## HOW MANY WERE ADDED TO THE FOLD.

### A Convert's Story.

The means by which unbelievers are drawn to the Church are so innumerable and sometimes so unexpected that the history of conversions to the faith is never without interest, while always affording encouragement or edification to the reader. It often happens that obstacles in the path of the honest inquirer become stepping-stones; help is sometimes found where least sought; the dawn breaks when the darkness seems deepest; and graces are vouchsafed in many instances which the recipient little thought of, and for which, perhaps, he had never prayed. It has often been remarked that a conversion to the Church generally results, sooner or later, in numerous other conversions; and it almost invariably happens that many to whom the faith is a birthright learn to appreciate it more thoroughly from association with those who have only just received the all-precious gift.

Special interest attaches to the following narrative, less on account of the distinguished position of the persons concerned than because it recounts the reclamation of two strayed souls, who had actually renounced their faith on account of those to whom it is now the dearest possession. One is reminded of that passage in the Acts of the Apostles where it is stated that "the number of the disciples was multiplied exceedingly," to read of so many persons entering the Church as the result of a single conversion.

The present narrative is the substance of a privately printed pamphlet in which the writer tells the history of her own conversion; and is followed by a letter—which we are permitted to present with it—recounting the conversion of other members of two families. Both of these documents will be read with no less interest than edification; and we are sure that many persons will share the gratitude we feel to those whose kindness has enabled us to publish so precious a recital.

* * * * * * * *

I was born in New York, and brought up in the Presbyterian Church. A constant attendant at Sunday-school and an omnivorous reader, I early imbibed a most inveterate hatred of the Catholic Church from books published by the American Tract Society, in which she is represented as the "Scarlet Woman," and the Pope as "anti-Christ." When, finally, through God's mercy, my way led me across the ocean and I came to Italy, I was as bitter an enemy to the Church of Rome as ever I had been in the days of my childhood.

I reached Florence the last day of May. That evening, in taking a walk with my sister, we chanced to hear singing in a queer little church called the Madonna delle Grazie, which used to be on the bridge of that name. We went in, attracted by the lights and the voices; it was something to see a bit of local color. It must have been the last service of the Month of Mary, and it as the first time I ever heard those blessed words, *Rosa Mystica, Stella Matutina, Refugium Peccatorum, ora pro nobis!*

I remember kneeling and praying very earnestly for my absent mother; little dreaming that our dear Lord was on the altar before me, but fully believing that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them."

I had come to Italy for six months; and, after visiting Florence and Siena, we came to Rome. We had a furnished apartment in the house of an Italian lady of rank in reduced circumstances. Upon one occasion she was to have a private audience with Leo XIII. and invited me to go with her. I knew very little Italian then, but I understood when his Holiness, with his genial smiles, said to the Marchesa: "And this young lady lives with you? She is good, is she not?" And I, not wishing to be under false colors, and thinking he meant to ask if I were a good Catholic, hastily made confession of faith there at the feet of the Holy Father, and said: "Your Holiness, I am a Protestant." He seemed amused at my candor, and, laying his hand on my head, he answered: "But I will give you my blessing for you and for all your family."

Time passed, and before my six months in Italy were ended I had promised to remain there forever. A year before my marriage, my sister married the brother of my husband. Our husbands belonged to an old Catholic family, one of whose ancestors has been a Crusader, but they themselves, I regret to say, were very lukewarm Catholics, in spite of a most devout mother; and we were married in the American Episcopal Church, in the Via Nazionale, at Rome—after, of course, the civil marriage at the Capitol, which is the only tie that binds according to modern Italian law. My husband's family expressed the desire that we should promise to baptize our children in the Catholic faith. But I flatly refused, saying that it would be impossible for me to bring up my children in a creed in which I myself did not believe. So, when my dear boy was born, he was baptized at home by an Episcopal clergyman.

