

PILLARS OF SALT.

Writing under the above title in the Catholic World Henry Austin Adams, M. A., who is himself a convert, speaks of the converts, particularly those who are tempted to turn back:

It is the day of the convert. How to make one, how to develop him when made, then how to make more converts—these, it would seem, will presently be the questions most discussed by the Catholic press. There possibly was never a time before when one heard so much about non-Catholics as such. Nor, indeed, is this to be wondered at in view of the growing company of pilgrims pouring across the Campagna of bleak negation by every highway, into the Eternal City.

"All roads lead to Rome" eventually. The world is likely to find this out quite soon, thanks to the new signposts which Leo XIII. is setting up. Every encyclical of his is one, and set up, too, at the perplexing cross roads of our modern thought.

It may be that his reign will be celebrated in the days to come because of just this motley concourse of those whom his compelling love has won to God—strangers at Rome, and proselytes innumerable, and the dispersed.

At all events it is a time of conversions and of converting energy. Hence the peculiar prominence given the subject. To every phase of it attention has been called not only by newspapers published by Catholic authority, but (in a different temper) by the non-Catholic religious press. The latter frequently has that to say which, ludicrous as it must seem to us, nevertheless throws light on, let us not say the facts, but what is quite as useful, namely, their own interpretation of phenomena which from our safe, near side seems clear enough.

Of late, for instance, it has become the fashion among these journals to say of converts,

"Leave them alone, And they'll come home," etc.

The Episcopalian Bo Peep, whose sheep are forever being lost in the adjoining Papal pastures, does presently much comfort herself with the above refrain. So much so, indeed, is she sustained by that hope that the editor of her foremost paper, in commenting upon the return of a "pervert" to the other day jauntily declared that "most all of them return, anyhow, after a year or two."

We know, as does also the reverend editor, that hope and prejudice between them beget a delicious indifference to facts and that nothing is easier than hasty generalizing, unless, perhaps, the first earthquake seemed an awful exception; the second shock had a familiar look; the third fixed the earthquake habit, and for months the negroes looked for the cataclysm as regularly as for sunrise.

Given our cat and another cat on the roof, and the imagination of the boy at once prompts the statement of the old nursery tale, "There must be a million cats on our roof." Editors will be boys.

No, not "most" converts fall away. One can count those that do, but not those that do not. Moreover, such a spiritual revulsion is quite the most inexplicable movement that one sees.

It stands out above and apart from the conceivable; it is exceptional, singular, disquieting. Hence two, three, half a dozen cases, and our editor fits off into his "most of them."

Not most! Infinitely few. But inexpressibly saddening these few, are they not? And full, moreover, of significance to us and our day of convert-making.

To the average Catholic mind it seems strange beyond all else that devout men and women, earnestly striving to face God and the light, can live and die outside the Church. How utterly beyond comprehension must it seem, therefore, that anyone who has once passed the stormy trials inseparable from a conversion to the Truth, can deliberately retrace his steps and choose again the city of confusion for his soul's abode! And yet this "looking back" to the abandoned city does occur at times, and the effably sad spectacle is seen of some one hurrying across the plain to enter once again the very Sodom or Gomorrah from which he had but yesterday escaped with fear and anguish!

When these relapses shock us by their nearness to us we feel, as possibly by no other time, our Blessed Lord's swift, terrible injunction: "Remember Lot's wife!" But to no Catholic can these pathetic derelictions speak as to such Catholics as have themselves come from the desolation that is doubt. The present writer knows no subject quite so full of pain, no problem so perplexing and saddening withal. A few thoughts bearing on it may not be now amiss. First of all, then, the reasons commonly assigned for these reversions are superficial and anything but charitable. We hear that "So-and-So," having "turned Catholic" a year ago, has just thought better of his ill-digested step and has returned to his former Church. And in explanation we are told that he found that all is not gold that glitters; that he found things behind the scenes not as fair as in front of the footlights; that now that the glamor and tinsel are seen close by, their cheapness is discovered; and that "the human element," under saintly robes and back of spectacular mysteries, has now been felt too palpably.

The revert who declares these reasons have actuated him only echoes the statements of an unthinking world

—or, if he does so earnestly, degrades himself unspcakably.

Either in leaving his first position or deserting his new he confesses that he has acted in the most humiliating lack of the only motives which can for a moment be held sufficient for so unspcakably important a step.

Look at it. It is inconceivable that any one would think at all of putting every sacred tie in life to the perilous strain involved in a change of faith except for some compelling, fundamental, vital reason. A conversion to the Catholic religion means, usually, the giving shame, heartache, anxiety to parents, friends, fellow Christians. It involves the repudiation of all that is held sacred by those who love one most. It scandalizes disturbs, disgusts those whose respect has been one's chief measure of satisfaction. It seems to be a betrayal of honor in its very soul, when the convert is called and thought to be a priest of God. And—since man is still an animal—it nearly always costs him suffering. In nearly every instance it means a loss of comfort, influence, respect and money. Therefore it would most certainly not once be thought of but for the voice within which will not down. Some lofty, powerful reason must be sought for a self-injury so grievous.

