

Thomas, E. Mary A.
My reasons for entering the true...
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Journeys to the Catholic Church

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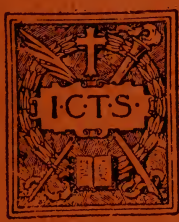
My Reasons For Entering the True Fold

By E. MARY A. THOMAS

AND

The Story of My Conversion

By WILLIAM E. JONES



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

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My Reasons for Entering the True Fold

By E. MARY A. THOMAS

ON the fifth of March, 1914, I had the happiness of embracing the Catholic religion, and becoming thereby a member of the true Church which Our Divine Lord established on earth. On that memorable day when I received conditional Baptism at the hands of Rev. Father Clarke, pastor of the Church of the Holy Name in Providence, all my doubts and uncertainty about the spiritual life ceased, and the conviction that I chose like Mary, the better part, that I had taken the right path that leads to my Divine Master's Home, has every day since been strengthened. "The snare was broken," as the Royal Psalmist said, which held me in cruel suspense, and I felt overwhelmed with joy and consolation at the thought that, though at a late hour of my life, I sought admission into Christ's fold, I was not repelled like the foolish Virgins in the Gospel, but was received with such a cordial welcome that its memory will ever remain the brightest and most delightful episode of my life.

I have often been asked by many of my former co-religionists why I deserted them and went to Rome: It is to answer this question plainly and straightly that I have ventured to write the following lines, hoping that their perusal will set aside many little prejudices, which, like me, they entertain in good faith against the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of which I glory today in being a member.

Before beginning, I wish to express my warmest gratitude to my dear old Baptist and Episcopalian friends for the generous treatment they extended to me; for, unlike most converts, I have not had one positively unpleasant experience with any person on account of my action. My old friends, as from time to time I meet them, have ever been in almost every case as friendly and cordial as before.

My girlhood was passed without any special leaning to any religious denomination, though, if asked what I

was, I would have unhesitatingly answered that I was a Protestant. The name of "Catholic" was abhorrent to me, for I imbibed from my elders a great animosity against that Church. They told me that it was a veritable cesspool of damnable superstitions and the centre of all idolatrous worship; that its members gave the same honor and adoration to statues of men and women as they pay to the great Creator of Heaven and Earth; that that Church had always been in the past, and is still, antagonistic to the spread of education, among its members. With the removal of these two objections, I found my way to Rome both clear and pleasant. For I remembered reading in the Bible that Our Lord said as the world hated and persecuted Him, so would it hate and persecute His faithful followers. Calumnies of this kind, held in good faith by the majority of Protestants have formed the basis of mean persecutions during 300 years against the Grand Old Church of Rome, but it has unflinchingly withstood not only these and many cruel ones, because Christ has promised to remain with it until the end of time.

Charitable Acts of Catholic Young Lady Awakened Desire to Embrace Same Faith.

Twenty-five years ago, just as I reached womanhood, I thought it about time to adopt some definite form of worship and become a church member. As most of my associates in those days belonged to the Baptist Communion, I joined their congregation. At this period I came to know a Catholic young lady whose kindly nature, genial character and most estimable qualities of heart and mind so charmed me that a very close friendship has ever since existed between us to my great benefit and edification. In her modesty she has begged me not to mention her name; else it would be my greatest joy to publish through the wide world that she it was who was the chief factor in making me a Catholic. For to see her soothing the last moments of the dying, counselling the wayward to keep on the path of righteousness, bringing peace to families

which had lived in discord, fitting like an angel of charity from house to house whenever an accident, sickness or any other cause became the source of sorrow and affliction, everywhere pouring sunshine by her very presence on rich and poor alike—and this, not once or twice, but almost daily for so many years—would bring conviction home to the most inveterate free-thinker, that the religion she professed must be divine. I am confident that God has already prepared for her a throne in heaven in recompense for the thousand and one kindnesses she has performed, and not the least of these, for that of removing all my difficulties against her Church.