When my boy was two years old he became very ill from teething, and our physician ordered him to be taken to the mountains immediately. I was obliged to go alone with him, and we had decided upon Siena; in fact, the railroad tickets were bought for that place. But a singular aversion to the town came over me, and I passed a sleepless night revolving in my mind how I could avoid going there without being considered *capricciosa*—which is a particularly undesirable quality in the minds of the Italians.

With the dawn I arose, and slipped away in my dressing-gown to call my brother-in-law and put the case before him. He met me more than half way, succeeded in persuading my husband to send me to some relatives of theirs in Umbria, changed the tickets for us; and at the hour we were to have left for Siena we started for Gubbio, on the morning of the 2nd of July—the day on which the Church celebrates that most tender mystery of the Visitation, when "Mary arose in haste and went into the hill country."

Gubbio is one of the most interesting towns in Italy. It can be reached by diligence from Perugia; but is more accessible by way of Fossato, on the Ancona line, where a train on a branch road meets the express, and in an hour takes one through the Apennines to Gubbio, situated picturesquely on the slope of Monte Ingino. Here St. Francis of Assisi lingered to talk to his friend the wolf, and gently persuade him not to continue his nightly depredations upon the flocks of the good citizens. Mass is said annually in a chapel built in commemoration of that event, where a carved wooden wolf of very primitive workmanship adorns the entrance. Here Dante wrote canto xxii. of the Paradiso, while on a visit to his Ghibelline friend Bossone, whom he had met at Arezzo.

It was to this charming medieval town that Providence led my footsteps. Here my husband joined me for the summer; and here we spent the winter months, too, on account of our child's health. It was a strange experience for one who had always been in the midst of the busy, social life of a large city. It seemed almost uncanny to have absolutely no engagements; it was like taking a year out of one's life; and the isolation was like the snow about us, covering us "as with a garment" white and still, unbroken and very restful.

With the exception of my husband's relatives, I knew only one lady in Gubbio, a most devout Catholic, who had been a governess in England for years. She was the only person with whom I could speak my native tongue; and she had been warned that it was better not to converse with me on the subject of religion, as I was a bitter Protestant, always ready to protest, and rather antagonistic—which was only too true.

She had a fine library, and she timidly ventured to offer me a copy of Longfellow. But what must have been her astonishment when I asked, instead, for Cardinal Newman's "*Apologia pro Vita Sua*!" I hastily explained, with my usual aggressive candor, that I desired to read it only from curiosity; that "Lead, Kindly Light," had long been my favorite hymn; and, though I could imagine how the soft light falling through painted glass, the music, *et caetera*, of the Catholic Church, *might* appeal to the poor and ignorant classes, I could *not* imagine how an intellectual man like John Henry Newman could possibly become a Roman Catholic. Very gently, in the Cardinal's own words, she replied:

And I hold in veneration,
For the love of Him alone,
Holy Church as His creation,
And her teachings as His own.

Then she went her way, doubtless to pray for me in the depths of those dear, solemn churches which I so much despised: though, thank God, I was always reverent in them out of respect for the feelings of others; and never talked nor laughed in a church, as I have seen so many Protestants do in Rome, especially in St. Peter's.

I read the book; I read it conscienciously, from force of habit; and I made up my mind that, in order intelligently to oppose the doctrines of the Catholic Church I had better know something more about them. It was mortifying to think I was a Protestant only because I was born one. Considering my right of *personal judgment*, in which I gloried, it was illogical not to know both sides of the question; and, then, St. Peter's words kept ringing in my ears: "Being ready always to satisfy everyone that asketh you a reason of the hope which is in you." So I borrowed books of my patient friend—"The Ritual of the New Testament," by the Rev. T. E. Bridgett; "A Catechism of the Catholic Religion," by the Rev. J. Deharbe; a pamphlet containing "A Conference on the Authority of the Church, held March 1, 1679, between James Benignus Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, and John Claude, Coivinist minister at Charenton"; and "The Grounds of Faith," four lectures delivered in St. George's Church, Southwark, by Cardinal Manning.

