

RADIO

Rumble, Leslie
Radio converts
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CONVERTS



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Radio Converts

By

REV. DR. L. RUMBLE, M.S.C.



Radio Control

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INTRODUCTION

Many centuries ago Geoffrey Chaucer conceived the idea of writing "The Canterbury Tales." They are a collection of stories which he imagined pilgrims telling each other as a form of mutual entertainment to while away the time during a pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Thomas a Beckett at Canterbury.

Although all made the same pilgrimage, his characters were drawn from every walk in life, their stories being adapted to each one's particular avocation. So we have "The Knight's Tale," and "The Miller's Tale," and "The Cook's Tale," and "The Monk's Tale," and "The Squire's Tale," and "The Nun's Tale," and "The Merchant's Tale"; and so on, through the long list of narrators in his classical work of fiction.

But truth is often stranger than fiction; and it is with real life stories stranger than fiction that the first part of this booklet is concerned. For the first part deals with a pilgrimage also—a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Christ Himself in His One True Church. But the members of this pilgrimage, though indeed most diverse in type, never met each other, lived in most widely-separated places, and set out on their journey in response, if not to the voice of a St. John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, at least to a radio voice coming to them out of the ether from the transmitter of Radio Station 2 S M, Sydney, Australia.

Unfortunately our pilgrims cannot all write their own stories. In most cases I must do it for them. For those who are not gone from this world altogether are now nearly all beyond my reach, and beyond any possibility of my asking them to write their own narratives at first hand.

In the second part of the booklet I share with readers a few of the letters sent me by timid and hesitant listeners, typical of hundreds of such letters received over the years. These will serve as an example of the real life problems confronting prospective converts, and will surely contribute towards a deeper understanding and sympathy in Catholics and non-Catholics alike who meet with people in similar distressing circumstances.

* * * * *

PART ONE

I. The English Major

The blessing of Almighty God was certainly evident in the case of Major Nevill Leeson, an Englishman who had been badly gassed in the 1914-18 War, and who had come to Australia in the hope of benefiting by its dry climate.

The Major was a nominal Anglican, but he had lost all religious beliefs and was a complete stranger to prayer. He was concerned only with the worry that his health was growing steadily worse and something was beginning to go very wrong with both his throat and chest.

He lived alone in a tiny apartment in King's Cross, Sydney, dining out in some nearby restaurant, or buying food to cook for himself over the gas-stove in his room.

It was quite by chance that, when dialing his radio-set one Sunday evening, he heard a question about prayer and its results being answered from Station 2 S M. He paused to listen for a moment; then sneeringly switched to music and song. But that also got on his nerves. It seemed to be mocking him, with the thing clutching at his throat and at his chest. So he went to bed, hoping to forget his worries in sleep.

But on the next Sunday night he found himself looking again for Station 2 S M, to hear what more it had to say about God and religion and all else in which he no longer believed. This time he heard the program right through; and the next Sunday night; and the next. Then he wrote to me—a letter filled with a strange mixture of bitterness and respect—asking for an interview.

He came to the Monastery in a taxi, looking very ill, and too weak to walk the few yards to the door without constantly stopping to get his breath. When at last he was seated, he spoke about himself, of his experiences during the war, and of the wreck of a man that he was. “What’s the use of it all?” he asked.

I had let him continue talking without interruption; but having put his despairing question he interrupted himself. Impulsively he stood up, reaching for his hat and cane. “I don’t know why I came here,” he said, almost angrily. “All these years I’ve not bothered about God. While my life was any good to me I made the most of it. Now it’s no good to me, I tell God He can have the rest. I can’t do it. I must go.”

I put out a restraining hand. “Sit down,” I said, “and leave your hat and cane where they are. You haven’t lost your faith in God, or you wouldn’t be talking like this. And you haven’t lost your sense of honesty, or you wouldn’t be worrying about the rank injustice of offering God only the dregs of your life after having kept the rest of it for yourself. But can’t you see that precisely because you have robbed God in the past, there’s all the more reason why you should at least give Him the bit of life that remains to you between now and your death?” He sat down, prepared to listen rather than do all the talking himself.

He came regularly for instructions as long as he could. Then I had to continue them by going to his apartment in Darlington Road, King’s Cross, where he was stretched out helplessly on his bed. He was received into the Church, and managed a journey by taxi to assist at one Mass in his life, though he had to be supported

to the altar rails and held on each side as he knelt—he insisted upon that—to receive Our Lord in his first Holy Communion.

He returned to his room, but for no more than a day. For I went that same day to the Sisters of Charity in charge of the Hospice for the Dying at Darlinghurst, and when I had explained his case to them they at once offered to take him and care for him until the end so that every spiritual as well as temporal provision could be made for him.

I was with him as he died, and almost his last words were: “Father, I am saving my soul.” He almost smiled as he said them, though he added—yet with no trace of despair—“But I have wasted my life.”

I read the prayers over his grave at Rookwood Cemetery, with one Catholic acquaintance of his making the responses, and four or five of his non-Catholic friends just looking on and wondering how this had all come about. Little did they dream that the confident “Requiescat in Pace” ringing out over the grave of Major Nevill Leeson at Rookwood was made possible in God’s providence by the existence of a Catholic radio station in Sydney, ready for the chance dialing of a radio-set in the room of an apartment house in Darlinghurst Road, King’s Cross.

II. The Woodsman

This story came to me from the Bishop of a country diocese in New South Wales, Australia, some four hundred miles north of Sydney.

The Bishop was driving through heavily-wooded country in an out-of-the-way locality when he came upon a camp of timbercutters nestling in a pocket in the hills. He stopped his car, went across to them to see whether any of his own were there, and after

chatting with the men for a while asked if there were any Catholics amongst them. No. None of them was a Catholic, but that made no difference to their appreciation of his visit, even as he had enjoyed it himself.

As he left them, however, to make his way back to his car, one of the men followed him to speak to him alone.

“Excuse me, Sir,” he said. “I am not a Catholic any more than the others. But I want to become one.”

“What put that idea into your head?” asked the Bishop.

“The radio,” the man answered. “Sunday nights I listen to Station 2 S M. Got more and more interested, until I started jotting down the questions and answers on paper, to go over them again for myself during the week. I think I know enough to answer most questions myself now about the Catholic religion. But what’s the next move I should make?”

“When you’re in town again,” said the Bishop, giving him his card, “come to see me, and I’ll arrange the rest for you.”

The man did. The Bishop did. And the Bishop himself wrote to me saying: “One never knows where your radio program will pick them up next. This is only one case out of the hundreds about which you hear nothing. But I thought you ought to be told of this one. Keep going.”

There was scarcely need for that last item of advice! Still it was a great consolation to know that in the midst of a dense forest of trees over four hundred miles distant, words spoken into a microphone in the heart of the city of Sydney had borne such fruit.

III. The Ship’s Officer

One day there came in my mail a letter from England in a completely strange handwriting.

It was from a priest, then working in the London Docks Area, who wrote from Our Lady, Star of the Sea Presbytery, 96 Dock Road, Tilbury, Essex. He said that he felt he should tell me of an incident which might be an encouragement in the radio work "out there in Australia."