I had joined the Baptists without inquiring much into their doctrine, because I simply wanted to be a member of some church. Religious tenets did not then bother me. For five years I remained with them. During that time my Catholic friend had become a member of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Cathedral. Her hour of adoration was from 3 to 4 o'clock p. m. In her own sweet way she invited me to go and pass the Holy Hour in her company. Many times I knelt by her side in the church, and while I observed her deep recollection, prayerful attitude and her fixed gaze on the tabernacle, just as if she was speaking face to face with her Divine Lord and Redeemer, strange sensations would often overwhelm me; thoughts, that previously never troubled me, would then arise and keep their ground despite distractions of various kinds; thoughts that have in the past worried countless souls and that will continue their work of perplexity and uneasiness as long as there shall exist so many religious denominations in the world, each of which is claiming the prerogative of being Christ's representative here below. "Am I on the right road to Heaven?" "Do I belong to God's own church?" The persistence of these thoughts quite unnerved me, filled me with fear and consternation, and I there and then regretted that I had not chosen

Episcopalianism instead of Wesleyism when I wished to become a church member. I thought somehow that the former religion would lead me more securely and directly to Heaven. I sought the advice of my dear friend on this matter; she laughingly answered that my mistake can be easily rectified. She would call on the Rev. Dr. Bassett, the Episcopalian minister, that very evening and tell him to go and visit me on the following day. He would be delighted to get a new parishioner. She never uttered a word to encourage me to embrace her own Faith she only hoped that I would not waver in my resolution. She was certain that this change from one church to another would eventually lead me Romewards.

Conflicting Practices of Protestant Sects Impelled a Desire to Seek the True Faith.

For 20 years I was an Episcopalian and tried to live up to all the requirements of that church. To my great surprise I often heard lay persons of both sexes severely criticising the sermons that the rector and other ministers had delivered, declaring certain tenets propounded by them to be nothing but rank heresy. I found out that there were three different standards of belief in that church—high, low and broad—and still, though divided in doctrine, these three branches appeared to flourish under the one title of Anglicanism or Episcopalianism. Some there were who believed in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Communion; others, and they formed a large majority, did not; some went to confession, whilst others ridiculed their action, saying it was a mere imitation of Popery. Some, too, prayed fervently for the repose of the souls of their deceased relatives and friends, and others looked down upon this pious practice and called it superstition. Times and times again I heard of my co-religionists styling themselves "Catholics." My reason revolted at the absurdity of this claim. I was certain that if a stranger asked any one in Providence to be guided to the nearest Catholic Church, he would be

directed to the Roman Catholic and never to the Episcopalian place of worship. The more anxious I grew to serve my God faithfully the greater the uncertainty I felt about my spiritual position. My very instinct called for unity of worship among all classes embraced by the one Church that Our Blessed Lord established. All around me I saw confusion and diversity of opinions on most essential articles of belief. Grave doubt naturally arose whether this church of which I was a member and which allows antagonistic views of religion was that church instituted by Christ and propagated by the Apostles throughout the world. "One Faith, One Baptism, One Lord," as the Bible tells us. One Faith that will bind the consciences of all who profess it—wealthy or poor—the learned or illiterate—the king on his throne or the ploughman in his humble cot. All must believe the same creed and live up to it if they wish to reign with Our Divine Lord in Heaven after death.

I asked one day my trustworthy friend if her church permitted a divergence of opinions on fundamental articles of the Faith. The answer came sprightly: "No; should any one contradict publicly the teachings of our Catechism, he is at once cut off like a rotten branch from a tree and excommunicated." I continued the conversation by seeking information about statue worship of which the Church was accused and which, since my girlhood, I sincerely believed to be true. She said: "There exists no person on earth who so heartily detests and condemns the adoration of images and statues as the Catholic. When we pray before the statues or images of Jesus Christ and His Saints, we pray not to the statues and images, but to Jesus Christ and to the Saints whom they represent. The honor we pay to the Saints is not the same as we pay to God; we adore God, but we do not adore the Saints; we pray to God to hear our prayers and petitions and to the Saints to intercede for us."

I then asked: "Is it true that your church has

always been, and is still, inimical to the spread of education?"

