

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CONVERTS

FROM the very earliest settlement of this country there have been a series of conversions to the Catholic faith. The wife of the illustrious Champlain, the founder of Quebec, was originally a Huguenot, but she, with her brother, an able navigator, became a Catholic, and after her husband's death she entered an Ursuline convent in France, where she died in the highest esteem for sanctity.

The oldest convent in the United States is the Ursuline Convent at New Orleans, founded in 1726. The first superior, who brought a little community across the Atlantic from France, was Mlle. de Tranchepain, a convert from Protestantism.

When Maryland was settled, many of the colonists were Protestants, but, with the opportunity of seeing the life of Catholics, and studying their doctrines, many applied to the Jesuit Fathers for instruction and were received into the Church. As soon as Protestants gained power, the Catholic religion was proscribed, but conversions continued. We have a curious Protestant testimony to the fact.

In 1697 Maryland was scourged with what is recorded as a "violent and raging mortality." The Catholic priests faced all dangers, and not only hastened to the members of their own flock, but to Protestants as well, many of whom asked to be received into a Church which could inspire such devotedness.

New Englanders who reached Canada and could see Catholicity dispassionately, were frequently converted. The presence in this country of the French army, with its chaplains and the Mass openly offered with dignity, during the Revolutionary war, produced a deep impression on many, who began to study and pray. Thomas Sim Lee, a patriot of those days, was Governor of Maryland during the latter part of the revolutionary war. He also served in the continental Congress and in the convention that framed the Constitution of the United States. He opened his eyes to the truth and was received into the Church. His eminent services to the State were not unappreciated and he was elected Governor.

Rev. John Thayer, a Congregational minister of Boston, was in Rome when the Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre died. The miracles wrought at his bier were the talk of all circles. A party of English and Americans were ridiculing the whole affair when a Catholic challenged any one of them to go and examine the evidence and come back with an honest report. Thayer undertook it, and was so astonished at the evidence he met that he sought instruction, became a Catholic, and entered the Seminary of St. Sulpice. The American who went abroad as a Protestant minister came home a Catholic priest. One great object of his life was to establish a house of religious women in Boston, and the Ursuline Convent at Charlestown was due mainly to him. The account of his conversion led many to the truth.

The Sisters of Charity in the United States owe their origin to a convert. Mrs. Eliza Bayley Seton, wife of a New York merchant, accompanied her invalid husband to Italy. Protestantism did not satisfy the yearning of her heart for certainty of doctrine and for a faith that could show spiritual life and good works. Catholicity as she beheld it offered this, and returning a widow she abjured heresy, and founded the American Sisters of Charity.

Rev. John Richards was a Methodist minister, sent to the western part of New York and upper Canada. He found that the Catholic Church had great influence, and he went to Montreal to convert the Sulpicians. He died many years after in that city during a terrible ship fever, attending the sick with the greatest devotedness, for he was a Catholic priest and a Sulpician.

The Rev. Daniel Barber, an old Revolutionary soldier, became an Episcopal minister, but his mind was not at ease. He found rest in the Catholic Church. His son, also a minister, followed his example, with his wife and children. He himself became a priest in the Society of Jesus, his wife a Visitation nun, and every one of their children embraced the religious life.

Rev. Maximilian Oertel was a Lutheran minister in Prussia, clinging strongly to the old Christian school; alarmed at the attempt of the King to force the Lutherans to unite with the Calvinists, he embarked for America with a great number of his parishioners. He hoped to find Lutheranism pure and zealous in this country; but to his dismay saw that there was little left of it but the name. He looked around for a Church which retained the doctrines that he felt were fundamental, and as there was none but the Catholic, he sought refuge in its bosom. He established the first German Catholic paper in this country and for many years was thus the means of guarding Catholics against errors and aiding them to know and maintain their faith.

Joshua Young was a printer in a newspaper office in Maine. There was a Catholic among the compositors, and of course he was often twitted about his religion. He was always able to give a good account of his religion. Young saw that his religion was not a mere Sunday affair, that it influenced his whole life. Joshua became his friend and began to ask about his religion. He received explanations and borrowed books. After a time there was another Catholic in that office, but before long he laid down his composing-stick and went away to study. Joshua Maria Young died Roman Catholic Bishop of Erie.

Two movements in America—the Connecticut movement among the Episcopalians, and the Oxford movement which extended to this country—led many to see and receive the Catholic truth.

The most eminent among the converts were Dr. Levi Silliman Ives, who had been the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina and Rev. James Roosevelt Bayley, who died Archbishop of Baltimore. One day Dr. Ives was invited to dinner by Rev. Charles C. Fise of St. Charles Borromeo's Church in Brooklyn. Donald McLeod, a mutual friend, afterwards a priest and professor at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Cincinnati, was also a guest. After making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the Church, McLeod said: "Doctor, do you remember when we last met here?" Dr. Ives stopped for a moment to recall his thoughts and exclaimed:

"Oh! the mercy of God! The last time I was here was when I, as a Protestant bishop, ordained you an Episcopal minister, and now Bishop, minister and church are all Catholic, thanks be to God!" And it was really the case.