An Officer from a P & O liner had called at the Presbytery one evening to say that he had but ten days in Port before his ship was due to sail again for Australia, and that he would like, if at all possible, to be received into the Catholic Church before then. No. It wasn't a case of marriage.

"It's this way, Father," the Officer told the priest, producing a book from his pocket. "On the last three or four trips to Australia, I got very interested in a radio program there on a Catholic radio Station known as 2 S M. A priest was answering letters from all-comers on anything to do with religion. On this last trip I came across this book called "Radio Replies," containing a collection of questions and answers from the program. I just chanced upon it in a bookshop in George Street, Sydney, bought it, and have studied it from cover to cover all the way home. And I feel that I must become a Catholic before sailing again. Check me over, Father, and I think you'll find me pretty well up in all I ought to know."

"I asked him to let me have a look at the book," wrote the priest, "and after a general survey of it I said to him: 'Look, if you'll give me the book, I'll receive you into the Church provided you come each evening whilst in Port for instructions and practical preparation for actual reception of the Sacraments.' I have just received him into the Church, and he seems a very fine type. I think he'll be a credit to the Faith, and I know that this information will make a radio program which has such results seem more worth while than ever."

IV. The Orchardist

Two priests were sitting in a small country rectory in far-off Queensland, about a thousand miles north from Sydney, N.S.W. One of them was the parish priest, the other a member of a Religious Order who for the past two weeks had been preaching a mission in all the scattered churches attached to the parish.

"I think, Father," the parish priest was saying, "that tomorrow I'll take you to one of the rather remote sections of the parish. It is about 180 miles away, and there's no church there. I have Mass there about once every three months in a Catholic home. But there's a small State school, and you can speak to the Catholic children attending it. Afterwards we'll visit the homes of the few Catholics in the district."

They arrived at their destination about noon next day, and the solitary teacher in charge of the State school gladly allowed them to visit the one class-room of children who were of all ages and sizes.

"Hands up," said the parish priest, "all who are Catholics."

About ten hands went up, but one little boy of about nine held his only half-up.

"Now, little fellow," the priest said in a kindly voice, "you are either a Catholic or not. If you are, put your hand right up like the others; but if you're not a Catholic, you shouldn't put your hand up at all."

"Well, sir, I'm not a Catholic yet," the child replied. "But Mummy said we're going to be Catholics."

The parish priest told him that he would see him afterwards, gathered the Catholics into a group on the verandah of the school, and left them with the mission priest for a half-hour's talk on fidelity to their religious duties.

Later, as they walked towards their car, the parish priest said: "The little chap told me that his people have an orchard about

four miles down the road. I know the place, though I've never met the folks there. We'll call in."

When they knocked at the door a woman opened it, and on being told who they were and of the incident at the school, invited them in and asked them to wait whilst she went to bring her husband who was working in the packing-shed nearby. Their story was not long in the telling.

"For months past," the man explained, "we have been listening to a Question Box program from Station 2 S M, Sydney. Our interest in the Catholic religion so developed that we wrote to the priest conducting it for the books explaining the Catholic Church and its teachings more fully—books which he said would be willingly and freely sent to any non-Catholic who wanted to study the Catholic religion more deeply."

He got up, went to a side table, and brought back almost a dozen books he had received, and said, "The wife and I have read and re-read all these. And as for this"—he handed the parish priest a Catholic prayer-book—"every morning and every night we and the children say our prayers from it and know most of them by heart. The one thing we have been asking ourselves is what to do next; for we've just got to become Catholics, and that's all there is to it."

"That's easily arranged," said the parish priest. "I'll come once a week and instruct the whole family together. And I'll arrange for a Mass here on the day you are all received into the Church so that you can all receive Holy Communion together."

It was from the mission priest, whom I met later in Sydney, that I heard all this, of which I would probably never have heard otherwise. And it left me more convinced than ever that great indeed are the uses of the radio, in the providence of Almighty God.

V. The Business Man

Back in the city. For over forty years they had been married, the wife and children excellent Catholics, he of no religion in practice at all. A good man in his own way; and a kindly one. He never put any difficulties in the way of his wife and children fulfilling their religious duties. He even seemed to delight in their fidelity. But never did he give any sign of wanting to attend church with them, nor of progressing in any way towards sharing in their beliefs.

One day he came to see me. "Father," he said, "I want this visit to be confidential. My wife must know nothing about it—at least, as yet. It would break her heart if hopes were unduly raised only to find them all in vain, after all."

He told me his story. "For a long time now," he said, "I have been a listener to your radio program, quite unknown to my wife and children. It comes on at 7 p.m. when I am alone in the house, since the wife and children always go on Sunday nights to evening devotions at the church. So they have not the slightest idea that I have been regularly listening to Station 2 S M during their absence."

He paused for a moment or two, and then went on.

"Many things you have said over the air have made it clear to me that my ideas about the Catholic religion have been quite astray. But I have several problems no one has asked you to discuss, and it may be that my ideas are as wide of the mark on those as on the others."

He came each week for months, during business hours—for his time was his own—and he fought every inch of the way. But even when he granted that his imagined difficulties were of no weight at all, I could see that the positive Catholic teachings held no real meaning for him. His real need was the gift of faith, and I told him so again and again.

“I can explain the Faith to you,” I would say in desperation. “But I can’t give it to you. God reserves to Himself the bestowal of that great grace, and you must pray for it.”

“How can I pray for faith,” he would answer, “when I need faith before I can pray?”

And always I would reply, “Nonsense. You need only be a reasonable human being. You know that you did not make yourself, and that whoever did make you made you with obvious limitations both physically and mentally. There are thousands of things beyond your physical control, and your thinking has been a history of mistakes as often as not. Reason alone should impel you to ask the One who made you to preserve you against the disasters into which your physical and mental limitations could lead you. Pray, even should you merely say with the agnostic: “O God, if there be a God, save my soul if I have one. Or, if you wish, say at least once a day: O God, if the Catholic Church be not the one true Church, please keep me out of it.” At least that’s a prayer, and since the Catholic Church is the one true Church, God will hear your prayer by bringing you into it.”

At long last, almost in spite of himself, he found himself beginning to pray. And the day came when he was received into the Church, his wife standing beside him.

After the ceremony, her eyes flooding with tears of happiness, she said to me: “Father, this is the answer to over forty years of prayer and anxiety. I used to take him by the shoulders and shake him, and say: ‘Frank, why can’t you see!’ But he couldn’t, and I’ve worried my heart out over it year in and year out, never daring to hope that this would ever be possible.”

“You see the price you’ve had to pay for a mixed marriage,” I remarked, smilingly. “Only for that, think of all the worry and anxiety you would have been spared!”

“But I’d marry him again, all the same,” she came back quickly. “He’s worth all that worry and anxiety and more. And see what God has given us in the end.”

They went off happily; and if ever a man made up for lost time by his fidelity and fervor in the practice of his religion, that woman's husband certainly did, thanking God for the day he first tuned in to a Catholic radio hour.