"That accusation is as old as Protestantism itself," she replied. "It first saw the light when Martin Luther had broken his vows in the Augustinian Order, started a church of his own and married an ex-Cistercian Nun. He had to give the world some reasons to palliate his apostasy, and what you have just stated was one of them. There never was a proposition more flagrantly opposed to the truth than that the Catholic Church ever put hindrances to the cultivation of the human mind either in sacred or in profane learning. No person conversant with the history of the by-gone centuries will show the least doubt on the fact that it was the Catholic Church which upheld and consolidated civilization—converted the barbarous hordes that overran Europe with fire and sword, and which, whilst planting the standard of the Cross in their midst, strove with might and main to curb their savage passions—to wean them from war and violence and instill into their hearts the love of peaceful pursuits."

"If she had ever looked with an evil eye on education, it was in her power during the Middle Ages to destroy the manuscripts of the immortal geniuses who had flourished both before and after the birth of Christ. There were then no printing presses, throwing out thousands of copies every hour. The works of the old Roman and Greek orators, poets and philosophers, could never survive the wear and tear of time to reach us at the present day, were it not for the industry and care bestowed by that church in gathering them into her monasteries and having her saintly children devote several hours a day to transcribe them word for word, so that the wisdom of the past ages might be transmitted to posterity. In those ages of faith when the nations basked under the balmy influence of one church—when rich and poor everywhere breathed forth their petitions to heaven with the same prayers on their lips, schools were always found attached to

the monasteries in which all that was then known was taught. To some of these schools thousands had recourse for education. They had not to pay entry or tuition fees—so essentially in these days in our big educational establishments. All they had to do was to enroll their names on the register and mention the special course of study they wished to take. The Abbot would then tell them to go and build a hut which would be their kitchen, refectory, study and bedroom, as long as they remained. The scholars who were too poor to supply their own meals were fed by the monks, as also were all the very poor of the environs. Today her motherly heart beats with the same ardor to promote learning among her children, besides building and maintaining parochial schools without state aid in order to give the young a knowledge of God and Divine things as well as the elementary training in secular education, she has opened up, wherever she flourishes, colleges, convents and universities in which sacred and profane learning are taught, and in which her members are equipped to take the foremost ranks in the legal, medical and the other learned professions. Yes—the Catholic Church is charged with ignorance by bigots, and we find her the mother of learning; with children at the forefront of every constructive and progressive effort in literature, science, art, mechanics and in every field of human endeavor.”

Impressive Sacrifices Made by Catholics Due to Adverse Conditions of Weather.

As the wind dispels the clouds and reveals to our gaze the blue vault of the heavens, so did the potency of my friend's arguments sweep away my old bigoted notions and disclose to my mind the beauty, grandeur and magnificence of the Catholic Church. I felt at that moment inclined to declare my firm purpose to enter its fold, but thought it more prudent to make further close-range investigation into its discipline and government.

What struck me most forcibly at the start was the

great crowds that could be seen every Sunday morning wending their way to hear Mass in all kinds of weather; whilst the other places of worship in the neighborhood would have very thin attendance if it were raining, snowing or very cold. And all these people, despite the danger they ran of catching influenza, or worse sickness, appeared joyful and eager to leave at the feet of their Crucified Lord their rich bouquets of pious prayers.

Again, I came to know of the wonderful sacrifice that thousands of my own sex have made by consecrating their lives to the arduous duties of teaching, serving the sick and old and uplifting the unfortunates who have fallen by the wayside. They left comfortable homes to live under austere rules which forbid them associating as formerly, with the world and which keep them busy from morning to night in the exercises of charity. All their actions are generously performed through their pure love of God and not to win attraction or any earthly recompense from their fellow creatures. They are chaste spouses of Our Lord, Who will one day reward them exceedingly in Heaven for the edifying and painstaking manner they discharge their many duties. I was brought into companionship with some beautiful souls in the convents and hospitals. I saw what the Church was doing for those around me, building day by day, characters that had in them an aroma of saintliness, and I was convinced that the faith which could produce such loveliness of daily living must be the true one.

