

Chapter XV

Assisi : Madagascar : The Press : America

In the spring of 1898, Edith and Hardwicke visited Italy again. There they met Francesca Alexander, a friend of Ruskin, who showed them her roof garden.

Hardwicke wished to find out all that he could about St. Francis, so they travelled from Florence to La Verna and then had a long drive to Bibbiena, where the thirteenth century monastery was associated with Francis and kept to his rule, based on a life of prayer and austerity. There was a famine at that time and peasants came from miles around to receive a small loaf of bread. Hardwicke stayed overnight at the monastery while Edith was cared for by two "poor Clares" at the Beckia close by. He was impressed by the simple, hard life of the monks, most of whom could not read or write, nor had they any Art. They met God in their daily labour. Francis had taught that if a man did not work then he could not expect to eat.

From there they went to Assisi and met Paul Sabatier with whom a deep and lasting friendship developed. Hardwicke described him as, " ... the noblest Christian of his time." Paul did not encourage visitors to dispense charity to the people, who were very poor, but once a week he shared with them anything he had received. With Paul Sabatier they visited the garden where Francis was said to have written his "Song of the Sun" and the house where St. Clare was born.

So deep an impression did this visit make on Hardwicke that he returned many times. In 1902 he gave the Inaugural Address on St. Francis and the ideals which inspired him. He also paid tribute to Paul Sabatier's work. Later they went on a walking tour. Hardwicke also worked on a translation from Latin of *Sacrum*

Commercium with an account of the Lady of Poverty and how St. Francis came to love her.¹

On his return from Assisi the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to Hardwicke asking him if he would consider being appointed as the Bishop of Madagascar. In his usual way, Hardwicke set about finding out as much as possible about the place and its people. He also wrote to friends for their advice before making up his mind. Two of his most trusted advisers, Thring and Jowett had died, but Edward Caird, Master of Balliol, the Bishop of Carlisle, Sir George Adam Smith, the Duke of Westminster and the Bishop of Hereford, were all in agreement that he should not accept the offer.

One friend told him he was needed more for the pagans in England than those in Madagascar, adding that his health would not stand up to the climate and that he would most likely die of fever quite soon. In a lighter vein, the same friend pointed out that the dialect of Madagascar would not be suited to the sonnet form!

It was Octavia Hill who clinched the matter by saying that although she admired and honoured men who went abroad to represent England and uphold truth and honour, it certainly was not for everyone, especially Hardwicke. He was needed in England she said, to carry on the great projects in which he was the moving spirit, e.g. the National Trust, Crete, Armenia and the Selbourne Society. He was unique and it would be a great loss if he went away.

These words gave Hardwicke great encouragement, when he realized that people whose opinions he valued, regarded his work as important and worthwhile. He had, therefore, no hesitation or regret in refusing such an interesting offer.

Hardwicke's handwriting was legendary for its illegibility, which often defied translation, even by those accustomed to doing so. If he sent copy to newspapers, alarm, even terror, spread

¹ Published by Messrs Dent in the Temple Classics, 1904.

throughout the staff and many editors insisted that his letters and articles must be type written.

There were many stories in circulation concerning his handwriting. He had three curates who looked after the parish when he was away. This did not mean that in his many absences he abandoned his work and his parishioners, but kept in close touch with his curates by sending them many messages and instructions. One curate received one of these messages on a post card, but two words totally defeated him. The curate thought that they might be "Monday morning", but as these made no sense, he consulted Mr. Bakewell, the printer and journalist, who was considered to be the expert on Hardwicke's writing. After much debate, he thought the words were "larch plantation", but this only confused the message. Finally the curate telegraphed for a translation which turned out to be, "missionary meeting."

Another such occasion was recounted by a newspaper reporter for the local paper, *The Herald*. He and another reporter from another local newspaper, the *Observer*, went to the village of Kirkoswald, where Hardwicke had been invited to plant a commemorative tree in the churchyard, since the school had had a great success in winning the Bird and Tree competition, sponsored by the R.S.P.B. and encouraged by Hardwicke. The rain fell in torrents and trying to make shorthand notes while holding an umbrella, was well nigh impossible.

Hardwicke at one time had been a member of the Society of Journalists and was always on good terms with professional members of the press. Seeing their predicament, in his usual considerate fashion, he told them there was no need to take notes, as he would give them his manuscript at the end of the ceremony.

The reporters' delight turned to dismay, when they reached the waiting room of Lazonby railway station, where they decided to write up the story while waiting for the train. On opening the manuscript they found that it appeared to have been written by an ink soaked spider crawling over the paper. Having decided on

the right way up the paper was meant to be they managed between them to produce half a column, mostly from their joint memories.