VI. The Crippled Girl

Early in November, 1944, I received a letter addressed to my radio program from a small country town called Hay, in the far west of N.S.W., about 400 miles from Sydney.

The writer asked me to deal with her problem over the air, but she took great care to avoid giving her right name and address, or any means by which I might locate her. At home in the town where she really lived she wrote her letter, slipped it into an envelope, addressed it to the "Question Box Program," Station 2 SM, Sydney, and stamped it. Then she placed it in another envelope, addressing the second envelope to the Postmaster at Hay, N.S.W., enclosing a note of request that he should forward it on from there. He did so, and her letter duly arrived from Hay, hundreds of miles distant from the town in which the writer really lived!

For purposes of the radio, she asked that the replies should be given to "Pauline," of Hay, N.S.W., though "Pauline" was no more her right name than Hay was her correct address. The reasons for all these precautions will become clear as this story proceeds.

The letter sent by Pauline was one of the most moving I have ever read over the air to my listeners. Here it is, just as it was written—though I had to deal with it in sections over the air.

"Dear Dr. Rumble. I have been listening to your program for the last couple of years, and would like to know if it is possible for me to become a Catholic.

“I am a cripple, and have been so since my birth 23 years ago. But as I have never known what it is to be really well, I do not feel very sorry for myself. What I do feel sorry about is that I am as near an approach to a pagan as this country can boast of.

“Now, about three weeks ago my mother had to go to hospital, and as I am quite helpless on my own, a nurse came to take her place. This nurse was a Catholic, and brought with her her little girl of seven, who attends the Catholic school here. This child was getting ready for her First Holy Communion, and every afternoon would tell her mother and myself the instructions the holy ladies at the school gave her.

“From the little girl I learned that God was born into this world of a human mother, and thus became man. Now I never knew before that Jesus Christ was really man as well as being God.

“But Mary, the little girl, says that that is true, and that when she receives Holy Communion she will receive Him into her heart, and be able to talk to Him and love Him as her best Friend. Is this true?

“One day two of the ladies from the school came to see Mary’s mother. One was rather old, and talked to the mother. The other was young, with soft kind eyes that seemed to dance and twinkle all the time. She talked to me.

“I asked her if what Mary said was true, and she said yes. She explained to me about the three Persons in God, and how the Second Person was born of His mother Mary into this world, taking a human body and a human soul like ours.

“I told her that if I knew God was present in the tabernacle on any altar in this world, I would want to be there with Him all day long. But the holy lady smiled and said she had plenty of work to do for God, and He didn’t expect her to be with Him there all the time. ‘Besides,’ she added, ‘He is always in my heart, and wherever I go He goes with me, so I don’t really leave Him alone.’

“This made me think that if I only had a friend who would not

tire of me being so helpless and useless, I would find life nearly worth living. Do you think I could be a Catholic, even though I am at present a cripple and a pagan?

“There will most likely be strong opposition from my parents who are very much against anything Catholic, but I think I will be able to persuade them. The way the Catholic religion is hated on earth makes me curious to know more about it. Would you mind telling me what Catholics are guilty of, in the eyes of the rest of the world?

“I do really want to know and love Jesus enough, so that one day He will come and stay in my heart as he does in the heart of the nun who is Mary’s teacher. Do you think He will some day? Perhaps you could tell me how to go about it, and whom to consult.

“‘Pauline,’ Hay, N.S.W.”

In reply to that letter, I sympathized with “Pauline,” both as regards her illness, and on her having been left so completely without instruction in the Christian religion.

I pointed out to her, however, that her being a cripple could not possibly be an obstacle to her becoming a Catholic; told her that the opposition of her parents, if she could not win their consent, should not count against duty to God and to conscience; and advised her, as a first step towards becoming a Catholic, to ask the Sister who was preparing Mary for her first Holy Communion to visit her and explain the Catholic religion to her.

I concluded by inviting “Pauline” to write to me again and let me know how she was progressing, promising my own prayers for her, and assuring her that many Catholic listeners, after hearing her account of herself, would pray for her also.

No reply came from “Pauline.” I had no idea whether she had been able to listen on that particular night or not. I could but give the reply and leave the rest to God.

Yet "Pauline" was listening that night when the reply to her letter was given.

News of her came to me, however, only after her death on July 2nd, 1945. And it came from the Sister who was Mary's teacher, and who had baptized "Pauline" a Catholic in the very last moments of her life. Here is what the good Sister wrote, on July 11th, 1945:

"Rev. and Dear Dr. Rumble:

"Towards the end of last year you answered a letter from a young crippled girl, 23 years of age, who signed herself 'Pauline' of Hay. I have been asked by this child to write to you and tell you the end of her story.

"Pauline did not live at Hay, but thought it wise to write from there in case of complications with her parents who are very prejudiced against the Catholic Church.

"On December 8th, 1944, Mary made her first Holy Communion, and although 'Pauline' begged her father to allow her to be brought to the church in her chair to witness the ceremony, he would not hear of it. Two days later, he told Mary's mother that they would now be able to dispense with her services as a nurse. But I received from 'Pauline' through Mary the message: 'Do come down to see me when you have time. I have a lovely secret which I can't even tell Mary.'

"Puzzled as to what the secret could be, I obtained permission from our Mother Superior to visit the invalid. But on reaching the house where she lives, I was greeted at the door with, 'Your Catholic friends have left here. I don't think anyone in the house wishes to see you.' Thereupon I asked to see 'Pauline,' but received a very determined, 'No.'

"Several times after that I tried to gain admittance, but with no more success than the first time. Christmas came and went, and one by one the months slipped by. I heard nothing more from

'Pauline,' though I often saw her sitting in the sun on the veranda as I passed on my rounds of visitation. If she were alone I would wave to her, and always got a sweet sad smile and a wave in return.

"On the morning of July 2nd, just as I was preparing to go to the school, my Superior came to me and told me that Mr. X wanted me on the telephone. I immediately recognized his voice as he told me that 'Pauline' had been stricken with a heart-attack, and that the doctor gave no hope whatever of recovery. He said that 'Pauline' was asking continually for the Sister who was Mary's teacher, and that since she was dying he could not refuse her last request. Would I come to see her?"

"My Superior at once set out with me and in a few minutes we were at the house. We walked up a pathway under archways of deep, red roses, which reminded me to ask the Little Flower's help in this critical moment. Met at the door by both father and mother, we were taken into the room of the poor little invalid.

"When I reached the bedside I could not restrain my tears at the sight of the white sunken face, from which deep blue eyes looked up at me. 'Pauline' grasped my hands in hers and whispered her wonderful secret. 'Oh, Sister, Dr. Rumble told me over the air that I could be a Catholic. He said to tell you. Daddy would be cross if he knew; but I must be a Catholic. Will you ask Daddy for me?'"

"After speaking with her for a few moments and realizing that there was no time to be lost, I beckoned the father from the room. I knew for a certainty that 'Pauline' had never been baptized. So I told him that she was surely going to die and asked him if he would allow her to be baptized. 'Whatever for?,' he replied angrily. 'I will not allow any Catholic priest to come near my child. What good will baptism do anyway? It won't save her life.'

