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### ABOUT CONVERSIONS

Personal experiences of a spiritual kind are always interesting, especially in the case of people who are dead in earnest about their own souls and have been led in consequence to changes of life which involve self-denial and sacrifice. Four or five years ago it occurred to a convert in England to publish a book giving the experiences of a large number of converts. He wrote to several, asking a brief statement of facts, and the result is the book appropriately called *Roads to Rome*, published by Longmans & Co. It contains replies from sixty-five British men and women and one Swiss living now in England. The variety in the points of departure is striking. The only remarkable thing common to all is that they are well educated. Nearly half of them are graduates of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. There are clergymen, both Anglican and Non-conformist, lawyers, doctors, merchants, men of science and women of the world. Many passed directly from High Church Anglicanism or other form of Protestantism into the Church. Others journeyed through the valley of unbelief, having discarded all profession of religious faith. In their enquiries, some began with the past and worked up to the present, while others took the present state of things in the world to understand the past. Some climbed step by step from a belief in God to the divinity of Christ and finally to His Church. Others looked directly at the Church and saw in her the tokens of divine authority sufficient to guarantee faith in Christ and in all that she teaches. And two at least received an illumination of mind without argument or effort on their part, like St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Thus, Robert Bracey, a young man in Birmingham, went occasionally to the oratory church to get a glimpse of Newman. One day he went to High Mass. Newman did not preach that day. Bracey says: "I remember well my contempt for all I saw, and my complete ignorance of the meaning of everything. The sermon that morning happened to be a very poor one indeed, and the preacher floundered about sadly. And yet it was in the midst of that very sermon that Faith came to me. I suddenly found—how, I know not—that I believed in this religion of which I knew so little, and that (to my utter dismay, for I foresaw the troubles and difficulties such a change would involve) I was a Catholic. I went out of that church with my brain in a whirl, but as certain of the truth of Catholicism as I am to-day, and quite prepared to give up everything for its sake. That night, for the first time since I was eight years old, I said my prayers." He took eighteen months of study and reflection to make quite sure that there was no hallucination about it. This case shows clearly how faith is a gift from God. It is as much a gift in the case of those who studied before they received it as in his case. As another convert says, "a conversion is and must always be the work of God. No amount of reading, no amount of controversy, will ever bring a soul to the divine light of faith. It is dark till God illuminate it. Nevertheless, to a soul who seeks it and earnestly prays for it, surely He will never deny this grace." Study and argument may be a necessary condition in many cases, chiefly to remove obstacles, but only a condition, not the real cause of faith. Sometimes the illumination, whether before or after enquiry, brightens up the whole mind as by a flash. Sometimes it affects the conscience, causing a strong sense of the duty to seek admission to the Catholic Church, and after admission comes the lasting peace of mind that passeth understanding. There is often a solid mental conviction that Catholicism is the truth of God before the gift of faith is received, or even after it has been

received and lost through disobedience or failure to act when action became a duty. Mgr. Robinson, in the account of his conversion, remarks that men who enter the Church and fall away again are not necessarily apostates. They may never have had the faith. They were sincere and were intellectually convinced; but the gift of faith may have been wanting. Faith is an act of the reason, but different both in kind and in degree from the intellectual consent which comes from a process of argument. It is a seeing, even though obscurely, rather than a reasoning. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner," but still we see. Thank God for the gift. Hence priests who receive converts are careful to ascertain whether faith is present, and not merely an intellectual inference. Several of the writers in "Roads to Rome" express the surprise they felt at not being received at once with open arms when they applied for admission. Commander Paget of the Royal Navy was started on the road of enquiry by the reply of a friend whom he asked how it happened that he was a Catholic while his brother was a Protestant. "Because the Catholic is the only safe religion to die in." Paget said to himself: "Good God, can this be true?" He had thought one religion as good as another, and that it was merely a question of birth. After examining the whole question, for himself he went to Father Meagher of Simonstown, and expected to be received at once. "To this expectation I received a rude shock, for, to my astonishment he sent me away, telling me kindly to look well into the matter, and to come again in a fortnight's time if of the same mind. But when I called again in the hope of being received without further formalities, I received another shock. He told me that I must now, if I would indeed be a Catholic, put myself under instruction, and commence by learning the catechism. He quoted the text of Scripture, 'Except ye become converted and be as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.' I found that I had to become as a little child, and to sit down and be taught. I learnt the Catechism by heart, and went to him daily to repeat my lesson." That man has the gift of faith beyond a doubt. No mere act of reasoning would have given him the strength to become as a little child. Not only has the gift to be proved but it has to be paid for. Of course it is beyond price; but God exacts a return in the form of self-sacrifice. The convert has to face losses of various kinds. Relatives and friends resent the change and make him or her feel their displeasure. Sometimes there is a loss of wealth or position or both. In all cases there is pain on the part of friends which causes reflex suffering in a kind heart. But the gain is always greater far than the cost. And you, Catholic Reader, who received this gift in childhood, what return are you making for so great a gift? Do you suppose that it is only in the case of converts that the gift of faith should make one tread the way of the Cross without murmur?—The Casket.

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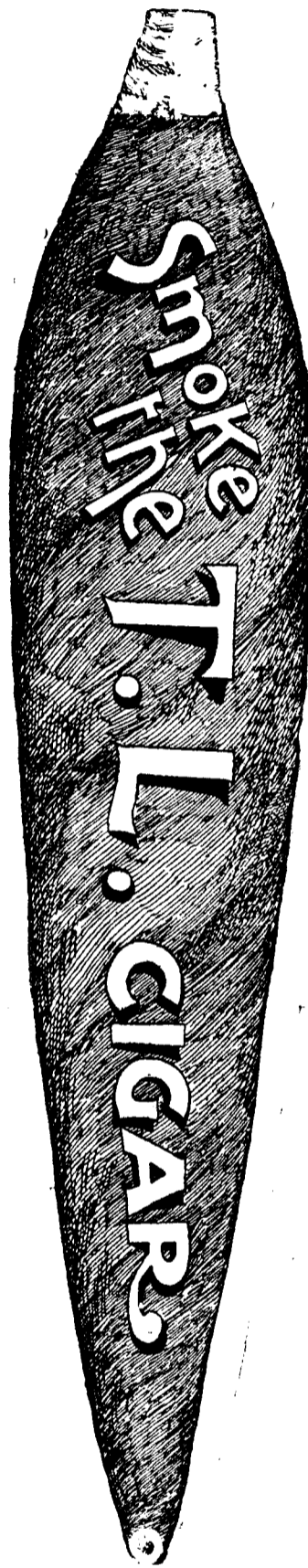
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