

CONCERNING MY CONVERSION

INTERESTING NARRATIVE BY A SYDNEY ANGLICAN

In the current issue of the *Australasian Catholic Record* Mr. Gordon Tidy, formerly an Anglican clergy, who was received into the Catholic Church early this year by the Very Rev. Father M. J. O'Reilly, Provincial of the Vincentian Fathers, gives the following account of his conversion:—

The cause of conversion, by which I mean its secondary cause, is not a subject which lends itself easily to expression. Even where some step or stage of such causation appears to make itself recognised, the mind is still oppressed by a consciousness of complexity. Piercing indeed must be his introspective and retrospective vision, who shall trace to its first faint dawn the full shining of faith's perfect day. For memory, if it be as interpretative as music, is often not less inarticulate, and much of the long chronicle of this secondary causation seems characterised upon the mind's diary in a keyless cipher, although no key would help the many passages that have been defaced or destroyed. I remember that I was once calling upon an Anglican clergyman who had been a preacher of great distinction. As I came into his study I noticed lying upon the floor a heap of those sermons which, in former years, had been amongst the sensations of London. I said that I should like to read them. But their preacher laughed, and told me that they were valueless, that he had advanced a great way since he wrote them, that he had long left them far behind. 'What are they?' he said, in his deep voice, as he looked down upon the pile of manuscripts scattered upon the carpet; 'what are they? the burnt-out embers of camp-fires.' 'Yes,' he continued, after a meditative pause, and seeming to speak to himself rather than to me, 'that is what they are—the camps where the wandering bushmen slept last night.' The phrase remains in my memory, 'the camps where the wandering bushmen slept last night.' Such signs and traces mark the onward travel of all of us, but to relate the story of the journey back from camp to camp would require more of both skill and time than some of us possess. And in these few pages I propose only to 'coast from headland to headland,' and that only with regard to the final stage of the itinerary, which ended with

Submission to the Catholic Church.

I have in my possession a collection of cuttings from newspapers of the early part of this present year (1911), which announce my conversion, and assign to me a place and label amongst the Anglican clergy. The labels do not all bear the same inscription, but I select the descriptive legend of 'Anglo-Catholic' as the one most pleasing to myself, and as at least not less unsuitable than any of the others. I daresay that my connection with St. James' Church, Sydney, and the fact that I travelled from Bathurst, where I was at the time in charge of the Cathedral, for the purpose of speaking at a meeting of the parishioners of St. James' on what has become so notorious as 'the Vestments question.' I daresay these facts had much to do with my being thus described by this term, as I say perfectly acceptable to myself, of Anglo-Catholic. Amongst the Anglo-Catholics I had for some time been sojourning, and with them it had been my hope, and something more than my hope, to find a home. But I was to learn that with me the position of the hero of Goldsmith's comedy was to be reversed. Charles Marlow mistook a home for an inn; I may be said to have mistaken an inn for a home.

I was present in St. James' Church on the last occasion when 'the vestments' were worn there. After the service was over I lingered in the empty church, feeling acutely all the pathos of the past. I realised as I looked upon the scene of so much association what Virgil meant by the tears of things. And as I came out into the, to me, so familiar sight of King street, in the cool, clear air of the early morning, and came down the oft-trodden steps, I remember that (for, as

was well known to some of my friends, my mind was already in movement), I found myself haunted by a passage in one of Mr. Augustine Birrell's essays, in which that fascinating writer speaks of an inquiry, and probably a final one, into

Certain Anglican Credentials.

The position seemed to me capable of a clear and concise statement. The clergy of St. James' parish had for a good many years worn 'the Vestments.' When Dr. Wright arrived in Sydney he found the parish vacant, that is to say, he found the parish without a Rector, and he found, therefore, also an opportunity for putting a stop to a practice which undoubtedly the Privy Council, appealed to upon the matter, had pronounced to be illegal. He addressed the people of St. James' parish upon the subject. He explained to them how the law upon the matter stood, and he declared his intention of taking care that within his jurisdiction the law should be kept. He said in brief that to wear the 'vestments' was to break the law, and that he could not permit the law to be broken. Furthermore, in an address to his Synod, he implied that 'the Vestments' had a doctrinal significance, that they 'connoted' a certain doctrine, and that that doctrine was not the doctrine of the Church of England. This doctrine he did not, in any report of this address which I have seen, define or even name, but from a quotation which he made, and from the general tendency of his remarks, he seemed to make it plain that he was in sympathy with those of his clergy, and of his laity, and these were numerous, who were accustomed, when making allusion to the illegal Vestments, to speak of them as 'the Mass Vestments,' or the Sacrificial Vestments.' To myself it appeared (and it is only of myself that I have now to speak) difficult, and even impossible, to vindicate the 'Branch Theory' of 'Anglo-Catholicism' unless unity by acceptance of the great central doctrine of Catholicity could be shown. And it had become my belief that such vindication of the 'Branch Theory' was to be found in what I believed to be a priest standing offering before an altar. Our claim to Catholicity, as I thought, demanded the doctrinal significance of the chasuble, and if it could be demonstrated that members of the Church of England had no right to this 'connotation' of the chasuble, or even to the chasuble at all, then I felt that I would not be justified in calling myself one of those members. The utterances and action of Dr. Wright brought me face to face with

What Seemed to me to be a Dilemma.

The Primate said that to wear 'the Vestments' was to break the law. He said also, or seemed to me to say also, that in his opinion these Vestments connoted doctrine, which was not the doctrine of what so many of his clergy, and of his laity, seem fond of describing as 'the Protestant and Reformed Church.'

Now, either the Primate was right, or he was wrong. If he were right how, with honesty, could I remain in the Church of England? If, on the other hand, he were wrong, then it would appear that the Church of England was a Church of so questionable a nature that it could appoint to be Archdeacon of Manchester and Archbishop of Sydney, one who was ignorant of the law that bound and of the doctrine that characterised the Church in which he was given such high and responsible position. It may indeed be thought by some that this latter of the difficulties presented by the dilemma by which I considered myself to be confronted, might be smothered or suffocated by that argumentative art for which Anglicanism in general and Anglo-Catholicism in particular are so justly famed. But whatever ingenuity might have accomplished in the matter was to be of no consequence to me, for it was the former horn of the dilemma upon which I was to find myself impaled. I may, perhaps, mention here that altogether apart from this dilemma, the old note of discord within the Church of England was now being struck with that arresting and annoying iteration which marks some of the methods of piano-tuners, and of piano-tuners whose feet are on the loud pedal. However, it is only of the very high