"'It will make her very happy,' I pleaded.

"'No. Not even to make her happy will I bring a priest here,' he

said, with grim determination.

“I looked at him through tears of indignation and pity. Then, calling up all my courage, I caught his two hands in my own, and looked into his grief-stricken face. ‘There will be no need to bring the priest here,’ I said, ‘in order to satisfy ‘Pauline’s’ desire. All you have to do is to say ‘Yes’; then you can watch me do the rest. And, besides, no one but yourselves and ‘Pauline’ need ever know. Come,’ I begged, ‘let that poor little girl die happy.’

“Just then the doctor came to the door from ‘Pauline’s’ room and said, ‘She’s going, Mr. X.’ The poor father turned to go into the room, but I did not release his hands. ‘Say yes,’ I said, in sheer desperation.

“Go ahead, woman, she’s dying,’ he said with a sob. I returned to the bedside. The poor child’s brow was covered already with the sweat of death, but she was quite conscious. She looked up at me with anxious eyes. I smiled at her, and whispered some aspirations of faith and hope and love into her ear. Then, after spreading a towel under her head, I took a glass of water and poured the water over her head while saying the words, ‘I baptize thee, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.’

“After telling the privileged girl that she was now indeed a child of God and a Catholic, I had only time to recite with her an act of love for Our Lord, and help her make an act of spiritual Communion before her purified soul left for her eternal Communion with Our Lord in Heaven.

“After a few words of sympathy to the poor parents, whose profound grief was sad to see, Mother Superior and I let ourselves out of the house and returned home to the Convent.

“Two days later, the funeral of ‘Pauline’ left a Protestant church, and I watched it as it passed the Convent, offering to God a very fervent ‘Te Deum,’ both in ‘Pauline’s’ name and my own.

“During the afternoon of the day on which ‘Pauline’ died, Mother Superior had painted a beautiful little card expressing our

deep sympathy with the lonely parents, and we sent it to them to show that we shared their sorrow. A few days later, a child brought to the Convent a great sheaf of roses, with a note attached: 'To the Sisters. You made 'Pauline' very happy.' We put the flowers on the altar in the Convent chapel, and I feel sure that 'Pauline' from her place in Heaven presented them to God by way of thanksgiving, and in petition for her parents' conversion.

"Among 'Pauline's' last words was the request: 'Write and tell Dr. Rumble. He said I could be a Catholic.' I have done that now. But you will understand, dear Father, that my own desire is to remain unknown. God has deigned to make use of the humble services of a Sister of Mercy, who wishes only to sing her joyful 'Magnificat' to Him. I only ask you to pray for me."

So concludes the story of "Pauline," of Hay. Yet surely it is the story of the beginning of her life in Heaven rather than of the end of her life on earth.

VII. The Divorced Wife

This is the account of a woman who never once listened to the radio program herself, yet who can undoubtedly be listed as a "radio convert"—at least indirectly.

It was not her fault that she was divorced. She had secured the legal decree of divorce on the grounds of her husband's infidelity; yet, although a Protestant, not for a moment did she believe that the legal decree dissolved her marriage in the sight of God. For her, there could be no question of remarriage. But her husband did not share her convictions on that matter, and once legally free to do so he at once married the one who had been the object of his illicit affections.

It was he who contacted me first, for in his own way he was a

religiously-minded man. Chancing one evening upon my program, he became interested enough to begin sending me all kinds of queries on various religious topics. Over the long period during which he wrote to me his letters became more and more Catholic in their outlook until at last, knowing nothing of his circumstances, I wrote to him suggesting that he should come to see me.

He wrote back to say that from much that he had heard me say over the air he did not think anything could come from such a visit. "Come all the same," I said. "It may be that what you imagine to be obstacles in your way may not really be obstacles at all."

He came; and came frequently. We went through the whole of Catholic doctrine together, in which he was intensely interested. But what he had thought to be a difficulty proved to be a difficulty indeed. His first marriage was valid, and I could not receive him into the Church unless he separated from his second wife—a sacrifice he was quite unwilling to make. So in the end I had to let him go, knowing him to be convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion but unable to do anything more for him save to pray for him. And he went away promising only that if anything ever happened to him, he would send for a priest before he died. "If God gives you time," was my last warning word to him.

But now for the divorced wife. She was a regular attendant at her church, and her own minister had advised her not to be foolish, but to marry again and not waste her life over an unnecessary scruple. "You are young," he said, "and the greater part of your life is before you. Moreover, the gospel permits remarriage in a case like yours." But she did not believe him, and adhered to her decision that remarriage after divorce was just not possible according to the Christian law of marriage.

All the greater was her indignation and bitterness when she heard from a friend of her husband's visits to me, and of his regular attendance at Mass. Taking it for granted that he had been received into the Church despite his continuing to live with

the second woman, she never tired of denouncing Rome's utterly unscrupulous "double-dealing."

"There's that Church," she would say, "that tells the world how opposed she is to divorce and remarriage, and that she is faithful to the law of Christ whatever other Churches may do, yet just for the sake of converts she will receive divorced people into her fold even though they go on living with their second wives!"

But one day she received a shock. She met a Catholic friend of her husband, who was well aware of the facts. "Didn't you know," he said, "that Dr. Rumble positively refused to receive him into the Church on the score that he is still your husband in the sight of God and that his second so-called marriage is null and void according to the Christian law?"

She phoned me next day. Might she come to see me? She could; and she did. "Is it true," she asked, "that you refused to receive my husband into the Catholic Church because of his marrying again after our divorce?"

"It is," I replied.

"Then, Father," she answered, "would you instruct me in the Catholic religion? I don't know enough about it to say whether I could believe in it all or not; but I'd like to know. And if God makes the truth of it clear to me, I'll become a Catholic."

On the day I received her into the Church I urged upon her the duty of praying for her husband. "Apart from all else," I said to her, "if he had not listened to the Catholic radio hour and been sufficiently interested to send in his own questions and come to me for instructions, you would not be a Catholic today. Indirectly at least, you owe that much to him."

So she became the Catholic, whilst he is still outside the Church; as indeed are so many others in similar circumstances who could be received into the Church tomorrow, and would like to be, but who are entangled in a second marriage after divorce which they are unwilling to forsake.

One thing, however, is clear. These people do not remain outside the Catholic Church because they have discovered her to be false. It is because they themselves are unable to make the sacrifices necessary in order to embrace what they know to be the truth. Not that they should be judged too harshly. As the husband of the woman in this particular case said to me in the course of one of our interviews: "Father, we just don't know. We are left untaught. I wish to God I had been a Catholic as a boy. My life would have been a very different thing then."

VIII. The Bus Driver

I wish I had more to tell you of the Bus Driver's story; but I have only what he himself wrote to me in one letter. So I can but let you read it for yourselves.