As soon as my friends on the other side of the sea learned from my letters the trend of my thoughts—the "dangerous" study upon which I had entered,—they stretched out their hands to save me, and sent me volume after volume against Catholicism. I read them all, sitting up alone into the small hours of the night,—reading *for and against*. This went on nearly for a year, till we were suddenly called to Rome for Easter, without any definite plan of return.

On Easter morning I went to the early communion in the Protestant Episcopal Church, an edifice endeared to me by many sacred memories. Again I knelt at the chancel where I had knelt as a bride, but I came away with anguish of spirit: the service for me was void and empty. I had lost the faith of my childhood, and was unwilling to embrace any other. What I suffered in the days that followed only those will comprehend who have been through a similar mental upheaval. In looking back, it seems strange to me that I did not seek some priest's advice. But I spoke to no one on the subject and had it been possible for me to give up my belief in the divinity of Our Lord, I should certainly have become a Unitarian at that time; for I was fully persuaded that the Church of England was a national institution, like her army and navy, with the Queen at the head. Another strong plea for the Unitarians was that the two most perfect characters I had known intimately were Unitarians, and I had known some very unworthy Catholics. I kept thinking of the words, "By their fruit ye shall know them." Still I could not deny the divinity of Our Lord nor cease to believe in the Blessed Trinity.

After we had been in Rome a month, my husband received an order from Prince Torlonia to paint a picture on one of his estates near Gubbio, and we returned to Umbria.

For some time I had felt reluctant to pass by the churches without going in, for fear it *might* all be true; and perhaps Our Lord was really there, hidden in the tabernacle, as He was in His cradle at Bethlehem, where I should not have recognized Him had I been living at that time in Judea.

I used to go and sit in the solemn cathedral, built into the mountain side, and try to realize that Mass had been said there daily for *centuries* before America was discovered. Sometimes I was the only worshipper; and what was most impressive to me was the lovely music, exquisite singing, rich vestments—all used simply for the honor and glory of God with no thought of an audience. Imagine such a thing happening in any fashionable church in New York! Doubtless these edifices were erected for the worship of God, but they are always spoken of as belonging to the preacher who is called to fill the pulpit, upon whose popularity the financial prosperity of the Church depends. At last I began to feel "out in the cold," and to envy the innocent little children who came in to murmur a prayer,—children whose happy destiny had caused them to be born Catholics.

And when the evening bells rang out the hour at which the whole Catholic world repeats the *De Profundis*, that beautiful psalm of David, in memory of the dead, *my* heart was wrung with sorrow for my dear mother in her distant grave; but *my* lips must remain silent, and *my* voice could not join in the refrain, "Eternal rest give to them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace!"—because I had been brought up to think it a sin to pray for the dead, and had been taught to limit God's mercy to this side of the tomb.

At last it came to me, this great gift of faith; for it is a gift, and no amount of clever argument will wear away one's prejudices: they must be melted by God's grace alone. It was on the Feast of Corpus Christi, and I stood in the great piazza waiting for the procession. Up the steep street came the children, scattering flowers before the Sacred Host: the old Latin hymn rose triumphantly toward the sky. I knelt, and all my doubts vanished. My heart became as that of a little child; and the people kneeling about me little dreamed that one among them had received her sight. Two months later, early one morning, I was received into the Church by the Bishop of Gubbio, the ceremony being performed in his private chapel.

There is one thing which I wish to mention, as it may help others who are dreading lest the step they wish to take might destroy all their earthly happiness. My dear husband actually opposed my becoming a Catholic. He seemed to fear lest the qualities he had loved in me would vanish with the change; and he went so far as to declare that he was quite sure he should cease to care for me if I took the step. This was a dreadful trial and temptation to me; for I loved him fondly. Yet I really did not hesitate even then, because I felt I must save my soul; only it made me terribly sad and unhappy. Well, the very morning we came back from the Bishop's palace to our home, he stopped at the door and opened wide his arms to me. To my intense joy, I saw in his face that all was right, and that he loved me as much as ever; so that, by the mercy of God, his heart had also been changed, and I was spared this great sorrow. I realized what Abraham felt when God gave him back Isaac; because it seems to me that there is a strong note of maternal love in woman's affection for her husband.

