the altar was. It wasn’t till Queen Elizabeth’s time that they got really savage. Although all her ancestors had believed in the Mass, and her own father and sister had gone to Mass all their lives, she made up her mind to abolish it.”

The Altar.

“Now, thanks to the Ministry of Works, there’s an old altar set up here that has been discovered after being buried for centuries. Just look closely. See those five crosses carved into the stone? That’s a sign of an altar where Mass is said. The altar in my Abbey church has got an altar stone just like this.”

By the side of the altar stone was a glass case forming part of a kind of museum that local enterprise had started.

“That open book,” the monk said, “is an old missal. It must be every day of seven hundred years old. The colours look as fresh as when the monks first painted them. Now look, see where something’s been crossed out. That’s where in every missal there is a space for the Pope’s name.

Mrs. Ellis had come up by now and was listening rather suspiciously to what the priest was saying.

“Excuse me, sir,” she said. “But it was only the Pope they got rid of, wasn’t it, at the time of the Reformation?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, the religion of the Church of England today is the same as it was before. We are all Catholics. But we are not Roman Catholics. That’s what my cousin says, and he’s a parson.”

The monk pointed to the altar stone.

“That’s really the test, madam. It is the Mass that matters, not the label you wear. Before the Reformation, they only recognised one kind of Catholic. That’s the kind which acknowledges the Pope as Vicar of Christ and believes that the Mass is the most important thing on earth.”

Mrs. Ellis flushed angrily.

“But I belong to the very High Church. We have the Mass and everything. We’re Anglo-Catholics and you’re Roman Catholic.”

The monk regarded her with a compassionate look.

“You know, it isn’t really fair to call yourself a member of the Church of England. You’ve got to be either a Catholic or a Protestant, really. If you had been alive in Queen Elizabeth’s day you would never have heard anybody in the Church of England talking about the Mass. Incidentally, you would never have heard of anybody talking about Roman Catholics. I suppose you know that the name Anglo-Catholic is a very modern invention? So you really ought to make up your mind whether you’re a Catholic the same as Saint Augustine and all the great names in English history — Edward the Confessor, William the Conqueror, Richard Lionheart — or whether you are a Protestant like Cranmer, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury. You can’t really —”

Underground Movement.

“Pardon me.” It was Moffat speaking. “I’ve had to put up with this kind of thing for a week. I don’t like arguments. I’m just looking for information. Will you tell me this? What happened to the Catholic Church when Queen Elizabeth had finished killing the priests and expelling the Catholics? Did it die out?”

“No,” said the priest. “The Catholics opened colleges on the Continent. Young men went there to be educated, and when they were ordained priests, they came back in disguise. The Catholics who were still left at liberty used to know them. These young priests used to say Mass in hiding places all over the country. That’s why there are some places in England where the Mass has been said without interruption for over a thousand years. But when they were found out, the priests were put to death.”

“Sounds like a sort of underground movement to me,” said Old Moffat.

“The Catholic Church had its underground movement in the catacombs in the first centuries, during the Reformation in this country, and today in every country where there is a dictator who hates Christ.”

“And how long will the Catholic Church stay underground?” asked Old Moffat.

The priest looked thoughtful.

“That doesn’t depend on the Church. That depends on the grace of God. When He gives men the light, they begin to look for the Church. They begin to love it instead of wanting to destroy it. When they look for the Church, they can always find it.”

“But not if it’s underground!” persisted Old Moffat.

“But this is God’s underground,” replied the priest. “God’s underground always comes out into the open so that it can be seen by the friends of Christ. The Catholic Church is not supposed to stay underground. Christ said it was to be more like a city set on a hill.”