A simple explanation of the manner of reciting the Rosary gave the final blow to my Episcopalianism. From that moment I resolved to embrace the Catholic Faith. As soon as I heard for the first time the words of the beautiful prayer—"Hail Mary"—I seemed to be carried away in spirit to the foot of that August Lady's throne and to beg most earnestly Her powerful intercession. My feelings on that occasion recalled to my mind the story of a lay-brother in a monastery in the

olden times who possessed a very poor memory. The monks had great trouble in teaching the prayers prescribed by the rule. When, however, he heard them saying "Ave Maria," his face brightened up, and he exclaimed: "Oh! that is beautiful music; I shall of a certainty quickly learn that, and never weary of repeating it." There is something so sublime, so supplicating in it that it won my heart, and I took the resolution never to let a day pass without invoking Mary, the Mother of God, to pray for me now and at the hour of death. Little did I dream that I was following in the footsteps of many distinguished Anglicans such as, for instance, the Rev. Frederick Faber, who implored Her and while championing the prerogatives of their English Church. On account of their loving devotedness to Her, the Mother, most Amiable, obtained from them from Her Divine Son, the grace to abjure their errors and the strength of will to turn aside from their kith and kindred and to life-long friends, and devote their genius to further God's interests on earth in the bosom of the Church of Rome.

Our Blessed Lady Guided Her Footsteps to the True Path of Heavenly Father's Home.

My heartfelt thanks are given every day to Our Blessed Lady for the grace of conversion She gained for me. She guided my steps to the true path that leads to my Heavenly Father's Home, on which alone security from spiritual shipwreck is found and where all mankind have at their disposal plentiful resources to fortify themselves against the snares and allurements of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Have I been happy since I took this step? Most assuredly. 'The simplicity of my present faith is to me its greatest attraction, for it is the faith of a child without which Our Divine Lord has said, no one may enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I have no more conflicting dogmas to contend with; no more do the vagaries of private judgment affright me. All now is peace and harmony. The Vicegerent of Jesus Christ on

earth, the Pope of Rome, speaks and all bow in submission without one dissentient voice. This is the unity which bespeaks the divinity of her mission to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

I regret very much, when some 25 years ago, I wished to become a church member, that I did not then embrace the Catholic belief. I feel and know now that I lost thousands of heavenly graces during that period which would have been at my disposal had I been a Catholic.

Should these lines fall into the hands of any of my former co-religionists, I hope their perusal will dissipate the false ideas they harbor against the Catholic Church, and induce them, with God's help, to enter that fold which possesses alone the means to calm the tempests of the heart and bring peace and contentment to troubled minds.

The Story of My Conversion

A Plain Statement of Facts

By WILLIAM E. JONES

FROM the Baptist denomination to the Catholic Church may seem like a long jump and in a sense it is, for they are fundamentally unlike in creed and form of organization. Being given the Baptist promise, I was led to believe that it was the only safe path to eternal salvation; that other Protestant denominations were more or less in error, but the Catholic Church was wholly out of tune with divine teaching and her clergy more or less aware of it. The Catholic millions I pitied for their "superstitious ignorance," but the priests deserved no such charity. Fortunately, however, I married a Catholic girl and was necessarily married by a priest, Father Francis Gavisk of Indianapolis. In that I was conscious that nothing was surrendered while the girl would otherwise suffer the pains of an outraged conscience. Our delightful union has been blessed with three happy children, all of whom have received Catholic baptism, their father not having been sufficiently interested to be present at the christening nor at all inclining to object, feeling that it would neither help nor hinder them. To him it was a minor matter, wholly immaterial, but of the greatest importance from the mother's point of view. That is as far as he thought his wife's religion would ever influence him. On the contrary, he had entertained a conviction that some day he would win wife and children by fair means, without malice or offense, to his own religious faith. The good wife on occasions indeed courteously and calmly listened to the husband draw parallels and contrasts between her religion and his, but when in his own wisdom he flattered himself with having driven a nail into the Catholic coffin and even clinched his "argument," just then she would calmly reply without the slightest evidence of malice that I should enjoy my belief in the fullest measure and she would continue to enjoy

hers undisturbed. And the only explanation I could find to justify her state of mind, her perfect serenity, was "superstitious ignorance." You know, when the Protestant minister is asked to pray at a dying man's bedside, that is faith; but when a Catholic implores the saints in heaven to intercede with God in behalf of a dying soul, that is "superstitious ignorance." It ruffled my patience a little to note her total indifference to my "logic," though that impatience was carefully concealed out of respect due her, but the hope always remained that another opportunity would be afforded to awaken her from her lethargy.

