

THE STORY OF A CONVERSION

Struck by some phrase of his (writes the Rome correspondent of the Philadelphia 'Catholic Standard and Times') I asked Mr. Isaac Henderson about his conversion, for I was puzzled to divine what had brought within the pale of the Church the author of the popular anti-Catholic novel, 'The Prelate,' and of the play, 'The Mummy and the Hummingbird,' with which Mr. John Drew, of the Frohman company, is now touring the United States.

'I will tell you the story and then you must judge,' replied Mr. Henderson. 'First of all I never spoke of Catholicism to any one, nor permitted anyone to speak to me on the subject. Having assumed an agnostic position I wondered at the faith of Christians, but at last made up my mind to look into the question once more and finally determined to examine honestly and follow my convictions wherever they might lead. I should then be able to say to my judge, if I found one, that I had done what lay in my power, and more no creature could do.'

'The first conclusion that I arrived at, after many months of study, was that if the Christian claims had a true basis, and if Christ were divine and had really founded a Church, the Catholic Church was

The Only Institution Having Valid Claims

to be that Church. After a course of reading which lasted two years I became stale of the subject. One afternoon in May, 1896, I met at a friend's house Dom Gasquet and Monsignor Moyes, who were in Rome as members of the commission to examine the validity of Anglican Orders, and I had a long and interesting talk with Dom Gasquet. Later in the afternoon I was strolling on the Pincio and met them both again. I asked Dom Gasquet if he would drive with me the next day and apologised to Monsignor Moyes for not asking him also, explaining that my carriage was a victoria, and I expressed the hope that he would go with me another day.

'Some time after my outing with Dom Gasquet—it was on May 8, and a lovely afternoon—I was reading Liddon's "Life of Christ," and, weary of the subject, I laid away the book and decided to drive to the Villa Pamphili. My wife had another engagement, and, after searching in vain for some friend who was not engaged, I recalled my invitation, not yet made good, to Monsignor Moyes. So I drove to S. Silvestro and found him at home and free to accompany me.

'In the Villa Pamphili we left the carriage and strolled to the wall from which there is, as you know, a fine view of St. Peter's. I happened to look at my watch and noted that it was exactly four o'clock—a fact that has a certain interest, so please remember it.

'Suddenly, impelled by what seemed mere impulse, and really to my own surprise, I broke my long silence on religious matters, and demanded: "How do you Catholics explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? To me it seems unthinkable."

'Monsignor Moyes began to explain, I following his exposition step by step, and for two hours we never moved. His words went home. The mystery was revealed to me; and with its acceptance every one of the Christian claims seemed to fall into place, and I found my reason convinced.

'But remember, my mind had been prepared by a long course of reading for this hour, and I was able to follow his arguments closely and without much interruption. It was a masterly exposition, and with my acceptance of Christian dogma and my realisation that Christ was Divine and had founded a Church on earth, my previous conclusions led me naturally, inevitably, to the acceptance of

The Catholic Church to be that Church

'I said nothing to Monsignor Moyes of the effect of his words upon me, but drove home silently, thinking and adjusting myself to these new conditions. My wife usually passes the evening with me in my study. That night, as she sat reading and I sat with a book in my hand but not reading a word of it, I pondered again the arguments of the afternoon. Towards midnight I said: "I have something to tell you. I have made up my mind to become a Catholic." My wife regarded me silently. "Do you mean it?" she asked presently. "You know," I answered, "that I would not trifle with you about such a matter." "Then I will tell you something," she went on. "All our Catholic friends, especially those of the Convent of Marie Reparatrice, have been making novenas to Our Lady for your conversion. The third one ended to-day and this is one of her feasts—the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii—and I associate Our Lady of Pompeii with you because I first prayed to her for your conversion, and I have since learned that the miracles at this shrine date from the 13th of February, your birthday and our wedding day."

'The next morning I went to see Mother St. Veronica, the Superior of the Convent of Marie Reparatrice, to tell her my decision and to thank her and her associates for their interest in me, and, presently her brother, Count de Raymond, was shown in and she told him what I had been saying to her. He seemed more moved than I thought the matter warranted. "Let me tell you now what I came for," he said. "I have been praying for a long time to know if it was my vocation to become a priest, and I have never been able to see clearly. Finally I asked God for a sign, which was that He would make you a Catholic. Yesterday, however, as I was going up the Scala Santa on my knees, when

half way up I felt that I should not try to make a bargain with God, and there and then I pledged myself to the priesthood unconditionally. Do you happen to know at what time you asked Monsignor Moyes that first question about the Holy Trinity?" I recalled, noting the hour when we reached the wall. "Just four o'clock," I answered.