"Dear Father," he wrote, "I am only a bus driver, but I like debates. Hearing of your program from a friend, I became a regular listener. Though a Protestant, I met a Catholic girl who was willing to marry me in the Registry Office; so that we did. Until I listened to your program I did not know that she was breaking the laws of her religion. As a matter of fact, all the explanations of the Catholic religion which I have heard from the Question Box Program have been a revelation to me. And I am just writing to tell you that, because of them I sought instruction from a priest, became a Catholic, and a Catholic I will be until my dying day. I only regret having wasted so much of my life as a non-Catholic, and hope I will be able to convert more people to the Catholic religion before I pass out of this world. Already, besides getting our marriage put right by the priest and bringing my wife back to the Church, I have converted another man and his wife and their two children. Please pray for me, and for my wife and our own three

children. I still listen to the program from which I am always learning some new thing. One can never know enough about his Catholic Faith.”

IX. The American Doctor

In one of the rooms in a suite of Flats at Rose Bay, overlooking Sydney Harbor and just across the road from the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Dr. Alsop, an American Army medico, lay ill in a bed which he knew he would not leave until death claimed him as its own.

His nurse, knowing that his end could not be far off, asked him if he had any religion, and whether he would like to see a Minister. “Religion?” he had replied. “Well, I guess I’m an Episcopalian—Anglicans I think you call them here. But as for wanting to see one of their clergymen, I think not. I have never bothered them during life, and I’m not going to bother them now.”

He paused for a moment and then said, as a kind of afterthought, “As a matter of fact, there’s only one man I’d like to see, but I don’t suppose he’d come to a fellow who doesn’t belong to his Church at all.”

“We can at least try,” the nurse replied. “Who is it?”

“It’s the ‘Question Box’ chap from Radio Station 2 S M,” the doctor answered. “I’ve been listening to his program quite a bit; and although there’s a lot of fantastic things nobody could be expected to believe, there’s a deuced lot of common sense in what he says as well. If he’d just come and have a talk I’d like it, although I can’t offer prospects of anything more than a friendly chat. If you phone him, don’t hold out hopes for anything more than that.”

The nurse phoned me, and I went to see him. The warmth of

the welcome he gave me was that of a man who was obviously hungry for friends in a country to which he was a stranger. "My dear fellow," he said, "it is indeed good of you to come so far afield to see me. Your job must keep you pretty busy, and it's a shame to make inroads on your time with nothing in it for you. But I'd love a talk with somebody sensible. Though I told my nurse to warn you that I could hold out no hope to you of roping me in as a member of your Church."

I laughed. "Doctor," I said, "It's not a question of your holding out any hopes to me, but of whether I'll be able to hold out any hopes to you should you make the slightest suggestion of wanting to become a Catholic. Where that matter is concerned it will be you who will have to do the asking, not me."

That was all for the time being, and we settled down for a general chat. He told me of himself and of his experiences in the army. We discussed the books he had read and was currently reading. No. He had no friends in Australia, and no relatives. Just a few acquaintances he had met and who came to visit him at times. The books were his best friends now. His illness? Well, he didn't want to talk about that, but he had resigned himself to never again setting foot on American soil.

That first visit was followed by many more. Whenever I could make time, I slipped over to see Dr. Alsop. And in the end it was he himself who insisted on talking about religion.

"You know, my dear Father," he began abruptly one day, "I'm not against religion. I just don't have any myself. After all, my nurse here is a Catholic, and every Sunday when she goes across the road to Mass I give her something to put on the plate for me. What I shy at are the things you people ask us to believe."

"I haven't asked you to believe anything—at any rate, yet," I interjected.

"I didn't mean it that way," he replied. "What I meant was that your religion is full of things no really educated person could

swallow. When I say 'really educated,' of course, I mean really educated. The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, for instance. It's biologically impossible, man, and that's all about it!"

"It has nothing whatever to do with biology," I said. "You're a bright one to speak of the really educated man! The Immaculate Conception means that the soul of Mary was preserved from the contagion of original sin. It has nothing to do with her body. It concerns her soul only. What's that got to do with biology?"

"Well!" he gasped. "Then I guess I've been barking up the wrong tree all my life; and I suppose that goes for a lot of other things, too. Say, Father, I think you'd better instruct me in the Catholic religion and I'll see what I can make of it."

He became a Catholic, received the Sacraments, and died a few weeks later. The nearest he got to attending Mass was by the presence of his body only at the Requiem offered for him in Rose Bay Church prior to his funeral. And I could not help feeling that among the memories he carried with him from this world was the time when he listened "quite a bit" to the Catholic radio hour from Station 2 S M, Sydney, Australia.

X. The Lawyer

I knew of the Lawyer's case only by letter, and that by one from himself. He lived in Goulburn, a country town about 150 miles south from Sydney.

"I want to tell you," he wrote, "that I have just been received into the Catholic Church. As I owe this to you, I think I should let you know.

"I have long listened to your program, at first interested only in the cut and thrust of the eternal debate. I admired the logic of the Catholic position, with its seeming ability to meet difficulties from

every angle without ever having to unsay to one opponent what was said in answer to another. Needless to say, I have a professional interest in the arguing of a case, and at the end of your answers to all charges against the Catholic Church repeatedly found myself saying 'Not Guilty!'

"After a time I grew interested in Catholic teachings for their own sake, above all in those concerning the Natural Moral Law—a subject to which I have devoted a good deal of study. But the dogmas which the Catholic Church puts forward as Articles of Faith also got me thinking, and I even found myself after a time trying to give the Catholic answer to questions as you read them out, before you yourself gave your own commentary upon them.

"To cut a long story short, one evening in the midst of your program the thought came to me: 'Good heavens, here am I agreeing with all that he says, as I have done for months past. Yet what am I doing about it? I must have the Catholic Faith myself, or our religious outlooks wouldn't square like that!' So there and then I turned off the radio, put on my coat and hat, went down to the Cathedral rectory here in Goulburn, and asked to see one of the priests. He saw me through my instructions and received me into the Church yesterday.

"This is just to let you know, not to burden you with the need of additional correspondence. As a lawyer I used to think you had mistaken your profession and should have followed mine. But I see things differently now. The faith does make a difference, doesn't it? Certainly the vocation to be a priest is in a different category altogether from any of the mere professions. You're in your right place; and will you let me add, behind the microphone as well as at the altar."

PART TWO

PROSPECTIVE CONVERTS

I. Motives

It will seem strange, perhaps, to many non-Catholics that a priest engaged in convert-work, and one so often accused of unscrupulous proselytizing as I have been, should seem to discourage rather than encourage anybody who shows leanings towards the Catholic Church.

But the question of motives is of the utmost importance in this matter. Religion belongs to God; not to man. And we cannot play about with it as we please. Catholic principles absolutely forbid the reception of any adult converts into the Church for motives other than a profound conviction of its truth, and a sincere desire to be true to one's conscience and fulfil the will of Almighty God. These principles have ever to be kept in mind.

As typical of the letters now to be considered, take this one:

"I am a Methodist woman, with a Catholic husband and three Catholic children. I regularly attend my own church, and am quite content that they should go to Mass on Sundays. But they are not so happy about my being a Methodist. I tell them that we should remain where God put us in the first place. Although they never ask me to become a Catholic, I know they are praying every day for that. Is it wrong for me to continue in a religion different from theirs, or would you advise me to become a Catholic?"