Failing ultimately in my good intentions, there arose to haunt me an unpleasant and embarrassing possibility. I could not consistently interfere with the mother's efforts to instruct the children, to shape their religious course. Neither did she ever attempt to prevent their attendance at the services of their father's church. They were enrolled in both Sunday schools and were therefore in a fair way to imbibe the doctrines of both and would eventually have to choose between them. I dreaded more or less the final outcome of this dual instruction, but my greatest apprehension was that they might be so confused and uncertain as to be lost to both. And since I could not possibly prescribe to a religion of "idolatry and superstition," it remained for me to "convert" my wife, and her willingness to listen as well as to visit with me on occasions gave hope. But in turn she kindly suggested an exchange of courtesy, and here commences the most interesting phase of the case.

I saw the people bless themselves as they entered the church, making the sign of the cross. I saw them kneel in silent prayer before being seated and twice more making the sign of the cross. I watched the priest as he went through the impressive Mass and saw the people worship in conjunction with him. I heard him read a passage of Scripture and expound its meaning to them, and was especially impressed by the fact that at no time during the sermon did he stray away from his

text. Again, I heard him answer explicitly the question propounded to him through the question box, questions asked by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It all interested me. In the lobby I saw a collection of books for sale, modest in binding and equally modest in price. The titles were conspicuous and their arrangement convenient. My curiosity was aroused and I purchased first one, then another, until several had been read and I was fairly enraptured. It would be difficult perhaps to find any people more prejudiced against the Catholic religion than the Welsh and Scotch, and the writer is a native Welshman, born and reared in that sphere of prejudice, except as the American labor movement softened it. My embarrassment lest my good wife might entertain the idea that her husband was weakening, can be surmised. However, the force of circumstances herein related gradually penetrated the dark veil of prejudice and the new environment brought on an awakening in my soul, a sudden change of viewpoint, a vital reality, to replace a doubtful uncertainty.

I read "The Faith of Our Fathers" and other books with astonishing interest. I listened to the priest with profound respect. I first was curious, then slightly interested, but soon intensely in earnest in search of truth. There came rapidly a conviction that the Catholic Church was grossly misrepresented, followed by an unmistakable conviction that Protestantism is based on a false premise, a foundation of sand. It suddenly dawned upon me that my religion was but a shadow and my creed the work of man. I had studied the history of the church to which I belonged, had heard many sermons from other Protestant pulpits than my own church and read much Protestant literature. But somehow there always seemed a something vague about Protestant religion, a something vitally lacking in the plan and origin of it. What it was I did not know and could not know, worshiping as I did within that sphere. I had observed that interest in any Protestant church was contingent on the minister's ability to attract and

to hold. It is continually pointed out to them that interest and service are due to God, irrespective of the personality of the minister, but practically interest nevertheless abounds in direct relation to the likes or dislikes of the memberships toward the pastor. The apparent spirituality of the membership hinges on the intellectuality and fervor of the minister. The congregation is large or small according as to whether the minister is a big man mentally or a little fellow. If the sermons are interesting, whether they be real sermons or mere lectures, the attendance will be correspondingly large; if uninteresting, correspondingly small. Hence the efforts to attract with musical specials to please the people, sensational pulpit topics to attract the curious, the various societies and clubs to arouse interest indirectly, and finally, the revivals, modest and sensational, to stimulate a waning faith. I would not discount any means contemplated to do good, but is it not true that Protestantism, generally speaking, is unconsciously responsible for the lack of interest displayed toward religion? In the minds of its misdirected millions it has destroyed the very germ of religion when it denies a visible authority. Protestantism reduced to its logical finality is to be good and do good, which is most laudable in itself, but that essence of religion, it is but a material fruit of it. Socialists and anarchists teach that. It is materialism pure and simple. Religion goes further. It makes definite requirements aside from this, requirements of faith and sacrificial obedience to His will in matters wholly spiritual.

"Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This sentence uttered by Our Saviour, even Protestants do not deny, though they do not try to explain away its real signification. This they must do to establish a church "invisible," to destroy the infallibility of the Catholic Church. Any church in order to establish its claims to divine origin must base its origin on divine inspiration, and thus inspired it must surely be infallible, else the gates of hell will surely prevail against it.

