

# Why I Became a Catholic

By Arnold Lunn

"Roman Converts" had no sooner been published than my friends began to prophesy my conversion. I was much annoyed by the forecast, and replied petulantly to my father that I was just as likely to become a Buddhist as a Catholic. I was pained that those who betray any interest in Catholicism should be regarded with such deep distrust by their friends. When my book on John Wesley was published nobody suspected that I was on the road to becoming a Wesleyan. When I attacked scientists and secularists I was not anxiously asked if I was contemplating joining the Rationalist Press Association.

But perhaps even those who are most anti-Catholic are subconsciously aware of the fact that Catholicism is attractive because Catholicism is true. It is difficult, on any other hypothesis, to explain the widespread conviction that an interest in Rome is a danger signal, and that safety can only be assured by resolutely ignoring Catholicism.

The fact is, as Mr. Chesterton has pointed out, that it is impossible to be fair to Catholicism.

You can either accept, attack or ignore Catholicism. The one thing you cannot do is to be fair to the Faith without steadily diminish-

The conversion story of Arnold Lunn, the brilliant English author, will appear in four parts and is taken from the book "Now I See." Mr. Lunn's book is one of the best of the convert biographies and is highly recommended as a "must" for every Catholic library. Mr. Lunn wrote "Roman Converts" and "Difficulties," the latter with Msgr. Ronald Knox as a spirited antagonist to the Catholic Church. Later he wrote "Is Christianity True?" with C. E. M. Joad, an agnostic, as a spirited defender of Christianity. "Now I See" is a spirited defense of Catholicity. "Now I See" may be ordered from Sheed and Ward, 63 Fifth Ave., New York 3, N. Y. at \$2.50. These chapters reprinted with the permission of Sheed and Ward.

ing the distance which separates you from the Faith.

I remember discussing the questions of "suasions" with Father Knox just after we had finished correcting the proofs of our joint book, "Difficulties." "I wonder," I said, "how far I should allow myself to be influenced by prejudice in favour of Catholic culture." "At the worst," said Father Knox, "such a prejudice would only counteract your prejudices against Catholicism." "But I've never been prejudiced against Catholicism," I replied indignantly. "On the contrary, Catholicism has always attracted me. Of course I used to think that the intellectual case for Catholicism was fantastic, but."

"I think that might fairly be described as a prejudice," said Father Knox mildly. "I suppose it

might," I conceded.

This little talk set me thinking. Nobody will admit without a struggle that he is prejudiced against anything. Such an admission is distressing to one's vanity. One likes to believe that one's views on all subjects from the Pope to Bolsheviks are the product of calm, dispassionate reasoning on the available evidence. Was it really true, I began to wonder, that Protestant dissuasions were as potent as Catholic suasions. Was it really possible that the suasions and dissuasions could cancel each other out, leaving reason free to record an objective verdict on the available evidence?

Non-Catholics are perplexed to explain the conversion of intelligent people to the fantastic superstition of popery, and seek a solution to this problem by emphasizing some trivial "suasion." I know that I am playing into the hands of such critics by admitting that my prejudices against Catholicism were to some extent offset by "suasions."

The Catholic Church from the moment that I began to realize its existence, appealed to me because it was universal. I was not prejudiced against Catholicism merely because the Pope is an Italian.

Furthermore, I was influenced by the fact that the happiest moments in my youth were those when I watched the cliffs of Dover fading away into the distance, and the most wretched those when I returned from the Alps to England. Even today I feel a sense of homecoming when I cross the Swiss frontier. I soon discovered that Catholicism was the religion of Europe and that Swiss Protestantism was an exotic growth with no roots in the soil. The bleak Zwinglianism of the Grindelwald Parish Church, to which I was taken as a boy, was even more depressing than the Low Church services at Roxeth. Protestantism, I discovered, increases in dullness as it departs from Catholic tradition. I have often enjoyed Anglican services, but I have always been depressed in the temples of Continental Protestantism. Even as a boy I felt instinctively that the rudest Catholic chapel in the remotest of Alpine glens enshrined the poetry of religion, a poetry

which has been effectively banished from the temples of Luther and Zwingli. Even as a boy I revolted against what Tyrrell described as "the pendency of a purely reasonable religion that would abolish the luxuriant wealth of symbolism in favor of 'the ministry of the word.'"

