

# The Church with the Open Door Part 1

## Welcoming Converts from Aristocracy and Literature

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### I. CONVERTS FROM THE NOBILITY.

THE general title of this series of articles does not refer to the fact that Catholic churches are open and in use every day of the week. It is not suggested by the crowds that are drawn to St. Francis' church in Melbourne, to St. Patrick's, Church Hill, in Sydney, or the new church of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in the same city. It is true that a Catholic church is not, any more than the Catholic religion, for use on Sundays only. The Sacrifice of the Mass is offered daily to Almighty God, and Our Lord is ever present in the Blessed Sacrament, making of the church a true House of God and house of prayer. But when I choose as title *The Church with the Open Door*, I am thinking rather of the number of people of every kind who, in search of true religion and bent on doing God's will, are constantly finding their way into a City whose gates are always open to receive them. The Catholic Church makes strict demands on those who would enter her fold, but the way is always open for those who are led thither by the grace of God.

It would encourage those who are in search of the truth if they realized how many, from all walks of life and from every form of religion as well as from no religion, have found peace and happiness in the Catholic Church. It would also bring satisfaction to Catholics, and perhaps deeper appreciation of their religion, to know how large the number of converts is, how steady the stream, and how many people of real eminence it contains. Not that we wish to make little of those whose names are not known to the world at large, for their souls are just as precious to God; but the names of well-known persons have naturally a special interest for us. As I must start somewhere I propose to start with the nobility. In the words of Gilbert (and music of Sullivan),

No Englishman unmoved that statement hears,  
Because, with all our faults, we love our House of Peers.

Apart from other considerations, peers and their relatives can have, I suppose, less worldly inducement to enter the Catholic Church than any other class of person, and therefore their example is all the more striking.

During the late war, those of us who were older often found our thoughts going back to the previous war, and to the people who played a prominent part in it. The Prime Minister of England at the outbreak of the First World War was the Liberal leader, Herbert Henry Asquith, later to become Lord Oxford and Asquith. The holder of that title now (1954) is a Catholic, the second Earl of Oxford and Asquith. The then Prime Minister's eldest son, Raymond Asquith, became a Catholic early in the war, and was killed in France in 1916. Maurice Baring, himself a distinguished convert to the Catholic faith, wrote in a letter to a friend at the time:

"I was certain he would be killed. I dined with him the night before he went back to his regiment after a spell at GHQ. I felt I would never see him again. I think he deserved his glorious fate, and deserved it doubly or trebly from not being a soldier, and by having so much to give; one can't say more... He was the wittiest man I have ever known; his wit was like a shining icicle, and it was the wit that receives as well as the wit that gives."

Raymond Asquith already had two daughters, and an infant son was born to him the year he died. This boy, who succeeded to his grandfather's title in 1926, was brought up a Catholic. His mother became a Catholic eight years after her husband's death. Four years later the elder daughter, Lady Helen Asquith, entered the Church, and she was followed two years later by her younger sister, who became Lady Perdita Hylton, wife of 4th Baron Hylton. Thus the whole of Raymond Asquith's family has now been united in the faith. It is all the more remarkable because Herbert Henry Asquith was not at all inclined towards Catholicism. Indeed one of his private secretaries has written of him that "he was by temperament and upbringing strongly Protestant in feeling, retaining until the close of his life what many would regard as an old-fashioned antipathy to the Roman Catholic Church."

But there are many cases in which the relatives or descendants of strong Protestants have turned to the old faith. Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, for example, who was one of the leading figures in the early part of World War I, until he went down in the "Hampshire" in the North Sea, would not have been considered particularly well-disposed towards Catholicism. But the only daughter of the second Earl (brother of the first), Lady Nora Kitchener, became a Catholic.

In the political battles in England in the years before the first war a prominent name was that of the eminent lawyer, F. E. Smith, or "Galloper" Smith, as he was nicknamed in the days when he was a supporter of Sir Edward Carson's threatened rebellion. It was a time when the House of Commons echoed with great rhetoric, even though the speeches were often only part of a political game. Those were the days of Lloyd George's famous revolutionary Budget, which brought about two General Elections in England in one year (1910), and of the Parliament Bill, which curtailed the power of the House of Lords, and of the Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill. It was a phrase of F. E. Smith in the course of the debates on this last measure that drew from G. K. Chesterton one of the most biting satirical poems ever written. Smith had spoken of "a bill which has shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe." The farcical nature of this solemn pronouncement, especially coming from "F.E.", roused Chesterton, and he wrote:

"Are they clinging to their crosses, F: E. Smith, Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses, Are they, Smith? Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding, Wait the news from this our city? Groaning 'That's the Second Reading!' Hissing 'There is still Committee!' If the voice of Cecil falters, If McKenna's point has pith, Do they tremble for their altars? Do they Smith?"

Then there is reference to Russian peasants:

"In the mountain hamlets clothing Peaks beyond Caucasian pales, Where Establishment means nothing And they never heard of Wales, Do they read it all in Hansard With a crib to read it with - 'Welsh Tithes: Dr. Clifford Answered'? Really, Smith?"