Many listeners were waiting to hear what the wily priest would say to that letter! Some even wrote to tell me afterwards of their surprise that I did not take full advantage of the emotional and psychological factors in my favor. But with the Catholic Church the interests of truth come first. And here is the answer I gave:

“It is not wrong for you to continue in a religion different from that of your husband and children, so long as you do not sincerely believe as they do.

“Nor can you become a Catholic merely to please them. The only reason which would justify you in becoming a Catholic would be your own personal conviction of the truth of the Catholic religion. No other motive should influence you except the sincere desire to do God’s will.

“At the same time, you are wrong in your idea that “we should remain where God has put us in the first place.” If we find that the Church to which we belong by an accident of birth owes its existence to the error of some human founder, there’s no reason why we should go on making a mistake just because our forefathers did so.

“At most I can advise you that, if the problem worries you, then you at least have the duty to try to solve it. And for the present there are only two things you can do; study and pray. Get some knowledge and understanding of the Catholic religion either by receiving instruction in it, or by reading books about it. And pray fervently to God, asking Him to help you to realize the fact, if indeed the Catholic religion be the true religion. But your actually becoming a Catholic will depend on whether, and when, you arrive at a sincere conviction of its truth.”

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A second letter of a similar nature was as follows:

“I am not a Catholic, but my wife and children are. My wife has been an example to me in every way, and has taught the

children to pray for my conversion. I know that, if I became a Catholic, I would give my wife a greater happiness than any I have yet brought into her life. I find a great difficulty, however, in believing in some of the doctrines of the Catholic Church, such as in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; and it's no use my saying I believe in them if I don't. If only you could make the Catholic religion mean to me what it means to my wife and children I'd become a Catholic gladly."

To that I had to reply: "To give a greater happiness to anyone on earth is not sufficient reason for becoming a Catholic. If a man went to a priest and said that he did not believe in the Catholic Church, but wanted to become a Catholic in order to please his wife, the priest would have to refuse his request. In such a case at most a priest could offer to explain the Catholic religion to you in full, leaving results to the future. If, during the instructions or at the end, you attained to a genuine belief in the Catholic Faith, you could be received into the Church. If not, you would have to remain as you are until you did get the faith.

"I must, however, say a few words concerning your difficulties about particular doctrines of the Church, such as the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

"Remember that God has revealed some things which are beyond a complete human understanding, and that our motive for believing them is not that we see the truth of them for ourselves, but because God Himself, who knows all things and could not reveal what is false, has declared them to be true.

"I myself believe wholeheartedly in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; yet it is every bit as mysterious to me as it is to an unbeliever. I accept it because I have faith in Christ; the unbeliever rejects it because he lacks faith in Christ.

"In the end, of course, it is a question of divine grace. When dealing with the very doctrine of the Eucharist which you have mentioned, Christ Himself said to the unbelieving Jews: "No

man can come to Me unless the Father who hath sent Me draw him." Jn., VI, 44. Only by the help of God's grace can a man attain to the gift of faith. As that grace is bestowed upon men of good will in answer to prayer, I can but advise you to pray earnestly for the grace of faith.

"If you do, the day will come when you will realize the truth of the Catholic religion and find yourself wondering how you could have ever thought otherwise."

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There is room for but one further example of "inadequate motives." It raises the question as to whether logic alone is sufficient to bring a man into the Church.

"If I am wrong in my approach to the Catholic religion," wrote one inquirer, "please point out my mistake. By a process of elimination I have rejected atheism and agnosticism, all non-Christian religions and Protestantism. But I feel that I must have a religion, and there's only Catholicism left. Am I justified in becoming a Catholic on that?"

Here is what he heard in reply:

"As an approach, but not more than that, your line of thought is all right. But something more is wanted than a mere "process of elimination." The discovery that other religions are wrong is not quite the same thing as the discovery that the Catholic religion is right. It might merely mean that you think Catholicism to be the best of a bad lot! Obviously, that is not enough.

"Still, dissatisfaction with other religions is a good reason for turning one's attention to a study of the Catholic religion. If, as a result of such study, one becomes sincerely convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion, then, and then only, one can and should become a Catholic."

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II. Obstacles

One who is not personally convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion may not become a Catholic merely in order to please relatives and friends. But what of the opposite case? May one who is convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion refrain from becoming a Catholic through fear of displeasing relatives and friends? Many are the tragic letters I have received from people in such distressing circumstances! Thus one woman wrote to me:

“I am a married woman with two young children, neither of them christened in any religion. I now want to become a Catholic. But my husband, who is only nominally a Protestant and never goes to church, hates the Catholic Church and gets very annoyed whenever I mention the matter. He says that none of our friends will ever speak to us again if I do this thing, and that it will interfere with his business prospects because his employer is a very bigoted Protestant. What am I to do?”

I was quite conscious that thousands of non-Catholic listeners were waiting curiously to hear what would be said to that. But those only would be disappointed who imagined that the answer would be modified to suit them.

“Your children,” I said, “immeasurably increase your responsibility in this matter; for their spiritual welfare is at stake as well as your own.

“As for your husband’s attitude, I need scarcely comment of his unreasoning hatred of the Catholic Church, whilst having no positive love of his own religion, entirely neglecting it in practice. Nor will it help to stress how timid and cowardly it is to be so fearful of what others may think of us where it is a question of following one’s conscientious convictions. And that even the most bigoted Protestant employer would penalize a fellow-Protestant employee merely because the latter’s *wife* had become a Catholic is, of course, quite incredible.

“The real truth is that your husband is only saying all he can think of in order to persuade you to remain as religionless as himself. And he’ll probably keep on doing so, urging now this, now that, before the event, in the hope of preventing you from taking such a step. If you take a definite stand and he finds that his efforts are of no avail, he will probably reconcile himself to the inevitable.

“At the same time, if his opposition is a worry to you, we must recognize that the step you contemplate is a worry to him. However unjustified his attitude, he is unhappy about the prospect, and that does demand our sympathy. You should, therefore, try gradually to win him round in order to spare him distress as far as possible—even delaying your reception into the Church for some time if necessary.

“Take up the study of the Catholic religion, for which I will send you some books if you wish. It will require a fair amount of time for you to make yourself familiar with Catholic doctrines and duties, and that will give you the opportunity to accustom him to the idea of your becoming a Catholic.

“But you must make it clear to him that he does not own you, body and soul. He is not the master of your conscience. Your soul came into this world alone, and he was not there then. Your soul will go out of this world alone, and he cannot go with you to answer to Almighty God for you.

“For the rest, if in the end you are compelled to choose between peace with God and peace with your husband, you will find that peace with God can compensate you for loss of peace with your husband, whilst peace with your husband will never compensate you for loss of peace with God.”

I cannot tell you the end of this woman’s story. She did not write again. But it is to the credit of non-Catholic listeners, so quick to send in their indignant protests against every word of which they disapproved, that there was not one letter criticizing

the advice given in this case.