Eleven years have gone by since then; and now, as I linger in these dear Roman churches, I no longer envy the little Italian children; for I have entered into their heritage; and, with St. Elizabeth of Hungary, I murmur:

All without is mean and small,
All within is vast and tall:
All without is harsh and shrill,
All within is hushed and still.

Rome, Dec. 2, 1898.

Perhaps you know that I have an only sister, married to my husband's brother; and that they have five children, all as dear to me as my own. My sister was very unhappy over my conversion, and had utterly closed her heart and mind to the subject during all these years. Her husband was completely weaned away from the Church, to the great grief of his mother; and the children were sent to a Methodist school here in Rome. My sister was so bitter that she insulted Catholics on all occasions, and I learned never to broach the subject of religion; but I asked everybody I knew to pray for her. At last, at a dinner party, the host (a Protestant) asked my sister if her children had been baptized in the Catholic Church. She replied: "I regret to say they have not been. It was their birthright, and I took it away from them." My knife and fork almost fell from my hands and I could hardly control myself.

That was four years ago. Then she heard a sermon by Archbishop Keane, which made so strong an impression on her that she procured an introduction to him, without my knowledge, however; and went several times to see him. But he himself told me that he thought there was very little hope of her ever conquering her intellectual pride.

Last April an English Catholic, who was visiting at her home, fell through a trap-door in a shop and broke a leg. She requested me to have the Blessed Sacrament brought to her on Pentecost, so I made the necessary arrangements. I warned the priest that it was a Protestant household, fearing some accidental disrespect might be shown. One of the children—a girl of thirteen, who had always longed to be a Catholic, and had asked her mother long ago if she might say the Ave Maria—scattered rose leaves through the hall. And my sister herself asked permission to be present. My mother-in-law and I received Holy Communion on the same occasion; and many Masses were said for my intention.

While this happened in Rome, my brother-in-law was absent in Turin, having been sent by the King to represent the royal house at the great festival of the Holy Winding Sheet—the *Sacro Sindone*. He was present at all the ceremonies, and assisted the Princess Clothilde to dust and fold the relic on the last day of the *festa*. He then wrote his wife an account of his impressions, made a general confession, and was reconciled to the Church.

Upon his return to Rome, my sister went alone to Padre Armellini, had a long talk with him, at the end of which she fell on her knees and made her abjuration. She was prepared by him and received baptism, without my knowing anything about it.

It was on the morning of Corpus Christi, and I had been invited to the first Communion of Miss Campbell, grand-daughter of the Duke of Argyle, who prayed much for my sister. Afterward I went to my sister's house. She was absent, but soon returned, with a radiant face, and said to me: "Kiss me on my forehead, but do not ask me why!" I little dreamed she had just been baptized. Her husband wished his mother to know it first, as she had suffered so long—which I admired in him. That day he came and told her, and she told me.

The second daughter made her first Communion as soon as possible, after a retreat with the nuns of St. George in the Via Sebastianelli (where she now goes to school). When she came out of the church after her baptism, she drew a long sigh and said to her mother: "At last I am a Catholic!" The oldest girl, now fifteen, was too thoroughly imbued with Methodist teachings to desire a change; and Padre Armellini said no pressure must be used—nothing but prayer. I was her godmother when we were both Protestants, so you can imagine my joy when she came to me a few weeks ago and begged to become one of us. She received instruction in the convent of the nuns of S. Marie Reparatrice, and there she received her First Communion on St. Cecilia's Day.

On December 8 the three other children will receive Confirmation, and then we shall all be safe within the fold. My sister is the happiest person, I think, I ever saw. As for myself, each morning when I waken I wonder what beautiful thing has happened to me. Please say a little prayer for me, that I may be truly worthy of such great graces.—Ave Maria.

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