Then, after a verse alluding to the Turkish massacres of Christians (especially Armenians) encouraged under an earlier Conservative leader, Chesterton concludes:

"It would greatly, I must own, Soothe me, Smith, If you left this theme alone, Holy Smith! For your legal cause or civil You fight well and get your fee; For your God or dream or devil You will answer, not to me. Talk about the pews and steeples And the cash that goes therewith! But the souls of Christian people - Chuck it, Smith!"

The saeva indignatio of Chesterton was not directed against Smith personally, for Chesterton never had a personal- enemy, but against the sham and humbug of the politicians. In one and the same year, 1922, Chesterton became a Catholic, and Smith became Earl of Birkenhead. Towards the end of 1939 an autobiography appeared, entitled "Life's a Circus," which received considerable notice in the London press. Its author was Lady Eleanor Smith, daughter of the first Earl of Birkenhead, (the self-same F.E. Smith), and a convert. She is only one of many such. For example, two daughters of another Earl of recent creation (the Earl of Inchcape) became Catholics not many years ago.

## 2. MORE CONVERTS IN HIGH PLACES.

In the poem of Chesterton that was quoted, occurs the name of Lord Hugh Cecil, who was one of the protagonists in the fight over Welsh Disestablishment. It was he who drew from Lloyd George the famous taunt about defending the Welsh Church with "hands dropping with the fat of sacrilege" - an allusion, of course, to the foundation of the fortunes of the Cecils in the plunder of Reformation times in England. This 20th century has seen two of the Cecils come back to the Catholic Church, Algernon Cecil, son of Lord Eustace Cecil, in 1915, and his sister, Blanche Cecil, in 1921. They were nephew and niece of Lord Salisbury, a name famous in English political circles.

Another name that comes to mind in connection with the beginning of the first World War is that of Viscount Morley, the biographer of Gladstone. He was one of two ministers who resigned from the Liberal cabinet at the outbreak of war. He had no sympathy with Catholicism, or indeed with Christianity. But both his step-daughter and a cousin, Miss Elizabeth Morley, became Catholics and nuns.

There is one name among the English nobility that is familiar to nearly everyone, and especially to those interested in what used to be called "the noble art" - that of the Marquis of Queensberry. This family has given many of its members to the Catholic Church. Sybil, Marchioness of Queensberry, was received into the Church in 1922. It is not becoming to allude to a lady's age, but she must have been well-advanced in years, seeing she became a Catholic fifty-six years after her marriage to the eighth Marquis. Her only daughter, Lady Fox-Pitt, became a Catholic three years after her mother. Her son, the ninth Marquis, had entered the Church in 1908, and his brother, Lord Alfred Douglas, in 1911. The seventh Marchioness of Queensberry was also, a convert to the Catholic faith, as was also her daughter, Lady Gertrude Stock, and a son who was known for many years as Canon Lord Archibald Douglas, who died only recently at the advanced age of 88.

Another name which everyone knows is that of Lord Nelson. The present (1954) holder of that title is a Catholic. The fifth Earl, who died in 1951 at the age of ninety, became a Catholic in 1888, at the age of twenty-eight, as did also his mother and two of his brothers at different dates.

I will deal with converts from the Services in due course, but I may mention here the name of another famous admiral, Lord Walter Kerr, whose career links up widely-separated periods of history. As a very young man he served in the Baltic during the Crimean War, he took part in the relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny, he became First Sea Lord in 1899, and lived on into the first World War. When he retired from the Service in 1904 the King notified his promotion as Admiral of the Fleet, "in recognition of the great value to the Navy and to the nation of his fifty

years of naval service." He became a Catholic as a midshipman, which in those days and in those circumstances must have been no easy thing to do. He was a son of the Marquis of Lothian, and he married a daughter of Earl Cooper; she too became a Catholic and well known as Lady Amabel Kerr for her Catholic writings.

The mother of Lord Walter Kerr, the seventh Marchioness of Lothian, was a very famous lady. She was a daughter of Earl Talbot, and married Lord Lothian when she was twenty-three, taking to her new home her father's advice, "Make God the idol of your heart." After ten years of ideal happiness she was left a widow with seven children, and devoted herself to them and to the service of God. Her first contact with Catholicism had been when, at the age of fifteen, she had told a young Irish footman to leave her breakfast ready and go off to Mass, only to learn that he had received notice because he refused to eat meat on Friday. This puzzled her, because she had always been taught that conscience must be obeyed first always. Ten years after her husband's death, study and prayer led her to the true faith. To her great joy, in succeeding years her daughters and three of her sons followed her, as well as her sister-in-law with her ten children and her brother-in-law, Rev. Lord Henry Kerr, an Anglican clergyman, with his family. Two of his sons became Jesuits and a daughter a Sacred Heart nun. Though one member of the Lothian family unfortunately abandoned the Church, the present (twelfth) Marquess, born in 1922, is an excellent Catholic.

