

JANUARY 15, 1921

And when the light came back—dim, indeed, but full of a new hope and life for him—it was Mabel from whom he drew the sweet confession as they stood under the lilacs.

HOW I CAME TO THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL

By Nellie R Ivanovich in The Missionary

Many times, during the thirty years since I became a Catholic, I have been asked both by Catholics and by non-Catholics why I look that step. I have found it was a very interesting subject. The Catholic was pleased and edified to hear the reasons which led an outsider, upon purely logical grounds, to accept the belief that his Church was the one true Church established by Christ Himself.

It is with the belief that the subject is still of interest, and with the hope of reaching many whom I shall never see, that I have written, with the greatest candor, this account of the various steps in the journey which at last led me safely into the Palace Beautiful, the true home of my soul.

I was born in Chicago of American parents in moderate circumstances. As far as I know, there had never been a Catholic in the family, nor anyone who dreamed of it. There were people we knew who believed in and practiced that religion—probably it was a good thing they did—but that we should embrace it would be as strange as that we should make ourselves South Sea Islanders, or consent to change our white skins to black.

My father was a lawyer, an intelligent, honorable man and a convincing talker, but a man entirely without religion. Many a time I have heard him say, in his authoritative way, that religious belief was a delusion—nothing more. It was a comforting delusion, therefore people clung to it. But it had no foundation in fact or reason. My mother was a little and sweet soul, young. She had several children, and lost them all except my brother and myself during their infancy. Dear little mother! She herself died so young.

She had no strong religious convictions, I judge. In fact, she seldom asserted her opinions or set herself against my father's masterful will. No one in our house ever went to church. Up to the time I was ten or twelve years old I had scarcely been inside one. Yet from my earliest childhood I felt sure there was a God and that He called me to love and serve Him. Father's arguments, so convincing on other subjects, failed in this. Many a time as I stood by my little window at night and looked down on the trees swaying in the summer breeze, or watched them sparkling and beautiful in their snowy garments beneath the wintry moon, I have raised my childish heart, as well as I know how, to Him Who made the world so beautiful, and asked Him to make my soul and my life beautiful. Alas! How far below that early ideal has been the reality!

The first day I went to school I heard the children recite the Lord's Prayer. That much religion was allowed in the public schools of those days. It was the first prayer I had ever heard. I was delighted with it, and learned it at once. When I spoke of it at home father laughed at me a little, and asked me to recite it for him, just so he could see how it went—he had about forgotten it, he said. I cried out, "I will not!" Not that I dared disobey father, but I could not bear to have it made the subject of ridicule. Mother gently interposed in my behalf, and the subject was dropped.

When I was about ten years old my mother became very ill, and I was sent to a neighbor's house, each day to practice my music lessons. What a house it was! Big and roomy and filled with children. There was a kindly, hard-working father and a big, warm-hearted mother; there were holy pictures on the walls, and an atmosphere of love and piety pervaded the house. One day the mother took me by the hand—how tiny my hand was in her big strong one—and led me upstairs. There on a bed in the spare room were lovely white dresses and veils for two of her little girls who were to make their first Communion on the following Sunday. How beautiful it all was! And how kind they all were to the lonely child whose mother was so sick!

My mother died a few days later, and we moved to another house. I never saw them again, but I have never forgotten them. Where are they now, I wonder—Mary and Margaret and little John and all the rest? And did they ever know how powerful an influence that memory of a happy Catholic home was to me in later years?

In time my father married again, and a year or two after he, also, died. My stepmother was a very different woman from my mother. She had a more self-reliant nature and was deeply religious. She was very kind to us and perfectly wise and just, both to us, and to her own religion. Upon all other matters we talked freely and confidentially; upon the subject nearest to both our hearts, we seemed unable to speak. I believe that condition often exists between persons outside the Catholic Church.

When I was fifteen we moved to California, and as teachers were scarce I soon began teaching in a country school. During the winters I went to school in the city. The country schools were then closed on account of the heavy rains. In the city I went regularly and joyfully to church—the Presbyterian, of course. But I became very much troubled about certain matters and determined to seek help in regard to them. Where to go or to whom, I did not know.

Finally I resolved to go to the minister himself. Such a thing was unheard of, I believe among my young companions and I did not mention my intention to anyone. After calling several times at the little study back of the church and finding no one in, I left a note saying I would be there at a certain time. When I arrived the door was locked, but after some delay, the minister came and asked me in. He was a bright man and a good speaker upon current topics, but hardly a fair example, I think, of the average Protestant minister. He seemed rather surprised when I stated my errand.