The Holy Spirit moves in many ways. Perhaps no two recount the same impelling motives; but surely, coming from whatever point, the panting pilgrims when they fall within the bosom of the dear old Church all know and say that they have come from doubt, confusion and uncertainty, in quest of the "City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Yes! they have come for two things—Certitude and the Presence! For these only was the sacrifice made, these alone were before father or mother or wife or lands or houses.

Nor is it conceivable, furthermore, that a man could take the awful responsibility, and inflict and incur so much pain, unless the negative untenableness and untruthfulness of his present position had first prompted the search for the positive good of some other. Only after the heart had starved, and the soul had fainted, and the mind grown bewildered by the discord and godliness of a Church, is it to be thought possible that a man can think of escape. Even then he searches diligently for reasons for remaining; he calls aloud for some one to comfort and reassure him. Oh! the pitiful clinging to the house where one's faith lies dead. Oh! the hungering quest of those who, though abiding in the tents of their fathers, "show plainly that they seek a country."

They remain—God knows!—till they cannot; some even till they die. To those who escape we take note of, comes an hour when they must go!

Now, is it creditable that one so harassed and constrained by lack of truth where he is, and having—at infinite cost and pain—sought it in despised Nazareth of Catholicity, can for any of the commonly alleged causes return to the city of the plain? Never!

And yet some do return. Why? God only knows! But that a soul so returning back can possibly be anything less pitiful than was Lot's wife I cannot think. Pillars of Salt, at best, whose bitterness is this—they found no refuge.

Of these are also doubters, troubled souls, who for some cause have not received that "Margarita preciosa"—Faith! These reverts stand out from the dreary plain quite the most needy of our prayers and pity.

Think of it! There is no soul to make its ease amid the Babel of confusion and the death of truth. They heard and heeded when the Voice bade them flee! They broke their very heart-strings for the sake of truth, and fled from home and friends and good repute. And we rejoiced to see them reach our sweet walled city. And then, to our unutterable amazement, we saw them leave. Whether? Apparently to go whence they had come: but fancy to what bitterness the soul has sunk when, having thought God had a place and home where man could know Him, it has come to think there is not such a place nor home—and so, heart-sick, chagrined, plod back to that which is a hell of torments. The man may reach it—his joy and peace do not; they are congealed, a very monument of dried up tears, there on the trackless plain. God pity them!

All this talk about "the human element in the Church" scandalizing the raw convert, and the disappointment on finding human nature under Catholic conditions is nonsense. As if there were any lack of human element in the Protestant denominations! I was constantly amused when I was first thrown with Catholics after becoming one myself, by their efforts to explain and apologize for this human element, finding myself thought to be very tender, not to say squemish, sort of a Miss Nancy who would be shocked by the downright common-sense and lack of cat found—thank God!—among Catholics.

So far from this precious human element scandalizing the recent convert I believe that nothing is more refreshing than this very naturalness of Catholicity, after the long suffocation, artificiality, and emotionalism of Protestantism. Poverty, plainness, simplicity, bluntness, downrightness are glories, and they seem so to the fresh convert from the plush and unction of official Protestantism.

Nor can we find any sufficient reason for a relapse in the experience of the convert as a practical Catholic. No. There is one reason—his faith is dead. It was given to him; he has lost it. What can he learn for the history of the Church, of the doctrines,

of the life, after becoming a Catholic, that he could not before? Nothing. In fact, it is beyond belief that anyone could possibly endure the throes of a conversion, unless and until all that is included in the Catholic faith burned itself into the conscience as God's inexorable truth. What happens is the death of faith. And so the wretched soul creeps back to the familiar faces and accustomed scenes of the Old Babel from which while faith remained he fled at any and all costs!

It is not logical to say "he found Rome wanting, therefore he returned;" for he did not seek Rome till all else failed. Does the Episcopalian din turn into God's own order during the temporary absence of some convert? Certainly not. Why, then, return? Ask of Lot's wife.

CREOLE DEVOTION.

Deep Religious Feeling of the Creoles of New Orleans.

The deep devotional spirit of the French Creoles of the South forms the subject of the following paragraphs by Ruth McNery Stuart of the Ladies Home Journal:

Your venerable hostess will tell you that she goes out seldom excepting to church—to the old St. Louis Cathedral, probably, and maybe, occasionally, for nine consecutive days, for a novena, out to the little chapel of Saint Roche—to secure a needed benefaction for a poor kinsman or friend, or to pray for sight to blind eyes or renewed life for paralyzed hands or feet. She rarely makes these weary pilgrimages in her own behalf.