In the same year as the Marchioness of Lothian, just mentioned, the Duchess of Argyle became a Catholic, and a few years later a great friend of the Marchioness of Lothian, the Duchess of Buccleugh, who was for five years Mistress of the Robes to Queen Victoria. The Duchess had been preceded into the Church by her brother, Rev. Lord Charles Thynne, who had been Canon of Canterbury, and his wife, who was the daughter of an Anglican bishop. After his wife's death Lord Charles Thynne, who was a son of the Marquis of Bath, became a priest. One of his daughters also became a Catholic and married the Earl of Kenmare. The mother of the present (1954) Earl of Kenmare was also a convert to the faith; she was a daughter of Lord Revelstoke and sister of another distinguished convert, Maurice Baring.

It may be of interest to know how the converts of an older generation in England were impressed by what they found when they came in contact with the faith.

I quote a passage from the Memorials of Sergeant Bellasis, a distinguished legal man who was received into the Church in the middle of the last (the 19th) century. "I was kindly received by the Catholics to whom I had been introduced; but more than this, I was highly edified by the habits of the Catholic households. I was particularly struck with the unobtrusive and natural manner in which religion was mixed up with the ordinary affairs and even amusements of life. Whilst we were staying at Everingham, the hounds were on the lawn, and the horses of the guests parading in front, and groups of gentry preparing to start, when I went into the chapel; there was no one there but Mr. William Maxwell (afterwards Lord Herries), and he was on his knees making his morning meditation in a scarlet coat and top boots. This looked to me, at first, like an incongruity. I soon saw, however, that it was not so... On another occasion, while we were staying at Holme, I was up early on a Sunday morning, and had gone into the tribune of the chapel, which was a gallery opening from the staircase, and where I was not visible to any one in the chapel below; at first there was no one, but after some time the sacristy door opened and the young lady of the house entered, who during the previous evening had been foremost in making merriment among a young party. She was not conscious of my presence, and proceeded to prepare the altar for Mass, doing this with such reverence and devotion that I could hardly believe her to be the same person who the night before

had been acting charades and playing forfeits with such a merry countenance. Everything now was done with deliberation; she never passed in front of the altar without kneeling, and everything was touched and handled so gently and devotionally that she might have been serving in the presence of some great monarch; she finally knelt, and prayed, and retired. I had not yet learned of the effect produced upon Catholics by the consciousness of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. This sight was most impressive to me."

### 3. STILL AMONG THE ARISTOCRACY.

The Catholic Church does not "collect" peers and peeresses. Their souls have the same value as other people's, nor more and no less. But this class of convert has a special importance from the fact that they could have no conceivable worldly motive for becoming Catholics. They would not gain in popularity with their friends; they would not increase their influence in government circles; they would not improve their position at Court or in Society. They embrace what is with their fellow-countrymen on the whole, an unpopular religion. They abandon a state of comparative freedom and submit themselves to strict discipline in religious matters. Needless to say, a peer enters the Catholic Church on exactly the same footing and on the same terms as anyone else. He must be convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith; he must accept the Church as having authority from God to teach and guide in matters of faith and morals; and he must obey the laws of the Church, and confess his sins, like any other man.

I think that it can be fairly said that it is - or at least was - a much more difficult thing for a member of a noble house in Ireland to become a Catholic, because Protestantism there was in many ways more extreme than on the other side of the Irish Sea, and there was the barrier between what used to be the dominant class and the subject race. Yet it is remarkable how many Irish titles are found among the lists of converts to the Catholic faith. Without trying to be exhaustive (or running the risk of exhausting the reader) I will mention the following well-known names: Lord Ashbourne (son of a Lord Chancellor of Ireland) and his wife (a member of an eminent French Protestant family); a son of the Earl of Lucan, the Hon. Albert Edward Bingham (godson of King Edward VII; hence his Christian names); the Countess of Clare (wife of the last Earl); Lord Dunraven, a name famous in the last generation, and his brother-in-law, Lord Emly, who was Postmaster-General under Gladstone; Viscountess Gormanston, wife of a former Governor of Tasmania; Lady Ellen Lambart, eldest daughter of the Earl of Cavan, and her sister, Lady Maud Birbeck, who entered the Church fourteen years earlier; both were still alive during the last war; the Marchioness of Londonderry and her sister-in-law, the Countess of Portarlington; Lady Margaret Domvile, daughter of an Earl of Howth; the last Earl of Roscommon; the Marchioness of Waterford. The Countess of Cork and Orrery is a Catholic, as are her two sisters (one a nun), for her father, the Earl of Albermarle, an Aide-de-camp to Queen Victoria, was a convert.

The letters and diaries of Queen Victoria are an amusing revelation of her old-fashioned fear and dislike of Catholicism. When ritualism was being introduced in certain Anglican circles she was strong in her opposition, going so far as to write personal letters to some of the clergymen concerned, forbidding the practices of which she disapproved. (After all, was she not Head of the Church, and had she not sworn to uphold the Protestant religion as by law established?) In her reign the religious state, so decisively rejected at the time of the Reformation, made its appearance for the first time among Anglicans. The first woman to become an Anglican nun died as late as 1912. It so happened that one of the early Anglican convents was established at Clewer, within sight of Windsor Castle, and the Mother Superior was one who had formerly occupied a position at Court.