"What particular points are you troubled about?" he asked. "Well, for one thing, I can't help wondering where the souls of my father and mother are. They were so good—dear. Father was a fine, honorable man; mother was sweet and kind. I don't think she ever did a wrong thing in her life. Yet neither of them went to church. Father did not believe in religion at all. I can't bear to think they may be in hell."

"The minister answered me with some impatience: 'We have nothing to do with your father or your mother or any of your ancestors. The Bible teaches that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, and that those who do not will be lost.' I am almost sure he said 'will be damned.'"

"Another trouble is, I can't pray. I don't know what to say. I get down on your knees and do the best you can." "Then, I got so discouraged about myself. I am so sorry when I do wrong, and mean with all my heart to do better. And I do for a while. But in time I fall back into my old ways, and things are just as bad as they were before."

"Well, all you can do is to keep on trying," and with that he dismissed me. I went away with a heavy heart. Here was a man who was supposed to be a follower of Christ; and instead of being kind to me, as Christ would have been, he had been harsh and cold. He was an ordained minister of God. But he, the teacher could give me no message from the God of Wisdom and Truth, no word of counsel in my hour of need.

"There was, then, no one to help me but God. I would do the best I could, and leave it all in His hands. One summer while I was teaching school near a small town, I visited a fine American family, Presbyterians like myself. On their bookshelves I came across a book called 'Priest and Nun.' I was always fond of reading and particularly interested in anything regarding religion. So I borrowed the book and took it with me out to where I was teaching. It was a so-called disclosure of an escaped nun, and revealed the vile and sinful life said to be led by priests and nuns and the awful crimes committed to conceal these things.

Strange to say, these horrible stories produced no effect except to arouse a distrust of their truth. My sense of justice made me long to defend those who were thus attacked without being given a chance to defend themselves. I could not believe that people who had left their houses and embraced a life of hardship with the avowed purpose of serving God could all be hypocrites and criminals. Some, if not most, must be sincere and living good and holy lives. If so, it was a wicked, horrible thing, to write such a book about them. I was surprised that my friends, kindly Christian people, should allow it in their houses.

That winter, after I went back to the city, I happened to attend the Episcopal Church, once or twice, in company with some of my true friends. The solemnity and beauty of the service charmed me, and I thought I had found what my soul craved. After a while I applied to the elders of my own church for a letter transferring my membership to the Episcopal Church. This request was readily granted, and I was given a most beautiful letter full of expressions of kindness and Christian fellowship.

For a while I was happier. I could pray better, for the beauty of the church was a help, the music was inspiring, and the ritual kept my mind from wandering. But in time my other difficulties came back to torment me. Besides, even here there was no sense of security, no steadfast doctrine to cling to. One thing troubled me exceedingly. In the form for administering the sacrament of baptism, which I found in my Book of Common Prayer, were the words: 'I baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock and do sign him with the Sign of the Cross'—and so on. A footnote added: 'If anyone objects to the Sign of the Cross it may be omitted.' 'Well,' I said to myself, 'if the Sign of the Cross is had, it has no business to be in the baptismal service at all—nor anywhere else. But if it is good and holy and part of the sacrament which makes the person baptized a child of God, who shall dare to object to it?' And what confidence could anyone have in a church which would allow him to dictate as to the words or forms used in one of its most solemn ceremonies?

In the meantime, my stepmother died, and I had married and gone to live in a small mining town. My husband was 'born and raised' a Catholic, but had not practiced his religion since he was a boy. At the time I met him he had lost all faith, I think, and made no objection to our being married by the Episcopal minister. When my children came, I was very busy and, as there was no particular obligation upon me to attend church, I went but seldom and finally sank into a low, unhappy state of mind, asking no help and bearing my burdens as best I could alone.

One stormy night I was sitting by the baby's cradle. The older children were asleep. My husband was away on business, and I was lonely and sad. Life had become hard for me in many ways. I had a little volume of poems in my hand, and among the rest was one, 'I Stand at the Door and Knock.' I do not remember the words: it was the illustration that touched my heart. The picture showed our Lord, weary and travel-worn, bearing a lantern and a staff. The heavy, barred door at which he knocked was overgrown with brambles and weeds. I have the little picture before me as I write.

Suddenly I realized that although I had forgotten God and had closed the door of my heart to Him, He had not forgotten me. I laid the book face down in the cradle and went down on my knees beside it, begging our Lord not to leave me, but to come into my heart and abide there. Among my neighbors were an old lady and her two daughters. The old lady was in poor health and I went in quite often to see her. They were devout Catholics. One day I noticed a large picture of the Pope on the wall, and underneath, the title, 'Our Holy Father, Pope Pius X.' 'I think it was.' 'Holy Father!' I mocked, laughing. 'Perhaps he's no more holy than the rest of us.' The old lady answered me kindly and seriously: 'We have every reason to believe he is a very good and holy man. But aside from that, he is the head of the Church, the representative of Christ upon earth. As such, he is entitled to our reverence and affection.' This from an old lady—need I say she was Irish—who could not write her own name!