Paying tribute to Hardwicke in his "Notes and Comments" on the 5 June 1920, a week after his death, the editor of *The Herald* newspaper, recalled his first meeting with the vicar of Crosthwaite, when he was greatly impressed by his thoughtfulness, courtesy, understanding and authority with regard to people affected by tragedy and the pressmen who had to report such events.

A party of about forty members of the Home Reading Union from Nelson in Lancashire, were spending the Nelson Annual Holiday at the Towers Hotel, Portinscale in August 1898. Boats had been ordered for the Friday morning from Edward Read, the boatman, for a picnic outing to Derwentwater. He had five boats of his own and borrowed two, all of them considered to be suitable for eight people. At 9.35a.m. on that day three young men and five young ladies, all aged either twenty or twenty one years, entered one of the borrowed boats. Three others had already set off. The organizer of the holiday, Reverend Leonard, had given instructions on being careful not to overload boats and to watch out for bad weather. As they set off the lake was calm and the weather good. Before long, however, the weather became squally and the water rough, so that this particular boat was swamped and sank. In spite of the men's efforts, the five girls were drowned.

As news of the tragedy spread, *The Herald* editor joined local and national members of the press on the train to Keswick, arriving about three o'clock. They had not much time, as Friday was publishing day and the train returned a few hours later. On their arrival they were astonished and exasperated to be met by a wall of silence. No one would tell them anything, except that they must go to the Towers Hotel and wait for Canon Rawnsley, who would see them at six o'clock. Frustrated and angry there were many hard words said about Hardwicke, but they could only wait, albeit impatiently.

Promptly at six o'clock he arrived and apologized for his seemingly strange and autocratic behaviour, explaining that he had to make sure that he had the correct facts, as he had to be in touch with the Reverend G.H. Pickering, the minister of the Nelson Wesleyan Chapel, with the tragic news about members of his congregation. As the Wesleyan minister had the sad and difficult task of breaking the news to the bereaved families, Hardwicke felt that it was important to give him the proper information to avoid wild rumours. After this, he dictated the details of all that had happened, with the details of the people involved in the tragedy, in such a clear way that they were ready for printing. As he realised that the station was some distance away and time was short, Hardwicke had his carriage waiting and drove the relieved newsmen to catch the train.

At the impressive funeral service for the five girls, which was held at the Carr Road Wesleyan Chapel, Nelson, followed by their burial together in the cemetery, the following message from Hardwicke was read,

"Dear Sir, - I send you a simple little hymn which I have written for the occasion of your sad burial service. It speaks what we are all feeling for you at Nelson. A town cannot afford to lose five of its brightest and best in their prime, and we are deeply grieved for all who mourn. God comfort them, and give them strength to bear the blow."

The hymn, which was sung by the congregation to the tune, "St. Anne", was dedicated, "In sympathy for those who mourn, and to the tender memory of the members of the National Home Reading Union Holiday Association who perished in Derwentwater, August 12th 1898." The text of the hymn is as follows:-

"O God, who from the darkest cloud
Or brightest heaven can speak,
Look on us, for our heads are bowed,
Our hearts for grief are weak.

Out of the deeps to Thee we call -
 The deeps of pain and loss -
 Give pure submission to us all
 And strength to bear the cross.

Make us know the bitter wave
 That closed, was closed by Thee,
 The hands that strove but could not save
 Were held by Thy decree.

Lord grant our loved ones gone before
 So swiftly to their rest
 May bid us welcome to the shore
 Where all true hearts are blessed.¹

The Duke of Westminster urged Hardwicke to visit America to explain the work of the National Trust. Therefore, in 1899 he set off determined to gain as much from the visit as possible, especially in lecturing about the Trust and in getting to know all he could find out about their educational system. His lectures on the Literary Association of the Lake District, based on his two volume work, published in 1894, and the work of the National Trust, were received enthusiastically. Wherever he went he made many friends. Visits to Niagara, the homes of Longellow and Lowell gave him great pleasure, as did his visits to see Ruskin's old friend, Professor Charles Norton. During a few days spent in Boston, he managed to see the house of George Washington, the scenes of Paul Revere's ride, of Colonel Shaw's gallant end and John Brown's tragedy. He preached in the Church of Phillips Brooks, a great preacher and friend, who had died recently. One of his sermons, had been included in a book of International Sermons by eminent preachers, edited by Hardwicke in 1885. Further lectures were given at Princeton and friendship developed with Professor Henry Van Dyke. He also attended a banquet for Admiral Dewey.

Hardwicke enjoyed America, but remarked on the endless rush of life. When he arrived back at Liverpool, it struck him forcibly,

¹*Mid-Cumberland and North Westmorland Herald*, the 27 August 1898

that people going about their work, appeared to be . . . "loungers on a holiday parade".