As the years passed by, this particular suasion became more potent. Every time I passed on foot or on ski or in a car from a Protestant into a Catholic valley I felt an odd sense of home-coming. The Catholic Church was home, the natural home of the human race.

Catholicism has assimilated all that is worth preserving from the older religions, and Apollo has made his submission to the Church. It is, indeed, very proper that dawn and sunrise and spring should not pass unnoticed by the Church, that the faithful should be reminded with due ceremonial that it is their duty to give praise to the Lord and Giver of Life.

A casual encounter with Catholicism in a remote Alpine glen strengthened this particular suasion. I had crossed a glacier pass just before the dawn, starting early, for the damp clouds pregnant with solvent energy threatened avalanches on the lower slopes. It was April, and the remnants of old avalanches still thrust their discolored deltas, black with earth and trees torn from the mountain side, far into fields carpeted with gentians and soldanella. Not easily is spring delivered from the womb of the Alpine winter.

We passed a hill chapel, and some obscure instinct moved me to enter. I remember thinking that Easter must mean far less to the lowlander than to those for whom this festival synchronizes with the resurrection of colour from the tomb of the winter snows, the winter in which in these lofty Alpine valleys begins in November and ends in April.

Mass was being sung as I entered. The worshippers were peasants on whom the hard life of the Alps had left its mark. There was no colour in their clothes, and little colour in their faces, but there was a feast of colour in the church. The decoration was crude and barbaric, but even the waxen doll, adorned with tinsel, which represented the Blessed Virgin, did not jar. A religion which is catholic in its appeal cannot cater for high-brows alone. I felt much as Tyrrell felt on a similar occasion, "Here was the old business being carried on by the old firm in the old way; here was continuity that took one back to the catacombs. Here was no need of, and therefore no suspicion of, pose of theatrical parade. Its aesthetic blemishes were its very beauties to me in that mood."

Ritualism, as such, irritated Tyrrell, but he was prepared to tolerate it where, as in the Mass, it had ceased to be self-conscious. The sturdiest of Protestants instinctively removes his hat on entering a church, a movement which is no more natural and no less self-conscious than the movements of the priest at the Mass. Like Tyrrell, I come of Anglo-Irish stock, and like most Anglo-Irishmen, I have some difficulty in understanding the Englishman's passion for ritual.

The Englishman not only enjoys

## STRANGE BUT TRUE Little Known Facts for Catholics

BY M. J. MURRAY

N. C. W. C. News Service

**An 18th Century AIRSHIP**  
This is a copy of the design for an airship made by the Brazilian Priest, BARTHOLOMEW DE GUSMAN in 1709  
NO 1 SHOWS THE SAILS WITH (2) THE RULLES AND ROPE TO HOIST OR FURL THEM. AT (3) ARE BELLOWS "TO BE BLOWN WHEN THERE IS NO WIND" AT (4) ARE WINGS TO KEEP THE SHIP BALANCED. NO 5 IS THE RUDDER.

A Century ago one of the historic Abbey Church at Bath, England, was used as a public highway!

**Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-82)**  
used to play the TAMBOURINE and FLUTE on Feast Days  
THESE INSTRUMENTS ARE STILL PRESERVED IN THE MONASTERY OF SANTA JOSEPH OF AVILA, SPAIN.