I promptly begged her pardon, and from then on I fell into the way of asking her questions, what did this mean, why did they do that, and so on. She always answered me as she did at first, kindly and seriously, and without taking offense. One day she said to me: 'I shall live to see you a Catholic.' 'Oh, no!' I cried, laughing, as at first. But she insisted. 'Why?' I asked. Tell me why you think so. Why should I be a Catholic any more than thousands of others?' 'Because you really want to know. People often ask questions, but in their hearts they don't care anything about it. But you really want to know. Don't you really want to know?' she persisted, looking into my eyes. 'Don't you want to know? If God reveals to you that it is the one true Church, established by Christ Himself, in which you can find guidance and comfort and rest for your soul here and eternal life hereafter—then wouldn't you want to be a Catholic?'

I answered that I surely would. 'Then you will,' she cried. 'I shall live to see you a Catholic.' And she did, and knelt by my side at the altar rail more than once.

There was a mission in the little mining town, and the old lady's daughters, seeing that I was interested, came home each day and told us what had been said. One day the message seemed especially for me: 'Father'—said that anyone, no matter what his belief, who did not know the Catholic Church to be the true church and lived up to whatever belief he had, was safe—provided he felt sure his belief was right. But'—and the words that followed seemed

sent to me by God Himself—'if he has any doubt he is bound before God to investigate, and to follow such light as God shall send him.' Ah, my heart cried within me, I am bound before God to investigate. To investigate! And I will. Then for five months I read and studied and prayed. Never once did I say I would or I would not be a Catholic. I begged of God continually to show me the way, and I promised to walk therein, no matter what it cost.

One of my little children became very sick, and the Sisters at the convent, whom I knew slightly, begged me to have him baptized. I consented not only to have him baptized but all my children. I had come so far on my journey—a long, long way from my old Protestant standpoint—as to be willing that my children should be Catholics, no matter what I might do myself in the matter. The little sick child died soon after. It was my first great sorrow since I was old enough to realize and together with my other troubles, would have bowed me to the earth, only that I had already begun to catch the gleam of the light that was leading me on. I turned with even more zeal and fervor toward the great question awaiting solution.

I read continually, at first a small prayer book, then a larger one, a catechism, and books of controversy which I obtained from the Sisters. Once when I was reading, I threw the book away from me in anger. 'No!' I cried, 'I will not submit my private judgment to the teachings of the Church! What have I a mind for, if not to use it?' But my guardian angel must have whispered to me: 'If the Church is really the Church of God, existing in the world for the very purpose of guiding men in the way of salvation, who are you to set your private opinions—mistaken ones, perhaps—against the teachings of the Church? I want not to pick up the book. Later I had another such fight with myself about making the Sign of the Cross. I couldn't, it seemed too 'foreign,' too ignorant. But again grace conquered, and I made the sacred sign. May it be my last act before my hands are folded in death.'

I had never doubted that Christ was God; of that, the subtle beauty of His character, and the marvelous wisdom of His utterances—which have outlived the wisdom of the ages and have only proved themselves seemed sufficient proof. If, then, He was God, it was only reasonable to suppose that, as the God of wisdom, He established a permanent, visible organization to carry on His work. For, though His Kingdom was not of this world, His followers were living in this world, and needed such help as only a visible, living, organization, possessing unity and authority, could give them.

I read, now, that Christ did establish such an organization, in the Catholic Church. Not only that: He promised to remain with the Church until the end of time, to help it to teach all truth, and to preserve it not prevail against it. By what right, then, did certain men, centuries ago, call in question the authority of that Church, setting themselves up as teachers sent by Christ? If it ever once during all the fifteen hundred years in which the Catholic Church was the only Christian Church—if even once the Catholic Church had taught what was false, or failed to teach what was true, or taught anything—could ever then nothing—could ever then nothing—Christianity, its Founder would have failed to keep His promises—He was not God—and the whole structure falls to the ground.

When I began to study books upon Catholic doctrines and practices, I found all my old troublesome questions answered in full. Here was the doctrine of purgatory, and I could pray for the souls of my dear father and mother. Here were the sacraments and sacramentals, and all the ritual of the Church to hold my wandering thoughts and help me to realize. Here was forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of penance, and strength and grace to do better. Each doctrine, as I studied it, seemed so logical, so reasonable, so suited to the needs of the human heart, I felt convinced that only God who made the heart could have devised means to meet those needs so completely.