"That was precisely the hour I was going up the stairs," he said.

There is coincidence in Mr. Henderson's story (remarks the correspondent), but such as puts no strain on the credence of any one. There is not a fact in it which repugns; the rules of chance and many accepted experiences of coincidence present more reduplicated and, perhaps, more striking interweaving and happenings and causation than this tale of simple elements working apart and wedded in one magic moment. Yet how evade the simple force of the message of the story, telling of the power moving behind the events, directing them, influencing the actors, and co-ordinating all to an issue remarkable in itself? Here we have no doubt of the Duke of Aquitaine's court seeing fantastic visions, no far-off narrative of unfamiliar incidents, no play of intrinsically difficult coincidences; but a member of the intellectual classes of America, born in New York during the 19th century, a man holding a responsible position for ten years on a prominent newspaper of that city, a novelist as well known, personally and in a literary way, in London as in his birth city, a dramatist who is now winning enviable laurels at the same moment on the English and American stages, a gentleman in cosmopolitan society in Rome, a living man of the world, who, by the gentle and manifold mystery of grace, was unexpectedly and in an instant irradiated within by the admirable light of Christ.

The Church of the Ages

A despatch from Los Angeles to the New York 'Free-man's Journal,' under date April 6, says:—

'The Catholic Church is the grandest organisation in the world,' asserted the Rev. J. S. Thomson yesterday morning at the services of the Independent Church of Christ, of which he is pastor. Dr. Thomson has been preaching a series of sermons on 'The Providential Purpose of the Various Denominations,' and yesterday morning's discussion was devoted to 'The Providential Purpose of the Roman Catholic Denomination.' He said, in part:—

'The providential purpose of the Roman Catholic denomination is unity and continuity. The Catholic Church is the grandest organisation in the world. It has a place of consecrated duty for all types or groups of mind. It is an imperialistic Church. The Pope is a real monarch on a powerful throne, holding in his hands a sceptre of wondrous influence over the souls and destinies of men. The present Pope glorifies the papal crown; for he is a scholar, a thinker, a poet, a genuine philanthropist, a true friend of every wise measure for the benefit of the race, a skilful and practical manager of vast and complicated affairs, a member of a noble family, a gentleman and a saint; and yet the Catholic Church is thoroughly democratic in its aims, policies, and efforts.

'The poor, the common, and the rich people meet together in that Church, as children of the common Father. The poor, hard-working man and woman are found in that Church. It is an ancient Church. It was an ancient Church before the birth of Protestantism. It has cohesion and unity and continuity. The very fact of its great age is a proof of its providential purpose. It traces its descent to the founder of our common Christianity. The gates of hades have not been able to destroy it. It stands to-day a victor over the opposition of centuries. It is the strongest religious force in Christendom. Many reasons might be given for the success and power of this wonderful organisation. That Church believes sincerely and profoundly in the necessity for the salvation and happiness of men and women in this world and the next. It preaches this necessity and it acts accordingly. It does not neglect the religious education of its children, expecting them to grow up some way or other to be religious members of society. The keys of knowledge which that Church possesses are wisely used to admit the worthy into the kingdom of heaven, and to prepare them to seek that kingdom with consecrated hearts. Religious knowledge frees and strengthens the soul; but a religion that cannot command loyalty and consecration is worthless.

'In the Dark Ages it was the monks who kept the fire burning upon the altar of literature. Our divine and glorious Bible was guarded and saved by the Catholic Church for us. In England and in many other places the priest made the dying slave-owner emancipate his slaves. Its priests are consecrated workers. They sacrifice many things in order to minister at the altar. The Catholic Church has always favored education. Before the Reformation that Church had established colleges and other institutions of learning. Was not Luther educated in a Catholic college? The Catholic Church is the mother of all Protestant denominations. Why should not these children give gratitude, respect, and honor to that mother, who has done and is doing so much good for the world? It will not hurt our Protestantism to be grateful.'

In cases of attacks of Colic, Cramp, or Spasms, Evans's WITCH'S OIL will be found invaluable.—**