The Queen was torn between a desire to visit her former friend and dislike of appearing to give any countenance to the regrettable tendencies of High Church Anglicanism. She solved the problem by making her visit strictly incognito, and giving orders that the Sisters were not to make any acknowledgement of the Queen's presence. Imagine her indignation when, as she passed down a corridor with the Superior, every Sister she met stepped aside and bowed low. When she reached the Superior's rooms, where she was to have tea, she demanded an explanation of this disregard of her instructions. The explanation was easy; the Sisters had been paying the customary mark of respect to their Superior; it was not meant for the Queen at all!

Yet in spite of the well-known views of Her Majesty, the number of converts among the nobility during her reign, even among those closely associated with her, is remarkable. I have already mentioned her A.D.C., the Earl of Albermarle, and the Duchess of Buccleugh, who was for five years Mistress of the Robes to the Queen. Another interesting example was Lady Victoria Kirwan, daughter of the Marquis of Hastings, a namesake of the Queen and godchild of the Queen's mother, the Duchess of Kent. Another was one of her maids of honour, a grand-daughter of the Earl of Elgin. Then there was the famous case of the Queen's representative, the Marquis of Ripon, Viceroy of India and Grandmaster of the English Freemasons, who became a fervent Catholic.

At the climax of the reign, from the celebration of the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of the Queen's accession (1887, 1897) to her death in 1901, a time when her popularity was at its highest, there was a regular stream of converts to the Catholic Church from noble houses. Only a few names can be given: the Earl and Countess of Asbburnham (1888); Lady Strickland, wife of Baron Strickland, who, as Sir Gerald Strickland, was successively Governor of Tasmania, West Australia, and New South Wales between the years 1904 and 1917; Lady Strickland's mother, Countess de la Warr, became a Catholic sixteen years after her daughter (1889); Count de Salis (1892); the Earl of Mexborough (1894) ; the present (1954) Earl, a Catholic, is his grandson; the Countess of Cotenham and her daughter, Lady Mary Pepys (1895) ; Viscount Encombe (1897); the Dowager Lady Auckland (1897); (- she is still alive, and her son, the late Lord Auckland, followed his mother into the Church in 1913); the Vicomtesse Sybil de la Bedoyere, a daughter of one of the leading Anglican, bishops of the time, Dr. Thorold of Winchester (1898) ; and there were other converts in that family. Her son, Count Michael de la Bedoyere, is (1954) editor of the London Catholic Times.

The stream has by no means dried up in more recent times. Some of those already mentioned in the first two sections or articles of this series entered the Church in our day. Thus the dates of the conversion of the mother of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith and his two sisters were 1924, 1928, and 1930 respectively. A name worth adding is that of Countess Brassey, daughter of the Marquess of Abergavenny. Her brother, Sir William Beauchamp Nevill, was received into the Church in Melbourne in 1886, while on the personal staff of the then Governor of Victoria. He lived on into the recent world war. Countess Brassey, his sister, became a Catholic exactly fifty years after her brother, in 1936. She died a year ago (1953) at an advanced age. The Earl of Craven, when still Viscount Uffington, became a Catholic with his mother in 1930. The same year saw the conversion of Viscountess Chilston, whose husband was British Ambassador at Moscow from 1933 till 1938. The Earl of Iddesleigh, who is a grandson, through his mother, of the celebrated Dean Farrar, became a Catholic in 1927, at the age of 26. It was the same year that the Duke of Marlborough entered the Church. In 1940 Lord Pakenham, once First Lord of the Admiralty, became a Catholic, having been educated at Eton and Oxford. His wife is also a convert, so with their four sons and four daughters they form a fine Catholic family. Viscount Furness became a Catholic in 1946, and

Baroness Kinloss in 1951, in which year also the Princess who is mother of Prince Bernard of the Netherlands, husband of Queen Juliana, received the gift of faith.

The phenomenon I have been dealing with is not a new one. It appeared very early in Christian history when, even in the days of persecution, the courts of the Roman Emperors were giving their quota of converts to the Church of Christ.

#### 4. THE ARISTOCRACY OF THE INTELLECT.

It is a common opinion among the more ignorant of non-Catholics that the Catholic faith is irrational. It has even been said that in becoming a Catholic a man commits intellectual suicide. Those, however, who know the Catholic Church from within and enjoy the light of faith are thoroughly familiar with the solid, rational basis of their religion. But how can we convince the outsider? In many cases he will not take the trouble to examine the foundation of our faith, or will be so blinded by prejudice that he cannot see what is so obvious to us who have our eyes open. But there is one argument which may have weight, a fact that clamours for an explanation, and it is this: that many of those who come into the Catholic Church from outside are eminent for their intellectual powers. It must be kept in mind that no one can be received into the Church who has not first been fully instructed about the authority of the Church and about her doctrines. If, then, men of high intellectual powers give their minds to the study of the doctrines, and are convinced that they must submit and become Catholics, that surely is a very strong extrinsic argument for the truth of the Catholic faith. Even the prejudiced must admit that here is a striking fact which demands an explanation.

