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WHY I BECAME A CATHOLIC.

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[READ BEFORE THE NEWMAN CLUB, LOS ANGELES, CAL.]

In answering the question, "Why I Became a Catholic?" I am painfully aware of the fact that I am dealing with a personal matter, likely to be misunderstood and apt to provoke criticism. It is not a matter of any public importance. Even this club would not desire to have it answered, nor would I care to answer it, if it were not for the fact that there are many others now considering this important step, who may profit by my experience. It would have been rash to have answered this question sooner. To answer it now, in the second year of my novitiate, after mature thought, constant study of the doctrines of the Church and some experience in her life, the answer may, I hope, have some weight. "A decent regard for the opinions of mankind" prompted our forefathers to state the reasons which impelled them to take a new stand among the nations of the earth. When a Protestant, a free-thinker, an infidel, if you

please, after having arrived at the age of fifty years, and having been in the full possession of his faculties, faces about, recants his past convictions, and adopts the "Credo" of the Catholic—a like respect for his old companions in thought requires that he should give good and sufficient reasons therefor. All conversions are the direct result of the interposition of the Holy Spirit. Not even the great Apostle to the Gentiles attempted to formulate his theological reasons for his change of faith until long after the light of heaven fell upon him, and time had been given for mature study and reflection.

In attempting to account for such a conversion upon rational grounds, one may say it resulted from the law of heredity. His paternal ancestors were Irish Catholics. He is "a chip of the old block." Like has produced like. No doubt there is some truth in that statement. There is a law called heredity, and our actions are somewhat shaped by it, but it does not govern our beliefs. If it did, there would have been no such thing as Protestantism, and Martin Luther would have remained a monk. A politician might account for it upon the theory that the convert was angling for the Catholic vote. But if the convert was not then, and is not now, in politics, studiously keeps out, and attends strictly to business, such a theory must be abandoned. Moreover, the man who expects to get into office in our day on the strength of his Catholicity, will "cool his heels" for a long time in the ante-chambers of the Nominating Convention. The Catholic vote is a very desirable thing to have, but Catholic candidates are not wanted.

I have advanced the belief that it is God's Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men, and not argument, which convinces and converts. A great sorrow, reverses of fortune, sickness, the prayers of a devout mother or devoted friend (like my good Father Tabb), the contemplation of good works and good examples by faithful servants of God—all or any of these are sufficient to arrest the attention and turn the mind

Godward, especially when the prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come," is ever on the lips, and the heart is yearning for that peace which passes understanding.

Fortunately for me, I was educated in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and in the highest wing of it. We called ourselves Anglican Catholics. In the creed we declared our belief in the "Holy Catholic Church," even while the word "Protestant" stared at us from the fly-leaf of the prayer book. A love of consistency, the exercise of the Protestant right of private judgment, together with the dogmas of science, falsely so-called, led me away from the excellent communion of devout men and women, and caused me much sorrow at the parting. This right of private judgment, with particular reference to the interpretation of the Scriptures, led me to agnosticism, to unitarianism, to the very opposite pole of Catholicism. The antidote and corrective was found in the study and practice of the law. This led me to see how confusing and destructive such a doctrine would be if applied to the law. Without a court of last resort to interpret the law, it was easy to see how anarchy would prevail. When every man becomes his own interpreter, the authority of the government ceases and security to life and property is at an end.

Following this train of thought, it was not difficult to trace in history and see with my own eyes the effect of such anarchistic doctrines upon the world and upon its own advocates. I saw Protestantism disintegrated and hopelessly divided. Free thought had ended in infidelity. Unable to agree upon what Christ taught, it soon found itself without power or authority to teach in His name. John Calvin had no more right to decide my faith for me than Martin Luther or Thomas Cranmer. The Synod of Dort had no more authority than the Westminster Assembly. The leaders could not agree. Sects multiplied until the doctrine of private interpretation of the Scriptures was reduced to an absurdity. Now, the creed of a Protestant church is the creed of its minister, and this

creed is a variation from the school in which he was taught.

"Higher Criticism," so-called, has at last relegated the Bible to the Catholics as the proper custodians of antiquated fables. It has been one of the revenges of time; for "Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord: I will repay." The Church which was condemned by the Protestants as the suppressor of the Bible is now its sole defender, as it has always been its only authoritative interpreter. Protestantism failed also because it had no head. Its members were bound together by a rope of sand. It presented no solid front, it could not be a Church militant against organized evil under the leadership of the devil.

To say nothing of the wickedness of those who originally brought about this division of the Church and the theological errors involved in it, the movement was unbusinesslike, unstatesmanlike, and hence, sure to fail. Its missionary efforts are known to be a failure by those who travel in foreign lands. At home it is broken into fragments, paralyzed by dissensions between heresy-hunters and heresy-archs, and has no standard by which to judge between right and wrong, and no power to enforce its judgment, if it could agree on one. No wonder such a communion is being deserted by business men, lawyers and scholars, and is compelled to all sorts of devices to pay its ministers' salaries. It seems to me that if there was any common agreement among Protestants, it might be summed up in these words: It is of no importance what a man believes, so long as he is sincere and acts according to his own convictions of duty. And this is anarchy. This is the doctrine which anarchists would apply to the law. Let every man do that which is right in his own eyes.