One of the most influential converts from the Episcopal Church was James A. McMaster, a friend and supporter of Carey in the Episcopal Seminary. With others they had studied the faith of the earlier centuries of the Church, and had returned to many Catholic truths. Carey passed his examinations and was ordained a minister, by the Protestant bishop Onderdonk, against the protest of some of the ministers. Mr. McMaster was by a stratagem sent off to study some branch in which he was deemed deficient. He studied St. Thomas Aquinas, and never sought orders in the Episcopal church; he went to a holy Redemptorist priest, who, finding him convinced and instructed, sought rather to bring to discipline an impetuous will, impatient of authority. Mr. McMaster, as a Catholic, became the editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, exercising a large influence.

Orestes A. Brownson, a man of most vigorous philosophical mind, had broken away from the trammels of New England Protestantism; but it was not enough to cast out error; he sought the truth. To him it soon became a question of Church or no Church. Nothing on earth represented the Church, teaching by divine authority, except the Catholic; and while editing a review that was read with respect in England and America, he went to the Bishop of Boston and began to learn the Catholic Catechism.

When preparing to hold the Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, the great Pope Pius IX. issued an invitation to the Protestant bodies, urging the descendants of those led away three centuries ago to return to the faith. Many derided the kindly call of the Vicar of Christ. The Rev. James Kent Stone, President of Hobart and Kenyon Colleges, read it, thought and prayed. The truth that comes to many, that the so-called Reformation was radically wrong, came clearly to him. He became a Catholic, and in his Invitation Heeded justified his course.

A Catholic priest at Milton, England, was greatly annoyed by the Protestant minister of his place who was constantly around among his poor people. Some years afterwards business required him to visit New York and he came with letters to Archbishop Hughes. When the door was opened a priest advanced to meet him; to his amazement he recognised in him his old opponent, Doctor Neligan, who had given him so much trouble in England, but who was now a zealous Catholic missionary in America.

Among other prominent converts may be noted Peter H. Burnet, Governor of California, Dr. McLouzhlu, head of the Hudson Bay Company, Hon. Thomas Ewing of the United States Senate, Gen. Rosecrans, Gen. Newton, Gen. Stone, S. S. Haldeman, the philologist, Dr. J. V. Huntington, General Hill, and many others who as clergymen and bishops have been eminent, like Archbishops Whitfield, Eccleston, Wood, Bishops Tyley, Rosecrans, Gilmour, Wadhams, Monsignors Preston, Doane, son of an Episcopal Bishop, Father Isaac T. Hecker, editor of the *Catholic World*, and founder of the community of Paulist Fathers, many of whose members are also converts, Mr. Wolff, editor of the *Catholic Standard*, and Messrs. Beckwith, Wreckmann, and others who have given their talents to Catholic journalism.—Exchange.

Oh, how refreshing, palatable and reviving is a draught of cool water with American Hop Bitters in it to a fever patient. See.

New York, Aug. 5.—A dispatch to the *Tribune* from Baltimore says: A few miles south of Marlboro is a chasm spanned by an open trestle bridge about sixty feet high. Yesterday afternoon as a passenger train sped round the curve nearing the bridge the engineer was horrified to see a woman crossing it on the railroad track, carrying in her arms an infant and leading by the hand a child of perhaps three years. The engineer at once applied the air-brakes and blew the danger signals. She heard the train approaching, turned and looked at it, and saw the horror of her situation, in one quick glance. To jump from the bridge would be to find death in the water. To remain where she was a few seconds longer would be to meet instant death. Several persons near the track at the time, who saw the situation, made signs to the engineer to stop, but he was powerless, although he struggled until the sweat stood out in great drops from every pore. Then he rushed forward towards the front of the locomotive with the intention of essaying the daring feat of seizing the woman and dragging her to the cowcatcher. At this moment the woman caught both children in one arm. With the other she firmly seized one of the ties on which the track is laid and swung herself between the ties below the bridge, and the train passed over her. As soon as the train could be stopped the conductor and brakeman rushed back to the spot where the woman was seen to disappear. They found her clinging to the ties with one arm and holding her two little ones with the other. From this perilous position they were soon rescued.

A correspondent writes to the *Madras Mail*:—In addition to several letters, recently published in your paper, concerning cruelty to animals, I may say that another very cruel and inhuman act or ceremony is, I believe, carried on in the interior of Mysore, and in other parts of India where Brinjarees (Indian gipsies) exist. The account which I am about to relate would not have been known had it not been for a near relative of mine (well versed in the Cauarese language) who entered into conversation with a Brinjaree woman and questioned her as to her religion. She said that her race were worshippers of Mari or Kali, and that once a year, according to their belief, they had to sacrifice a human being whom they clandestinely captured during their peregrinations. On the day of the sacrifice they all assembled and buried the individual alive up to his or her neck, in a standing position, placed a temporary burning lamp made of cowdung on the victim's head. After performing some ceremonies and hideous feats around the victim, and after invoking their deity, their priest or guru, with a sharp knife (broad-bladed), severed the head from the trunk. I should like to know from any of your readers if such an act of human sacrifice is carried on now.