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A problem belonging to the same category was revealed in the following letter:

“Is it in any way possible to be received into the Catholic Church when one’s parents have forbidden it? I am but 16 years of age, but for two years have wanted to become a Catholic. My parents, however, have forbidden me to do so as long as I am under their roof. This worries me very much, for if I have to wait so long I feel that I may lose my faith and not want to become a Catholic when it will be possible, through neglecting God’s will now.”

It is always easier to solve theoretical than to solve practical problems. St. Jerome speaks rather sarcastically of the man who stands safely behind sheltering ramparts whilst shouting out encouragement to Christians in the arena, urging them to die bravely in the cause of Christ! But what was I to do?

“It would certainly be *possible* for you to be received into the Catholic Church at any time, after due instruction,” I told this inquirer, “if you seriously wished it. But whilst that is possible, it might be wiser to delay taking the step for the time being.

“Strictly speaking, your parents have no authority over you in this particular matter, whether in God’s law or in civil law. If they said that they do not see why *they* should change their religion, one could easily understand that. But where it is a matter of *your* conscience, they should allow you full freedom to do what you believe to be your duty to God. And history records innumerable instances of quite young boys and young girls who have attained to a deep personal conviction of the truth of the Catholic religion, and who have become Catholics, some with, others without the consent of their parents.

“At the same time, although it is no sudden impulse that moves you, one could not blame your parents for trying to make

sure that it is not a merely passing fancy on the part of one so young before withdrawing all opposition.

“You may, of course, be able to persuade your parents long before you are 21 to agree to your becoming a Catholic. But if not, you can rely upon God, who has brought you this far, to bring you the rest of the way eventually, provided you do your part by earnest and persevering prayer.

“In the end, all I can advise you to do is to visit the local priest, explain things to him, and be guided by what he thinks best in the light of your particular circumstances.”

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Psychological factors often provide serious difficulties in the way of one's progress towards the Church. Here is a typical instance of that:

“As a Protestant who respects your replies, may I ask your advice on this? I was brought up with a distrust and dislike of the Catholic religion. Also, my people, both now dead, were very good-living and I loved them dearly. For me to accept the Catholic religion would mean disloyalty to their memory, and disbelieving all that they taught me. Do you think God expects of me a thing I find so very hard to do?”

In replying to that I felt quite at home!

“Like yourself,” I said, “I too was brought up as a Protestant, with a distrust and dislike of the Catholic religion. But as we grow older, it is our duty to ask ourselves whether there is any reasonable foundation for such antipathy towards the Catholic religion. Impartial consideration reveals that there is not.

“If you became a Catholic, you would not be expected to esteem or love your parents less. Nor is it true that you would have to disbelieve *all* that they taught you. For all the really *good* and *true* things that they taught you are also taught by the Catholic Church. You would, of course, have to disbelieve such of their teachings as are at variance with Catholic doctrine.

But once you realized the truth of the Catholic religion, you would realize that your people were mistaken, and that you could not possibly be expected to continue in the same mistakes merely because your parents never saw them to be mistakes.

“Meantime, your good parents, precisely because they were so good, have surely saved their souls, and know now as they never knew on earth that the Catholic religion is indeed the true religion. And what they most desire now is that you should have all its special consolations and blessings which, through no fault of their own, they did not possess in this life.

“By becoming a Catholic, then, far from doing a thing they might resent, you will be doing the very thing they are most eager to see you do. It is the realization of that which will be the solution of all your present difficulties.”

III. Unjustified Fears

The fears that obsess people who feel drawn to the Catholic religion but who have not yet attained to the divine gift of faith in it often seem strange to Catholics. But such fears are a reality, and the victims of them are always entitled to kindly consideration and reassurance. I have received many letters from such people, although I have room here for but one of them.

“Would you tell me this,” wrote one listener. “If I studied the Catholic religion and eventually joined the Catholic Church, would I be free to leave it if I later became dissatisfied with it? Does not the Catholic Church try to exert moral pressure by teaching that if a Catholic leaves the Church he will lose his soul? For example, as you left the Anglican Church to join the Catholic Church, so later on you might want to leave the Catholic Church for some other Church. And as you did not fear to

lose your soul by leaving the Anglican Church, why should you fear to lose it by leaving the Catholic Church?"

It was difficult to reply to such a letter in the brief time possible in such a program as mine; but I did my best as follows:

"Firstly, so long as you think it even possible that you would want to leave the Catholic Church in the future, after having joined it, you have not attained to an absolute conviction of its truth. And without that absolute conviction, you could not become a Catholic at all. If a person really gets the Catholic faith, all such vague fears vanish.

"Secondly, if you did receive the gift of faith, yet after becoming a Catholic you were to lose it through your own fault, no one would or could compel you to continue to profess it or to fulfill its duties. You could walk off, declare that you had left the Catholic Church, and tell your friends that you had joined another Church, or given up religion altogether.

"But what of moral pressure from the teaching that if a Catholic does lose his faith and abandon the Church he has been guilty of sin; and that if he dies in such a state without repenting he will lose his soul? Cannot you see that this teaching would have no moral power to compel a man who had really lost his faith in the Catholic Church to remain a Catholic? Having ceased to believe in the Catholic Church, he would have ceased to believe in her teaching on this subject also.

"The only thing that can prevent a Catholic from leaving the Catholic Church is his own interior conviction of its truth, and his sense of obligation to remain loyal to his conscience and to God.

"Everyone who has really attained to the Catholic faith believes that perseverance in it is necessary to his salvation. If you ever get the Catholic faith yourself, that will be your conviction. If you never attain to such a conviction, you will never have known what the Catholic faith really means.

"As for myself, if, through infidelity to the grace of God, I were

to lose my Catholic faith, I know well enough that no other Church could be the true Church. And I would have to abandon belief in Christianity as a revealed religion altogether.

“There is no parallel between my position as a Catholic, and what it was when I was an Anglican. In leaving the Anglican Church for the Catholic Church I left error for truth. In leaving the Catholic Church, no matter to what I went, I would be leaving truth for error. You may say that it only seems like that to me with my present convictions. But I never had grounds for believing in Anglicanism such as exist for Catholicism; nor did I have anything like the same supernatural certainty of faith which came with the conviction of the truth of the Catholic Church.

“You may, therefore, dismiss your fears. If you do get the gift of faith in the Catholic Church and become a Catholic, you will see things in an entirely different light.”

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IV. Are Converts Suspect?

There are people who seem to think that the only real reason for belonging to any religion is because “one has been brought up in it.” If one leaves the religion which has been “an ingrained part of his life since childhood,” it can be due only to instability of character, or for some ulterior motive. Thus one listener who described himself as “an Anglican by birth” wrote to me:

“Converts to any Church are suspect, and rightly so. They are really moved by sentiment or emotion, but they think out a whole lot of reasons for changing. As soon as they find a fault in those supposed ‘reasons,’ they will leave the Church of their adoption for another. If they could not be loyal to their previous Church, how can they be expected to be loyal to the Catholic Church?”

