

**CONFESSIONS OF A
CONVERT, PP. 1-162**

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Confessions of a Convert, pp. 1-162 by Robert Hugh Benson

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ROBERT HUGH BENSON

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CONFESSIONS OF A CONVERT

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DEDICATED TO
FATHER REGINALD BUCKLER, O.P.
WHOSE HAND UNLOCKED FOR ME THE GATE OF THE
CITY OF GOD AND LED ME IN

MEMBER

P R E F A C E

THE following chapters were first published, in substance, in the American Catholic magazine, the "Ave Maria," in 1906-1907, and it is by the kind permission of the Editor, Father Hudson, that they are now reprinted, with a few additions and corrections.

During the time that has elapsed since their serial appearance, the writer has received a very large number of applications that they should be issued in book form; and after long hesitation, he has acceded to these requests. He hesitated partly because it appeared to him really doubtful whether their issue would be of any real service at all, partly because he occasionally contemplated adding considerably to them, and annexing to them further "confessions of a convert" since his conversion. This latter idea, however, he has abandoned for the present, owing to the extraordinary difficulty he has found in drawing any real comparisons between the rapidly fading impression of Anglicanism upon his memory, and the continually deepening experi-

ences of the Catholic religion. Cardinal Newman compares, somewhere, the sensations of a convert from Anglicanism to those of a man in a fairy story, who, after wandering all night in a city of enchantment, turns after sunrise to look back upon it, and finds to his astonishment that the buildings are no longer there; they have gone up like wraiths and mists under the light of the risen day. So the present writer has found. He no longer, as in the first months of his conversion, is capable of comparing the two systems of belief together, since that which he has left appears to him no longer a coherent system at all. There are, of course, associations, memories, and emotions still left in his mind — some of them very sacred and dear to his heart; he still is happy in numbering among his friends many persons who still find amongst those associations and memories a system which they believe to be the religion instituted by Jesus Christ; yet he himself can no longer see in them anything more than hints and fragments and aspirations detached from their centre and reconstructed into a purely human edifice without foundation or solidity. Yet he is conscious of no bitterness at all — at the worst he experiences sometimes a touch of impatience merely at the thought of having been delayed so

PREFACE

ix

long by shadows from the possession of divine substance. He cannot, however, with justice, compare the two systems at all; one cannot, adequately, compare a dream with a reality. He has abandoned, therefore, the attempt — which lack of leisure in any case would make practically useless — to place side by side with his drowsy memories of Anglicanism the story of his vivid adventures under the sunlight of Eternal Truth. And he publishes the history of that long-drawn process whereby he passed from the one to the other, purely on the advice of numerous friends and inquirers. He is conscious of the appalling egotism of such pages as these; yet he has still to learn how an autobiography can be written without it.

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

EDINBURGH, November, 1912.

CONFESIONS OF A CONVERT

I

WHEN one stands at last upon high ground, it is extraordinarily difficult to trace the road behind by which one has approached: it winds, rises, falls, broadens, and narrows, until the mind is bewildered. Nor indeed do the comments of friends and critics shouted from below tend to clear the situation.

§1. I have been told that I became a Catholic because I was dispirited at failure and because I was elated at success; because I was imaginative and because I was unperceptive; because I was not hopeful enough and because I was too hopeful, faithless and too trusting, too ardent and too despairing, proud and pusillanimous. I have even been told, since the first publication of these papers, that I have never truly understood the Church of England. Of course that is possible; but, if so, it is certainly not for lack of opportunity. I was brought up, as will be seen presently, in an ecclesiastical household for twenty-five years; I was a clergyman for nine years, in town and country and a Religious House. My father was the spiritual