About the reality of this fact there can be no question. The difficulty is to know where to begin and where to end. To be complete we should need to traverse the universities and learned academies of the world; but, as in all these articles, only a few select examples can be given. The Gladstone Professor of Greek in the University of Liverpool, Arthur Hilary Armstrong, son of a parson, is a convert (1942). The University Lecturer in German at Oxford and his wife, University Lecturer in French, are both converts to the Catholic faith (Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Barnes). A. C. F. Beales, Lecturer in Education at King's College in the University of London since 1935, became a Catholic in that year; he is the author of a Penguin Special, *The Catholic Church and International Order*. He is not the only one connected with the University of London who has come into the Catholic Church from outside.

Other examples are, Bevan Bevan-Baker, who was Professor of Mathematics for over twenty years; Francis Yvon Eccles, who was Professor of French Literature from 1920 to 1934; and George Temple, who has recently been appointed Sedleian Professor of Natural Philosophy at Oxford, but was for over twenty years Professor of Mathematics in the University of London.

It will not do to neglect the ladies. Among these we have, (besides one already mentioned) a scientific writer known to the older generation, Agnes Mary Clerke, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society; Mrs. Frank Elgee, a well-known antiquarian, and Life Member of the General Committee of the British Association; she became a Catholic with her husband (also an antiquarian) in 1934; Miss Dorothy Garrod, who has the honour of being the first woman professor appointed at the University of Cambridge, where she is Disney Professor of Archaeology. To these we may add Agnes Headlam-Morley, who was Fellow and Tutor of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, from 1932 to 1948, and is now (1954) the Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at Oxford University; Miss Dorothea Paton, who is Lecturer in French at the University of Reading

(she is the daughter of a parson, and entered the Church in 1945); Miss Jocelyn Toynbee (sister of the well-known writer, Arnold Toynbee), who is Fellow and Director of Studies in Classics at Newnham College, and University Lecturer in Classics; and Mrs. Humphrey Watts, Research Scholar of the University of Birmingham, who has held university positions in the United States, in Ireland, and in England, and is the author of several books on biology and botany.

Practically every branch of learning is represented among converts. The Royal Astronomical Society has been mentioned, and there was a President of that Society who was a distinguished and devout convert, Andrew Crommelin, who worked at Greenwich Observatory from 1891 to 1927. He was one of the greatest authorities on comets and cometary orbits. His most famous piece of work, perhaps, was his calculation of the time of return of Halley's Comet in 1910, for which he received a Doctorate of Science, *honoris causa*, from the University of Oxford. An obituary notice of him appeared in the *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, from the pen of a Protestant minister, containing the following passage: "A man of higher ideals and principles could not be found, and he carried them out faithfully and fearlessly. Many years ago he had joined the Roman Church, but those who differed from him widely on theological issues could not but be impressed by the strength and constancy of his faith in a world largely characterized by scepticism and controlled by materialistic aims." Another distinguished astronomer was Sir Edmund Taylor Whittaker, F.R.S. After a brilliant course at Cambridge he became Fellow of Trinity College in that University, then Royal Astronomer of Ireland, and later Professor of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh for many years (till 1936); he became a Catholic in 1930.

Oxford alone would provide a considerable list of converts. Besides those already mentioned the following may be noted. The Professor of Social Anthropology in the University, a Fellow of All Souls, Professor Evan Evans-Pritchard, is a convert from Anglicanism. Like so many others, he was the son of a parson. In the year 1934, a Senior Proctor of the University. Professor Harold Hanbury, now Vinerian Professor of English Law, became a Catholic with his wife. Another distinguished Oxford scholar is Colin Graham Hardie, Fellow and Tutor in Classics, Magdalen College, formerly Director of the British School at Rome. He is son of a Professor of Latin at Edinburgh University, and he became a Catholic in 1945.

Scotland has provided many converts in the learned world. John Swinnerton Phillimore (son of Admiral Sir Augustus Phillimore), a very distinguished classical scholar, was converted while Professor of Greek at Glasgow University. Another scholar of this university was Steuart Napier Miller, who was Lecturer in Roman History and Archaeology. He conducted excavations of Roman sites. Sir William Wallace McKechnie, formerly Lecturer in Greek at Edinburgh University and then in Humanity at Glasgow University, and later Secretary of the Scottish Education Department for many years, became a Catholic at the age of 75 in 1947.

Very many names could be added to this list. One of the more recent converts who should not be omitted is George Wickens, a distinguished Oriental scholar. He was attached to the British Embassy at Teheran from 1942 to 1945, and then became Lecturer in Arabic and Persian at the University of London. He is now University Lecturer in Arabic at Cambridge. He became a Catholic after the War.