**"APOSTLE" SPOON**  
SO CALLED BECAUSE OF THE DESIGN OF AN APOSTLE ON TOP OF THE HANDLE — ARE AGAIN BECOMING POPULAR AS CHRISTENING GIFTS. It is usual to present a complete set of 12. (SHAKESPEARE REFERS TO THEM IN KING HENRY VIII)

The Vulgate Edition is the "VULGAR" or common edition of the Bible prepared by Saint Jerome which but slowly supplanted the old Latin edition used from earliest times.

ritual; he is extremely good at it. Those who understand such matters tell me that Masonic ritual is nowhere more effectively performed than in English lodges. Ritual has seldom found more noble expression than in the tribute which England pays to that Unknown Soldier who redeemed the blunders of the great. This burial of that Unknown Soldier, and the two minutes' silence of the Cenotaph, were the invention not of Catholic countries but of Protestant John Bull. John Bull likes to pose as a sturdy Protestant with a common-sense contempt for effeminate ritual, but, as Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith once remarked to me, the English are Catholic by temperament, and have discovered in the ceremonial of the Cenotaph a Protestant substitute for prayers for the dead.

The Englishman does not dislike ritual, he dislikes irregular ritual. He will protest against Anglo-Catholic ritualism, but will spend a happy evening indulging in Masonic ritual, and will be deeply moved, as he well may be, by the magnificent ritual of a military funeral.

It was certainly no hankering for Catholic ceremonial which brought me into the Church. Indeed, the obligation to hear Mass every Sunday was one of the minor dissuasions. In the quarter of a century which elapsed between leaving school and becoming a Catholic, I averaged two or three church attendances a year. When I was at Oxford, a convert to Catholicism, Lady Muriel Watkins, made me a sporting offer. She promised to take me to a matinee for every Mass which I attended in her company. The result of this bargain was that I went to Mass about six times, and I am grateful to Lady Muriel for the memory of a striking sermon by Father Hugh Benson, whom I should otherwise never see or hear. Naturally, after I had asked Father Knox to receive me, I regarded myself as bound by the obligations of the Catholic life, but prior to that I had not been to Mass, on my own initiative, more than two or three times in my life.

It was not Catholic ceremonial, but Catholic continuity which appealed to me. Catholicism was everywhere the same, branches of one great tree, the seed of which was sown in the catacombs. But Protestantism changed its shape

from one valley to the next. Lutherans here, Zwinglians there, and Calvinists beyond the next hill barrier. Protestantism is a collection of sects, Catholicism the home of our race.

It was not until I had left Oxford that I began to read Ruskin. *The Stones of Venice*, as I shall show in a later chapter, is a reluctant apologetic for Catholicism.

Ruskin's own religious development illustrates the potency of Catholic suasions and Protestant dissuasions. His whole way of thinking led him inevitably to the threshold of the Church, and there he stopped. He discovered that "all beautiful prayers were Catholic—all wise interpretations of the Bible Catholic;— and every manner of Protestant written services whatsoever either insolently altered corruptions, or washed-out and ground-down rags and debris of the great Catholic collects, litanies and songs of praise."

But in reply to the question, "Why did not you become a Catholic at once, then?" Ruskin could only answer, "It might as well be asked, Why did not I become a fire-worshipper? I could become nothing but what I was, or was growing into. I no more believed in the living Pope than I did in the living Khan of Tartary."

This is no answer, but a peevish, emotional reaction, the petulant protest of the Protestantism in which he has ceased to believe, but which is still powerful enough to thwart and stunt his religious growth. Catholic suasions either break down all resistance and result in conversion, or tend to render all other avenues of religious approach impossible. One turns back from the threshold of the Church, but one does not return to the faith of one's youth. Not so easily is the mind which has seen the best satisfied with the second best. It was so with Mallock and it was so with Ruskin. In a memorable passage, which I quote because it is too little known, he describes his final emancipation from the dour evangelical beliefs in which he had been reared. The scene of this deliverance was in Turin.

"There, one Sunday morning, I made my way in the south suburb to a little chapel which, by a dusty roadside, gathered to its unobserved door the few sheep of the old (Continued on Page 8)

### North Carolina Catholic Mother of 1947

Most Rev. Vincent S. Waters,  
Bishop of Raleigh  
15 N. McDowell St.  
Raleigh

I nominate for the N. C. Catholic Mother of 1947:

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