Thus it was that faith came to me, as every good thing has come to me, through reading. It is quite fitting that I should be spending these, my later days, in writing, more than satisfied if I can do for some one else any small part of all that has been done for me.

It was only when I began to go to Mass, however, that I realized the grandeur and loveliness of the Palace Beautiful, to whose portals my wandering feet had at last come. And when I had been led within; when my soul had been made without a doubt, a child of God in conditional baptism; when I had made my first confession and felt the grace which only sanctifying grace restored to the soul can give; when all the beauty and security and comfort were mine—Ah, then I had found my home!

Most tender, most consoling, most appealing of all was the Real Presence of Our Dear Lord in the sweet Sacrament of the Altar. Who could doubt its truth when to remain thus near Him, so in keeping with all that He did and suffered for us, so worthy of Him as God!

There was one thing—only one—

which I was slow and cold about, and that was devotion to the Blessed Virgin. My intellect acknowledged the justice and advantage of giving her honor and asking her intercession; but my heart was not in it. I suppose that this was the last vestige of my old Protestant training. But sorrow brought me even to that. How often since, have I cried to her who was the Mother of an All-Holy Son to pray for me, a weak and sinful mother, and for my children, and to be a true mother to us all.

So this is how I came to the Palace Beautiful. Pray for me, dear reader, to whom I have shown my very heart, and beg of God that unworthy though I am, I may be kept until the end within His blessed shelter. And may I meet you and know you, whom perhaps I shall never know on earth, in the streets of that City, not made with hands eternal in the Heavens.

BEAR WITH ME, LORD Bear with me, Lord, and suffer me to keep My soul from earthly stain! for all day long The tempter's voice is pleasant in mine ear, The world's deceiving beauties soothe mine eye, And all my frailties rise against my will.

Bear with me, Lord; and help me in my need; Look down in pity on my fainting heart, And raise me in mine anguish; for the night Is full of diverse thoughts that grieve my soul, And fright me with the phantoms of despair.

Thou knowest, Lord, my dire necessity; Thou knowest the will and weakness of my heart; Oh, let my soul that crieth out to Thee! By sorrow's fire refined and purified— Rest in the peace and pleasure of Thy love.

Lord, let the living glory of Thy light Flood all my being, and drive the shadows forth Of every vain desire: Oh, make me feel The beauty of Thy presence, so my Shall never miss the path that leads to Thee.

YIELDS SACRED PLACE ROOM OF THE LAST SUPPER TURKISH SULTAN'S GIFT TO ITALY A gift of peculiar interest to the Christian world is the coenaculum, or the room of the Last Supper, which according to La Tribuna, of Rome, has been presented to the King of Italy by the Turkish Sultan. The house in which this room is situated was a place of pilgrimage in the ancient church as early as the beginning of the Second century. It was for many years the only church in Jerusalem, being known in religious history as the Church of Zion, or the church of the Apostles. It fell into the hands of the Moslems in the sixteenth century, and transformed into a mosque, it has since been closed to Christians.

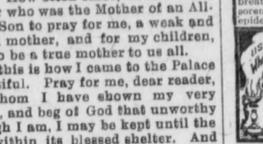
This house, according to tradition, belonged to Mary, the mother of Saint Mark the Evangelist, and reference is made by the ancient writers to its existence in 130 A. D. It was the one holy site open to the first Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, for the hill of the crucifixion was inaccessible to the pilgrims, while the place of Christ's burial was concealed by piles of earth and stone. The mound thus created being crowned with a statue of Venus. It was not until the Fourth century that Constantine the Great uncovered the cave where the body of Jesus had been laid by Joseph of Arimathea, marked the site of the crucifixion and built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Besides being the scene of the Last Supper, the room, according to sacred history, and tradition, was also the place where Christ showed Himself after His resurrection, where the election of Matthias to the apostolate took place, where Peter came after his liberation from prison and where the first Christians assembled to break bread.

The room, which was on the second floor of the house, has been described as 'a hall of godly proportion.' Some of the drawings of the Last Supper in the catacombs at Rome, it has been asserted, picture this room. It has been represented too, in early Italian mosaic and marble works. Leonardo da Vinci in his famous painting at Milan and Van Ghebbardt in a more recent canvas have given to us their conception of this, perhaps the last, meeting place of Christ with all His Disciples.—N. Y. Herald.

SIN A HARD MASTER When a man begins to do wrong, he cannot answer for himself how far he may be carried on. He does not see beforehand, he cannot know where he will find himself after the sin is committed. One false step leads him to another. Sin is a hard master; once sold over to it, we cannot break our chain, one evil concession requires another.—Cardinal Newman.

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