Worthy of mention, also, are James Munro Cameron, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Leeds, who entered the Church in 1944, Jonathan Tate, Professor of Greek and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sheffield, and Dr. Frank Sherwood Taylor, Director of the Science

Museum, London. I conclude with the name of Professor Max Planck, one-time Rector of Berlin University and recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1918 for his work as a physicist. He revolutionized modern physics by his quantum theory. One of the outstanding geniuses of our time, he became a Catholic in 1947, only a few months before his death.

When we reflect on the significance of so many conversions from the ranks of learning, we realize the soundness of what G. K. Chesterton so often insisted on:

"To become a Catholic is not to leave off thinking, but to learn to think"; "Most men would return to the old ways in faith and morals if they could broaden their minds enough to do so";

"A convinced Catholic is easily the most hard-headed and logical person walking about the world today";

"Conversion is the beginning of an active fruitful, progressive, and even adventurous life of the intellect";

"It is only since I have known orthodoxy that I have known mental emancipation".

## 5. THE WORLD OF LETTERS.

I have preserved the following notice of Mrs. Romanes, wife of Professor G. J. Romanes, F.R.S., which appeared some years ago in a London Anglican paper:

"The death of Mrs. Romanes removes from us one formerly the centre of a large circle of intellectual people, and one gifted with considerable social influence. She was certainly at her best during the lifetime of her distinguished husband. "As a writer, she will be remembered as his biographer, and for the very attractive memoir of her daughter, whose early death was so great a loss to the Community at Wantage, of which she was a member. Mrs. Romanes was for many years associated with the Anglo-Catholic Revival, at Christ Church, Albany Street, St. Mary Magdalen's, Munster Square, and St. Matthew's, Westminster. What exactly led to her secession to the Roman Church or precisely what she there obtained which devotionally or intellectually she failed to secure in the English Church, we have never been able to discover. We write with the happiest memories of her sympathy and kindness. Hers was a most interesting family circle. Her liveliness and rapidity formed the greatest contrast to her husband's slow, deliberate and weighty manner; but they blended wonderfully. It was a home into which it was a privilege to be admitted."

The spirit in which this is written is admirable, but surely it displays a strange inability to understand why people join the Catholic Church. It is not a question of obtaining some extra aid to devotion, nor even of satisfying one's intellectual needs; converts come into the Catholic Church because they see in her the one Church which Jesus Christ established. They become convinced that they are outside the one flock of Christ, and they wish, at all costs to get into it. It is hard to make some people see that religion is not a matter of personal choice and taste. Shortly before Robert Hugh Benson, son of an Archbishop of Canterbury, became a Catholic, a clergyman whom he consulted at his mother's wish urged on him points in the Catholic system which he was sure Benson would not like. "I tried in vain," the latter writes, "to make it clear that I proposed becoming a Roman Catholic, not because I was necessarily attracted by her customs, but because I believed that Church to be the Church of God."

This mention of two writers who were converts may serve as an introduction to an article on converts who belong to the world of letters. Writers, as a class, are people who have to think. It is

interesting, therefore, to note how many well-known writers have been led to accept the truth of the Catholic faith. R. H. Benson, whom I have just mentioned, is not so well known to this generation as he was to the one that is just passing away; but his books are well worth reading. Besides religious works like *Confessions of a Convert* and *The Religion of the Plain Man*, he wrote several historical novels dealing with the Reformation period in England (such as *By What Authority?* and *The King's Achievement*), and a long list of others, like *The Conventionalists*, *The Necromancers*, and *The Dawn of All*. They could be found in any Catholic Library.

Cardinal Newman is, of course, one of the acknowledged masters of English prose. Read Birrell's essay on Newman in *Res Judicatae* and you will probably be moved to look into the long line of volumes that bear Newman's name. Birrell's advice to one as yet unacquainted with the Cardinal's writings is to begin with the *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, which he calls one of the best humoured books in the English language. It is worth noting that Newman improved as a writer when he became a Catholic. Here is Birrell's comment: "The contrast between the Anglican and the Catholic writer is enormous. It is like the meeting of great waters. The one restrained, at times uneasy, eminently unpopular, remote from the trodden paths of feeling; the other exuberant, though never redundant, triumphant, sometimes to the pitch of boisterousness, sweeps along, marshalling forces, polishing epigrams, and making appeals, no longer to the scholar and theologian and prim church-goer, but to the man in the street - the rank and file of humanity."

There was one man, a minister of the Established Church, Charles Kingsley, who accused the Catholic priesthood, and Newman in particular, of a partiality for lying. When Newman took him to task, Kingsley had not the manliness to withdraw or the prudence to run away; he tried to bluster: "What, then, does Dr. Newman mean?" And Dr. Newman gave Kingsley his answer and the world a masterpiece of literature and a most precious human document in his *Apologia*. Kingsley is remembered chiefly for his anti-Catholic bias, while Newman gained a position in the esteem of men that he will never lose. Newman never bore any ill-will to his adversary, and when Kingsley died he offered Mass for him. Kingsley's youngest daughter, a novelist well-known as Lucas Malet, became a Catholic.