That is, of course, an extraordinary attitude for any professing

Christian to adopt. What would have become of the Christian Church if the Apostles had preached that people should persist in the religion that had been an ingrained part of their lives since childhood, and on no account to change to any other! The Church grew by conversions, and she refused to regard all "converts as suspect." But to my friend I replied:

"If a convert's change of religion were due merely to sentiment and emotion, or to some ulterior motive, he would rightly be suspect. For if a person bases his actions on variable feelings and emotions, one never knows what he will do next; and he is quite likely to prove unstable and unreliable.

"But the Catholic Church, as no other Church, makes sure that converts are thoroughly instructed, that they give evidence of genuine faith, and that they have a realization of the sound and reasonable grounds for their choice. Every precaution is taken against their being received into the Church on a merely sentimental impulse, or for any other motive than one of sincere conviction.

"Allowance must be made for the fact also that, when a sincere convert is received into the Catholic Church, he receives from God such a supernatural light of faith that he acquires a new, higher and divine certainty, leaving no room for doubt as to the wisdom of the choice he has made.

"Even supposing that he discovered after his reception into the Church that some of the arguments upon which he had relied during his approach to the Faith were unsound, he would not be in the least shaken in his conviction that he had done the right thing. He would merely abandon the 'wrong reasons' for the right ones—which exist in abundance.

"Should he, in later years, and through his own fault, lose the grace of faith in the Catholic religion and abandon the Catholic Church, his defection will be based, not on reasonable grounds, but on other considerations altogether, moral rather than intel-

lectual in character.

“Such a disaster is, of course, always possible, human nature being what it is; but its explanation would not be such as the one you have imagined.”

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Whilst dealing with this subject, it is worth while including one further letter which has some bearing upon it. It is not surprising that some newly-received converts should grow only gradually out of an inherited diffidence and uneasiness as to what their position will be within the Catholic fold. As an example of what I mean, consider this rather anxious inquiry:

“I and my wife and our seven children, three boys and four girls, have just been received into the Catholic Church. Will my position as a convert debar me from any privileges open to born Catholics? Or, should any of my children in later years wish to become priests or nuns, would the fact that I am only a convert stand in their way?”

The reply to him could be one which could afford him only complete satisfaction.

“I am delighted to hear,” I told him, “of the conversion of yourself and of your family. And I congratulate you, even as I am grateful to you for letting me know, thus enabling me to share in your happiness.

“But now for your question. Be sure that, once received into the Church, you are as much a Catholic as any other Catholic, and have the same rights and privileges as any other Catholic.

“As for your children, did one of your sons later on desire to become a priest, he would merely have to state in his application form that his father is a Catholic. He would not need to mention the fact that his father was a convert; and it would make no difference one way or the other, if he did. Your son would be in exactly the same position as the son of a man who had been a Catholic all

his life. And the same answer applies to any of your daughters who might wish in later life to become nuns."

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V. Why Many Refuse

It has often been said that the Catholic religion is "a hard one in which to live, but a most consoling one in which to die." Certainly innumerable cases can be cited in which people have refused to become Catholics because of its exacting standards, not because they lacked conviction of the truth of the Catholic Church. As is to be expected, not all are willing to admit this; and on the occasion of one remark of mine along these lines, an irate listener wrote to suggest that it was no more difficult to live up to the Catholic religion than to that of any of the Protestant Churches.

"I have heard you say," he wrote, "that some people would be Catholics, only the religion is too hard to live up to. Don't you think those same people would find the Protestant religion too hard to live up to properly also? In other words, it is not easy to be a Christian, is it? That's all it comes to."

"I could give you dozens of instances," I said in reply to that, "in which people, convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church, have refused to join it because they were unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices. Protestant clergymen have told me that the only thing preventing them from becoming Catholics was the need of continuing in their present ministry in order to provide security for their wives and children. Freemasons have said to me that, whilst they admitted the truth of the Catholic religion, they could not bring themselves to renounce the advantages of belonging to the Lodge. A businessman turned away sadly when told

that he would be obliged to make restitution of large ill-gotten sums of money. Many people, divorced and remarried, have wanted to become Catholics until told that they could not continue in their second marriages. There are ever so many cases like these, in which people would become Catholics only for the difficulty involved.

“I grant that in some cases these people would find it too hard to live properly according to the requirements of their own Protestant religions. The dishonest businessman I mentioned was obviously not living up even to the Protestant religion. But the Anglican clergyman, and the divorced man who had married again in his Protestant Church, do not find it too hard to live up to Protestant standards.

“What I do maintain, however, is that the Protestant interpretation in general of Christian requirements is a much easier one than that of the Catholic Church.

“For example, the independence of private judgment granted by Protestantism is very flattering to human self-complacency compared with the Catholic duty of obedience to the Church. Again, Protestants see no harm in omitting attendance at divine worship when they don't feel like going, whilst for a Catholic regular assistance at Mass on Sundays is a grave obligation in conscience. Also, it is a favorite charge on the part of Protestants that the Catholic obligation of confessing one's sins is too hard; and that the discomfort of fasting, and of abstaining from meat on Fridays, is too great a burden. Most Protestant Churches sanction divorce and remarriage; and all of them permit contraceptive birth-control.

“Much more could be said, but I have said enough to show that the Protestant Churches have much easier ideas of what a Christian life requires than has the Catholic Church. And surely every regular listener to this program has heard over and over again complaints from Protestant listeners against the strictness of

Catholic requirements, and efforts to justify the easier ways of the Protestant Churches by appeals to the 'Golden Rule' of Christian charity—as if charity not only covers a multitude of sins of which a person has repented, but permits also a continued indifference as to the way in which one chooses to live!"

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Conclusion

Since Christ Himself said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me," it should be clear that He offers us no easy path. But we must not overlook the compensating blessings those receive who accept His invitation.

In his book, "The Religion of the Plain Man," Robert Hugh Benson, the convert son of an Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote:

"Three hundred years ago we could have offered you great things; the hatred of all who heard your name . . . We could have offered you . . . prison, chains, stinking dungeons, the rack, the whip, the gallows, the hangman's cauldron. Now we have no **more** than the chips of Christ's cross to tempt you with; a little **sneering** and lifting of the eyebrows; a little good-humored laughter; a few remarks about 'intellectual servitude'; a little smiling over your mediaevalism . . . your superstition and fear of the priest.

"But where the cross is, there is Christ. And you will have the authoritative 'Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti' (I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost). You will have certitude for doubt . . . and will have the tabernacle of God with men—Emmanuel.

"And for the friends estranged from you, you will have . . . blood relations born of the same Mother of Salvation. You will be one with the saints of all ages and all lands . . . Your parents who died

twenty years ago have been Catholics from the day you closed their eyes; and instead of leaving, you are returning to their faith; and they now thank God for it and for your response to His grace.”

In “The Puppet-Show of Memory,” after recording his reception into the Catholic Church, Maurice Baring added a note—“The only action in my life which I am quite certain I have never regretted.” An eloquent under-statement, if ever there was one! But how eloquent only those will fully realize who have received the same great grace of conversion to the Catholic Faith. The joy of it is to be experienced, not described; and one can but say to those who have not yet known it, as did Christ to the woman of Samaria: “If thou didst know the gift of God . . . thou wouldst perhaps have asked of Him, and He would have given (it) to thee.”