But this is not the law of God which the Catholic Church teaches, nor can teach. Order is Heaven's first law, and obedience God's first command. To me it became unreasonable to believe any longer that the Savior of mankind would leave us without a sure guide

unto all truth. We had His promise : " Behold, I will send a Comforter unto you, and He shall guide you unto all truth." Finally, it appeared clear to me, as an historical fact, that He did establish a body of living teachers, a Church by whom and by which He designed that His religion should be taught orally (for He left no written word), and throughout all ages. As a student of the sacred writings, I was compelled to admit the Bible to be the most fragmentary of books. It was difficult to understand, sometimes apparently contradictory. As a lawyer, the conclusion was forced upon me that an authoritative interpreter was a logical necessity. To admit that was to admit the doctrine of the Infallibility of the Pope, and all the doctrines of the Catholic Church. There must be an end to controversy as well as to litigation, and sweet contentment began to steal over me as I saw the light breaking and the end in view.

There were ethical reasons also why I became a Catholic. From pulpit and platform I had heard much of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. I was much inclined to the conviction that both of them were to be found in their best estate outside of churches. A wider experience taught me differently. For a realization of that dream I searched diligently and conscientiously through Oddfellowship, Masonry, the Liberal League, Unitarianism and kindred ethical societies. But the god of all these was not a Father. He was a mere abstraction, a first cause, an over-soul, a law, not a law-giver. He was the subject of much rhetoric, the object of little love, and no worship. He was not a being who hears and answers prayers, who pities and forgives sinners, who makes laws and commands obedience. As for the brotherhood of man, let those who have searched for it through all the secret, benevolent societies and fraternal organizations tell me if they have been more successful than I in finding it. I did not find it until I searched for it in the Catholic Church. There I found the brotherhood kneeling side by side on the same hard

floor. There I found all sorts and conditions of men, all colors, all nations, blended by a common faith in the same Heavenly Father into a universal brotherhood, a catholic Church. There all tongues confess one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and in one universal language praise God's Holy Name.

Socialism, as an economic system, and Altruism, as its religious counterpart, were also very attractive subjects to me. I was longing for the time to come when the only competition among men might be, "Who best can serve his fellow-man?" My practical attempts in this direction, and those of others which came under my observation, were failures. They were destroyed by the selfishness of man. They fell because they were not built upon the Rock. They were irreligious to the core. They despised God and His ways, and He brought them to naught.

My attention was called to Socialism and Altruism as taught and practiced in the Catholic Church. Monastic life, the Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods were examined. The Franciscans of this Coast in particular were studied. All these succeeded in the work they had to do. Some of them have been suppressed in time of persecution by the State—but always to the injury and disgrace of the State. They are still in successful operation. I saw how they girdled the earth with their hospitals, schools and churches; how they had spread from pole to pole; how these Christian brothers and sisters are found on every battlefield, in every plague-stricken spot of earth, among savage tribes, amid arctic snow and ice, in the fever-laden tropics—wherever there is found a brother in distress, there are they also. Taking upon themselves vows of poverty, which our modern Socialist has no intention of taking, they look to God for their daily bread, and hold their goods in common. Their success is due to the object of their organization—*ad majorem Dei gloriam*. They have a divine commission and are doing their duty faithfully and fearlessly. They believe in God and in His revealed word, and keep steadfastly

the faith once delivered to the saints. For the same reason, it seemed to me, all other forms of so-called Christian Socialism failed. Infidelity runs riot among these professed followers of Christ. The Sacraments are despised and laughed at as vain superstitions. In a word, Christian Socialism fails because it is not Christian.

Time will not permit me to mention all the reforms by which the world was to be redeemed without a Redeemer, and with which I allied myself with sincerity and enthusiasm. These were all tasted and tested as substitutes for a Christian religion. Each was found to contain some grains of truth, and men and women of the highest integrity. Their aims were high and holy, and exalted themes were ever on their lips. We were not hypocrites, but "like men beating the air." We were not willing to believe that there was no other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we might be saved. We trusted in our own strength and expected to be saved by our own righteousness. In rapid succession I saw many of these, like their predecessors in history, teaching the same heresies by different names, live out their little day, and until itching ears demanded some new thing. These good people are all on their way to the Catholic Church. There is a tendency in our day among all religious denominations to come together. As the Roman Catholic Church is the largest body of Christians in the world, and stands firm and immovable as the Universal Church, it is in accordance with the law of gravitation that all these particles of divided Protestantism will gravitate to her. Again, as the tendency in our day is for the rich to become richer and the poor poorer, so the Catholic Church, which has always been the Church of the poor and the multitude, will be the fold into which the poor and oppressed will huddle for protection, "and there shall be one fold under one Shepherd." As I read the history of the Catholic Church in this light, I saw that she had always been cosmopolitan and democratic. The poorest lad could be-