We cannot enumerate all the writers who have entered the Church since Newman's day. Wherever we turn in the records of literature and publishing we come across the names of converts. Sir F. C. Burnand, editor of *Punch* for 26 years, and responsible (with Sullivan) for the well-known operetta *Box and Cox*, was a convert. The founder and first editor of the *Windsor Magazine* was one also. So were the original Burns and Oates and Washbourne, who gave their names to the well-known Catholic publishing firm. Burns was the son of a Presbyterian minister; his five daughters became nuns, as did also his wife, herself a convert, after the death of her husband. Kegan Paul, Rivington, Sands, Crosby Lockwood, Simpson Marshall, Eyre and Spottiswoode, are other publishing firms closely associated with converts to the Catholic Church.

There was no newspaper correspondent in the last generation more famous than Ashmead-Bartlett, and he died a Catholic. Max Pemberton became a Catholic. The name of the poet, Michael Field, conceals the names of two convert ladies; John Oliver Hobbes was the pen-name of the convert novelist, Mrs. Craigie. W. H. Mallock put off his entry into the Church till the very end of his life, but his sister, herself an author and niece of James Anthony Froude, had become a Catholic earlier. To these we may add the poets Aubrey de Vere, Coventry Patmore, and Adelaide Ann Proctor, and the distinguished writer, Marion Crawford. His sister, Mrs. Hugh Fraser (wife of a British Minister in Japan), was also a convert; she is known for her books, *A Diplomatist's Wife in Japan*, and *A*

Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands, and novels. Among those who may be reckoned as belonging to the last generation may be added Miss Alma-Tadema, Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, Isobel Clarke, and Enid Dinnis. This leaves us with no room for the better-known names of the present day, which must be reserved for a further article.

Among relatives of literary people who became Catholics may be noted a brother of Matthew Arnold; the sister of Sir Rider Haggard (Baroness d'Anethan, herself an author); a niece of Thackeray; the father, mother, and wife of Sir Phillip Gibbs; the daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Rose Lathrop, who after her husband's death devoted herself to nursing cancer sufferers in New York, became a nun, and founded a cancer hospital; Mrs. Stephen Gwynn; Mrs. Coulson Kernahan; and many others. All the direct descendants of Byron and Dickens and Scott are Catholics.

## 6. SOME MODERN CONVERT WRITERS.

There is a difficulty about dividing converts into classes, for some could be put in more than one class. For example, two of the most brilliant writers of today might be more naturally mentioned under clerical converts, Father Martindale and Mgr. Ronald Knox. The former became a Catholic on leaving Harrow, and had a distinguished career at Oxford. He has been pouring out books and articles at an alarming rate for most of the time ever since. He has to his credit several biographies, of R. H. Benson, Father Bernard Vaughan, and Father Garrold, S.J. (another convert writer who produced some of the best Catholic school stories ever written), volumes of sermons, colourful records of his travels (as in *The Risen Sun*, a book about Australia and New Zealand), lives of saints (including the popular broadcast talks, *What Are Saints?*), and various books on the spiritual life. Two of his minor works can be confidently recommended, *Jock, Jack, and the Corporal*, and *Mr. Francis Newnes*. In these Father Martindale's intimate knowledge of men, and his power of portraying vividly life as he finds it, are conspicuous. Few readers, on completing *Jock, Jack, and the Corporal*, could guess the end which its loveable hero reaches in the sequel, *Mr. Francis Newnes*.

Mgr. Knox, son of a late bishop of Manchester, was received into the Church in 1917, and is another writer of great brilliance and versatility. He excels in any branch of literature that he attempts. He has published many volumes of sermons, equally practical whether addressed to Oxford undergraduates or convent school-girls, ingenious mystery stories, *Essays in Satire* (read the brilliant skit on the 'higher critics in which he proves from internal evidence that Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was written by Queen Victoria), and novels (his *Barchester Pilgrimage* might have been written by Trollope himself). His translation of the Bible is a monumental work. A very useful book, which is not among the best known, perhaps because of its more prosaic title, is *The Belief of Catholics*. The book which tells the story of his conversion is entitled *A Spiritual Aeneid*. A new edition appeared a few years ago, with Preface, "After Thirty-three Years." In this he writes:

"The step which I took in 1917 is one which I have never had the wish, never even the velleity, to retract... It is often said of us converts - a friend of mine heard it said of me, years ago, on the top of an omnibus, 'He realizes, now, that he's made a mistake.' But in fact I have never experienced a mood of discouragement or of hesitation, during these last thirty-three years, that has suggested, even on the horizon of my mind, the possibility of going back where I came from."

And later he adds:

"For the world's benefit, there is nothing to add to what Maurice Baring wrote in *The Puppet-Show of Memory*: 'On the eve of Candlemas, 1909, I was received into the Catholic Church by Father

Sebastian Bowden at the Brompton Oratory; the only action in my life which I am quite certain I have never regretted'."