Its religious creed, then, and church discipline must harmonize with the plan of salvation as prescribed by the Author of that salvation. There can be no guess work about it and no doubt. But accepting our Protestant friend's version of the matter, it must be self-evident that God did forsake the world for many centuries and the last clause of our Lord's most positive statement is at once clouded in serious doubt, to say the least. There was only the one Christ sent to instruct man as to his relations to God, and to be crucified for him. That Christ taught no conflicting doctrines. Neither did He establish a multiplicity of conflicting churches. He established a church, with the full stamp of His authoritative approval and there and then appointed a visible head with full authority to forgive sins or to withhold forgiveness as each case merited; a visible, earthly executive, divinely ordained to govern a visible church similarly ordained. "What you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and what you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Why did He not say to the people: "Now, I go to my Father in heaven. I leave you and the generations to follow you to your fate. These men who have traveled with Me will record the things I have said and done together with their own experiences. They will reveal to the generations the will of my Father, but there will be no human authority to interpret this will to them. They must be guided by their own individual wisdom. Each child must figure salvation out for himself without assistance other than the influence of the Holy Spirit. The plan is to be that of spiritual instinct rather than visible guidance. Of discipline there will be none. Those who can not read what shall be written must necessarily trust to luck or fate for an interpretation of My will, for none will there be with authority to interpret for them. My Father has systematized the universe and all His creations, except the most vital of all, the salvation of your souls. In this all important matter, so important, indeed, that He sent Me, His only begotten Son, to die for it, I must confess that in His

infinite wisdom He has seen fit not to provide any particular, tangible plan. You are to be left to grope in darkness, each to establish his own system in a hit or miss plan of salvation. But as all roads lead to Rome, so all religious routes, however remote from one another and inconsistent in essentials, will lead to heaven. It matters not how little now how much you believe, so you believe something and that conscientiously. True, if Paul continues to persecute as he has he will suffer the penalty in spite of his unruffled conscience. But My Father will be more tolerant with you. Believe what you will and I shall be fully satisfied with your fate, but believe something." Such is the real logic of the Protestant position. But such is not what Christ did say. And pinned down to the authority, Himself, can any Protestant church hope to trace its origin even remotely near to the real beginning of the Christian Church? On the contrary, it must be admitted that only the Catholic Church can lay such claim. And here is the point to which my study brought me. Having satisfied myself on that score there was no further need to argue seriously. The struggle was over except as to details. The rest was quite easy. I could readily understand and as readily believe. The Apostles' Creed at once became my creed and the beautiful Hail Mary became my own fervent prayer with abounding satisfaction. Why should I not appeal to the beautiful mother of Christ to intercede for me? She was honored above all earthly beings and must surely be most favored with God.

I go no more to church to hear the minister preach and to enjoy the sermon or be bored by it, according as to whether it is interesting or dry. But I go to worship, beginning as I enter and ending only as I leave, except for a brief interval during which I listen attentively and profitably to the instruction of the priest. The service has an equal attraction and fascination for men as for women and that is why there is no particular complaint from the Catholic Church concerning the absence of men from the place of worship. Sheridan, Wyo.

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International Catholic Truth Society

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NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THE TRUTH

[*The Ave Maria*, Nov. 1, 1924.]

The Church has nothing to fear or to suffer from the truth. She suffers only when it is distorted, or when it is hidden or ignored. Ignorance is ever with us, and old errors die hard on account of being constantly revived. This is the case with regard to the Church and Democracy. It has been so widely proclaimed that "Democracy and Civil Liberty are fruits of the philosophy of the Reformation" that, owing to incessant reiteration on the part of ill-informed writers and a still less informed public, the assertion passes for a well-established fact. To correct this error, and to dispel this ignorance, is the twofold purpose of Mr. Sylvester J. McNamara, M. A., in his treatise entitled "American Democracy and Catholic Doctrine." In some 160 well-documented pages he shows the "great debt Democracy owes to Catholicism." Published by the International Catholic Truth Society, Brooklyn, N. Y.

(The price of "American Democracy and Catholic Doctrine" is 25 cents a copy—\$20.00 per hundred. Address 407 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.)