come Pope. There is not a place in the sacred ministry which any ragged, barefoot boy may not reach. Her Popes are elected from all nations. Her missionaries have sacrificed their lives all over the world. Her strength lies in the fact that she is universal. In England the Queen is head of the Church, in Russia the Czar; but the Catholic Church has put before the world the idea of a Church for humanity, bounded by no national lines. National barriers are being broken down. Neither the Chinaman nor the Boer will be permitted any longer to exclude or discriminate against the foreigner. The people that refuses to receive the light of the world will go down into oblivion before the advancing hosts of truth and righteousness. We see already the dawn of a better day for the common people. Under the providence of God, it has become the interest of the strongest nations to afford protection to life and property everywhere in exchange for trade relations. They afford at once protection from the petty tyranny of local dictators, and an opportunity to resume the arts of peace without fear, and to worship God and educate their children without disturbance. My old companions in thought will find, as I have found, the best realization of their dreams of a universal brotherhood of man, under the fatherhood of God, in this Church of universal humanity. We cannot kneel to an English King nor a Russian Czar, but we can yield glad homage to the Holy Father, who is the subject of no nation and the spiritual ruler of all, without violating our allegiance in temporal things to the nation in which we live.

To all these societies I am indebted for grains of truth in bushels of chaff. They excited me to press on until the whole truth was found; and when I found it in the Catholic Church, I discovered, to my astonishment, that there is not a truth, nor a semblance of truth, in any of these sects, that has not been better taught by her for nearly 2,000 years.

In this connection I am also bound to acknowledge the obligations I am under to well-known friends—the

A. P. A.'s. Long before I had thought of becoming a Catholic, these sticklers for truth declared I was one and had been seen communing at the altar rail. The more I denied it, the louder the cock crew. At length it occurred to me that a Church which excited the hostility of such men must be a very good Church; and that her doctrines must be true if no weapons better than forgery and perjury could be brought against them. Thus it has always happened to me. I am indebted to both my friends and enemies. Both have helped to bring me into the Catholic Church. The friends led, the enemies drove; and so I got there sooner than I otherwise would.

I must also admit my obligations to the politicians and the parties. Without them you would not know all the reasons why I became a Catholic. I had studied them all closely; tried always to vote for the best men, regardless of their party affiliations. I believed the world was to be reformed by a new party, to grow out of the old. Experience, however, taught me that the new party man was just as hungry for office as the old one, if not more so, because longer from the crib. He was not a bit more honest, and not nearly so well qualified. I finally became convinced that the reform of all reforms must consist in growing a better man. Good laws do no good when put in the hands of bad men to execute. Bad laws are shorn of their badness when put in the hands of good men to enforce. From this the next step was not difficult. The Church, not the party, must grow this man. Even the public school cannot grow him, because it is forbidden by law to grow anything but a one-sided man, a half-man, and that the worst half. In this reform the wisest of Protestants are with us. It is the parent, whether Catholic or Protestant, not the State, upon whom both the right and duty rest. My study and investigation led me to prefer the Catholic system of education for the same reason that I prefer the Catholic Church, but I shall be always glad to extend the right hand of fellowship to every parent of every creed, and

no creed, who believes with me in Christian education as the reform of all reforms; and that a Godless education is corrupting public life and filling our prisons with the best blood of the land. Of the Infallibility of the Pope, of saints and images, of purgatory and hell, of candles and incense, of penance and indulgences, and other doctrines of the Catholic Church, I have said nothing, because they do not explain why I became a Catholic. They more properly belong to a paper, if ever I should write it, telling why I *am* a Catholic. Those who are interested in those subjects and earnestly desire to know the truth should read "The Faith of Our Fathers," by Cardinal Gibbons, and other kindred works. "If they will not hear these, they will not believe though one rose from the dead." When I presented myself, a stranger, to our good Bishop Montgomery, and told him I wanted to become a Catholic, I was already convinced and only needed instruction and the Sacraments of the Church. For these I shall always be grateful to Fathers Clifford and Doyle. I have no apologies to offer, no defense to make for my past conduct and past belief. To the charge that I have entertained various opinions in the past and have not been steadfast and immovable in any one, I enter a plea of guilty. The prophecy, "He will change again," reminds me of an incident that occurred in a Catholic church in Colorado. A little boy attended Mass for the first time with his father. They both went out of curiosity. It happened that the Bishop was the celebrant, and the boy watched with amazement the changing of the Bishop's vestments before the high altar, a ceremony that seemed to him like undressing and dressing before the people. At length he could stand it no longer, and turned to his father with the remark: "Daddy, I wonder what he'll do next!"

Some of my friends and relations are equally solicitous about me. In view of what they regard as my past inconsistencies and changeableness, they wonder "what I'll do next." God only knows. In the

words of our great Cardinal Newman, I can only say :

“Lead, kindly Light;

* * * *

Lead Thou me on !”

Just as I was, without one plea, I faced about like the prodigal son. My belly was filled with the husks of free thought and reform nostrums. I longed for what Archimides called *Pousto*, a place where one can stand and feel the ground solid beneath him. I started back and never stopped until I reached my Father's house. Its portals opened. I was received with a loving embrace. I became a Catholic. May God give me grace here to remain and manfully to fight under His banner, the Cross, unto my life's end.

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