In this quaint old cathedral all the proud old Creole families that New Orleans has ever known, have, in one generation or another, come to kneel and pray, and to the old who worship there to-day, the high altar, with all its wealth of suggestive symbols, is reminiscent of a thousand tender associations, that in the retrospect are as way stations along the pathway of life. Here, to look upon the scene of the miracles of Lourdes, and mayhap receive the perfect gift of faith, many have brought their little ailing ones, and when the good Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Lady, has granted their petitions here they have hung their tablets of thanks, or perhaps their tablets of prayers, or perhaps they have enriched the altar with a gift—a handsome lamp or cross of carved ivory or fine metal. Here, amid the votive tablets with their grateful inscriptions, "Merci" or "Ex voto," have sometimes hung the identical discarded crutches that the healed sufferers have no longer needed; models in wax or marble of eyes or ears made whole; examples of distorted, maimed and twisted hands or feet. Here rich and poor may generally be seen kneeling together, black and white, reputable and notorious—all equal in the presence of the Divine manifestation. If the Lady of the Grotto does not heed the petition perhaps Saint Antoine, the patron saint of little children, will add his intercession to hers. When prayers are answered through his intercession the beneficiary will drop into a little black box a gratuity in acknowledgment of the benefit—a fund which is distributed among the poor.

While there are, perhaps, no people less ostentatious than the Creoles in matters of religion, there are certainly none in America whose religious observance and ceremonials form so interesting and definite a factor in distinguishing them. Whether it be May or November, Christmas or Easter, or only one of the lesser religious seasons of the Church calendar, the Creole is always in evidence in relation to her Church. In writing the above sentence I have unwittingly employed the feminine pronoun, and, while I would disclaim any charge against the fidelity of the Creole *pater* in regard to his religion, I am, nevertheless, inclined to let the pronoun stand—and, for this reason: The beauty and picturesqueness of the religious ceremonials, as they impress the spectator from the outside, are so closely and almost exclusively associated with the gentler sex that when one thinks of the New Orleans Creole as a religious unit he is apt inadvertently to write her down a woman. And this is not only because he first realized her as a procession of dainty, veiled First Communion girls, passing in one street and out another, through the old French town, immaculate as little brides; nor is it, yet, because he recalls her gentle face as Sister of Charity, and knows its sweetness even though he has never seen her lift her placid eyes from the starched rim of the beautiful bonnet of her religious order—the beautiful bonnet of one of the few enduring fashions that know no change. Nor yet, still, is it because it is the woman who is most in evidence in the crowded old cemeteries on All Souls' Day—the annual festival of the dead—where the Catholic is the only expressed religion, and French the language of the day. Women are there by daybreak and all day bearing testimonials of flower and plant and beaded symbol to the tombs of their departed dead—women in tears and heavy crape; women in rose bonnets and smiles; women in Paisley shawls, and women in gilt shoes; old, withered, French-talking, brown and yellow *praline* women; shabby women, bending to rearrange the white shell borders that outline the cheaper graves; rich women who can well afford the luxury of priest and red gown and acolyte with swinging censor, who intone their beautiful Latin lines at the wrought iron gates of some of the stately tombs; Sisters of Charity at the outer gates chaperoning the pink-bonneted

orphan girls who stand beside them and clink their silver plates for sweet charity's sake.

FOR FAULT-FINDERS.

Speaking of fault-finding, a recent writer on that subject said that the habit of fault-finding is so common that most of us seem to take delight in giving the reason why our fellow-sufferers in this vale of woe have not done better than they have. If by any chance we are led to take an introspective view, and analyze our own attainments and undertake to determine our own latitude, we find that it is owing chiefly to our misfortunes, rather than our faults, that we have not become bright and shining lights beckoning those below us to greater effort, in the hope that they might scale the precipices above them and at last stand untrifled by our side. This is no doubt the case with a great many people, and the position we find ourselves in as compared with that occupied by our neighbors—and we use the word neighbors in the larger sense of the word—is probably the effect of an obliquity of vision, which, strange to say, we notice in others so much sooner than we do in ourselves. While we are not prepared to dispute the truth of the ancient writer who declared, "There is not one perfect; no, not one," we believe that most people occupy the very place they are best fitted for. If every man were capable of making himself famous, fame would lose its value and become too common to be worth striving for. It all men had equal ability to accumulate riches, then each one would have a like amount, and in the division the share that would fall to each would be so small that it would not be worth while to make special effort to become possessed of it. After all, the rather trite saying, "You can't keep a good man down" is true to a very great extent. The man with ambition and energy will succeed along the lines upon which he expends his energy, whether he become "a doctor, a lawyer, a beggar man, or a thief." It is altogether likely that the man who is a doctor would have failed as a lawyer, and a lawyer would have made a sorry preacher, while both would have failed as farmers. It is a wise provision of Providence that there are "many men of many minds," and that men are so constituted that what is easy of accomplishment for some is utterly impossible in others. A man may be both witty and wise and not succeed, and still not be in any way at fault because of his lack of success. Very few men have greatness thrust upon them, and it is quite safe to assume that any man who is really great was born with possibilities in the direction of his achievements. There is no harm in speculating over "mute inglorious Miltons or Cromwells guiltless of their country's blood," but there is no possible foundation upon which to base a logical argument that any Milton ever lived who did not sing, or any Cromwell who did not lead their partisans into civil war.

If we feel inclined to find fault we should stop an instant and ask ourselves this question: "Why am I not more of a success than I am?" We will find that our inability to answer that constitutes, or should constitute, a very good reason why we should refrain from fault-finding with others.—Sacred Heart Review.

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