If I mistake not, Mgr. Knox called Baring's autobiography, just mentioned, "the perfect autobiography." It is a puzzle that some editions leave out the reference to his conversion. Maurice Baring (who was heir presumptive to Lord Revelstoke) was a distinguished writer and a man of high character. He was a great help to G. K. Chesterton in finding the true faith, and his letter of congratulation when Chesterton entered the Church contained the following passage:

"Every day I live; the Church seems to me more and more wonderful; the Sacraments more and more solemn and sustaining; the voice of the Church, her liturgy, her rules, her discipline, her ritual, her decisions in matters of Faith and Morals more and more excellent and profoundly wise and true and right, and her children stamped with something that those outside Her are without. There I have found Truth and reality and everything outside Her is to me compared with Her as dust and shadow."

That is the experience and judgement of a cultured and gifted convert, well worth our thoughtful consideration.

Dame Ethel Smyth, in her book on Baring (published in 1938), says regarding his conversion:

"Perhaps it is permissible to add, without further comment, that, informed of the event many months after it had happened, one had the feeling that the missing piece of a complicated puzzle, or rather the only key wherewith a given iron safe could be unlocked, had at last been found. He remarks that this is the only action of his life which he is quite sure he never regretted, and I fancy that most people who know him - of whatever persuasion, or even of no persuasion at all - will have seen, or anyhow have come to see it eventually, as a matter for nothing but rejoicing."

That is the comment of a sympathetic non-Catholic. Justice could not be done to Chesterton if the whole of this article were devoted to him. A writer of prose and verse that needed no signature to tell us whose they were, a lover of his country and mankind, a champion of the truth, a laughing warrior, he has enriched our literature permanently with work that will surely be prized as long as men value keen thought and vivid expression. He finished his Autobiography (but what an autobiography!) only a few weeks before his lamented death. As Birrell gives advice to those beginning to read Newman, so I venture to advise those who want an introduction to Chesterton to begin with the volume of essays entitled *The Thing*. G. K.'s brother, Cecil, had become a Catholic ten years before his more famous brother. But his fame, too; is secure for the work he did with Hilaire Belloc on the *Eye-Witness* and the *New Witness*, and the efforts he made for purity in political life by exposure of the Marconi scandal. Strangely enough, the other protagonist in that fight, Godfrey Isaacs, who was managing director of the Marconi Company and brother of the Attorney-General, Sir Rufus Isaacs, and a Jew, became a Catholic and died not long after Cecil Chesterton had met his death in a military hospital in France. "No one would have rejoiced more than my brother," writes G. K. in his Autobiography.

But those mentioned are only a few cut of a vast host. Among women writers we have Vera Barclay, Enid Dinnis, Isobel Clarke, Pamela Frankau (who became a Catholic in 1952), Cecily Hallack, daughter of a parson, whose books are fortunately being now reprinted, Frances Parkinson Keyes, Clare Boothe Luce, Esther Meynell, Margaret Monro, Naomi Royde Smith, Rosalind Murray (daughter of Professor Gilbert Murray), and Sigrid Undset. The last was a famous Norwegian novelist who was a Nobel Prize whiner in 1928, and the first woman, not of royal birth, to receive

the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Olaf. She became a Catholic in 1924 and died in 1949. Sheila Kaye-Smith, who has over thirty novels to her name, is a convert, as is her husband, a former parson. She has written an account of her conversion in a book entitled *Three Ways Home*.

There is room for only a few of the best known among those that remain. Christopher Dawson and Christopher Hollis are outstanding among modern writers. Grahame Greene, Bruce Marshall, and Evelyn Waugh are familiar names. The last-named has had his life of Edmund Campion issued recently among the Penguin books. J. B. Morton is a brilliant and versatile author and journalist; he became a Catholic in 1922. D. B. Wyndham Lewis became a Catholic a year earlier. Sir Arnold Lunn, Sir Compton Mackenzie, and Sir Shane Leslie, have all been knighted fairly recently. Lunn made an honourable capitulation after having fought against the Church for a period, and has made valuable contributions to Catholic literature. Two of his best known books are *Now I See* and *Within That City*. Alfred Noyes, one of the greatest of living poets, is the author of a fine defence of Christianity, *The Unknown God*; he has recently published an interesting autobiography under the title of *Two Worlds for Memory*.

Everyone will be able to recall the names of convert writers who have been omitted; but enough have been mentioned to prove how strongly literature is represented among this class of Catholics. If so many men and women - most of them of outstanding ability - have in recent times turned to the ancient faith, should it not encourage others, in these dark days of the world's history, to seek in the religion of Jesus Christ the solution of the problems of the individual and of the world ?

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These articles appeared originally in *The Australian Messenger of the Sacred Heart* and are here reprinted by the editor's permission. The limitation of space imposed by their periodical form precluded anything like completeness in the enumeration of converts of any particular class. Only selected examples have been given of a phenomenon which has surely a profound significance both for those within and those without the Church. An effort has been made to be accurate, but in such a mass of names, dates, and biographical details, errors are possible. Some of the statements are to be taken as true at the time of writing, 1954.

St. Mary's North Sydney, Easter, 1955.

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