

## *FOREWORD*

**Charles A. Coulombe**

You hold in your hand a very remarkable book by a very remarkable man. John Hobson Matthews (1858-1914), was born in Croydon, Surrey. His mother, Emma Hobson, was a native of the fishing port of Grimsby in Lincolnshire; his father, John T. Matthews, came from an old Cornish family in St. Ives. At 18 years of age, he went to Malta to work with a shipping firm; a year later—inspired by the culture he saw around him, he converted to Catholicism. By the time he returned to England in 1883, he was fluent in Maltese—a very difficult language to learn, being closer to Phoenician than any remaining tongue. Six years later he became a solicitor, moved to Cardiff, Wales, and in 1892 married Alice Mary Gwyn-Hughes, by whom Matthews had six children.

Save for his conversion and acquisition of Maltese, his biography thus far seems conventional. But after his return to Britain, he learned the already extinct Cornish of his ancestors and the related Welsh of his new home. From thenceforth, the spread of the Catholic Faith, revival of Celtic culture and languages, and the history of both Wales and Cornwall became his driving passions. Matthews was very active in the foundation of the Catholic Records Society in 1906, the Catholic Federations of Westminster and of both England and Wales, of the St. Teilo Society—

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expressly concerned with the conversion of Wales to the Faith, and was named a bard of the Royal National Eistedfodd of Wales—the latter in tribute to his ability to write fine Welsh poetry. Matthews translated a number of Catholic works into Welsh, wrote pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society with titles such as *Continuity Reconsidered* and *The Old Faith and the New*, and a history of St. Ives—as well as the article on “Wales” for the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. He was made archivist for both the City of Cardiff and the County of Monmouthshire, and edited collections based upon their records—and began to do the same for Herefordshire when death claimed him. He belonged and lectured to numerous historical and archaeological societies, as well as being a journalist, writing for such newspapers as the *Tablet*. Matthews’ scholarship was renowned amongst both Catholics and non-Catholics, and he had the facility for showing the relevance of the historic for present day issues.

The truth is that Matthews stood at the confluence of several interesting movements—all of which had come out of the Romantic movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; it is sometimes characterised as a revolt (against the so-called “Enlightenment”—the Age of Reason that produced torrents of blood unequalled until the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and at others as a revival (of interest in the Middle Ages). Either or both are true descriptions of a large and amorphous movement, spearheaded in these United States by Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne, and in Britain by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott. The British version led to a renewal of interest in the Middle Ages, from whence came Neo-Gothic architecture, the Oxford Movement and

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Anglo-Catholicism, the specifically Roman Catholic revival, and the rebirth of national consciousness among the Celtic peoples (Irish, Scots, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Bretons). Together with the intense literacy of the Victorian Age (far fewer people finished secondary school in those days, but those who did were far more versed in say, Latin and Greek than most of our Ph.Ds), you have the intellectual forces that produced John Hobson Matthews.

All of this learning did he pass into *The Mass and Its Folklore*. I myself first read of it in the extensive introduction to Fr. Lasance's *New Roman Missal*: "A very interesting and instructive little book on the Most Holy Sacrifice and its ceremonies is *The Mass and Its Folklore*, by John Hobson Matthews." The good cleric then goes on to quote a large number of paragraphs from the book, which well serve to round out his own very fine notes on the liturgy. The one which particularly caught my teenaged imagination (already in love with King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Chivalry in general) was this: "No one who has read the old Welsh and English tales, on which Tennyson founded his Arthurian idylls, can have failed to be struck with their frequent allusions to the Mass: King Arthur's knights, good, bad, and indifferent, all turn in to wayside chapels to hear Mass, as naturally as in the present day their descendants would enter the newsrooms of their various clubs." I resolved to read the original as soon as ever I could.

In those far-off days, now 40 years gone, that meant interlibrary loan. But what a feast for my mind when it finally arrived! For Matthews deals with the love of the peoples of Britain for the Mass both during the Ages of

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Faith and the horrors of the Penal Times, when attendance as often as not could mean prison for the laity and death for the priest. To read this intoxicating material at a time (the 70s of the last century) when liturgical life was at perhaps its lowest ebb in Catholic America was both a balm to the soul and an inspiration to keep the Faith when everyone—lay and cleric alike—appeared to be doing their best to lose it.

Things are somewhat better now, and the form of the Mass that Matthews and Fr. Lasance so extolled is far more widely available than could have been imagined in those far-off days. But there is so much more to be done in the work of Catholic reconstruction, and it is a work that shall take all our strength of soul, mind, and often enough, body. This little book can be a powerful inspiration to do so, and I am very grateful to Tumbler House for doing so. May it give everyone who reads it the same innumerable benefits it has given me.

Charles A. Coulombe  
Monrovia, California  
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## *PREFACE*

There are many good and popular English books on the Mass. Some of them treat the subject after the manner of a *Rationale*, explaining the significance of the prayers and ceremonies of the Eucharistic rite; others are historical and antiquarian, and elucidate the origin and evolution of the ceremonial—while of devotional works there is no end. It appeared, however, that there was room for a short treatise on the folklore and minor antiquities of the Mass; by which are meant the various aspects and the numerous details of the Holy Sacrifice which have so impressed the minds of Catholics in the past as to leave permanent traces in the popular traditions and speech. The aim of this little book is to stimulate love for the Mass by showing how it was valued by our ancestors in the ages of faith, and what our predecessors in the penal times willingly suffered for its sake.

The Church, being the Catholic Church, has many ways of leading her children along the pathway to heaven. Her chief effort, the primary object of her existence, is to secure the salvation of all men by every means in her power. And since the collective human mind comprises an infinite variety in intellect, character, temperament, imagination and taste, the Church (making herself “all things to all men”) adapts with like diversity the forces which she brings to bear upon mankind, including her ritual, her discipline and her methods of worship both public and private.

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At the same time, there can be no doubt that the spirit of antiquity strongly permeates the services of the Catholic Church—the most conservative institution on earth, as well as the most democratic—and that those are entirely in harmony with the genius of Catholicism who are animated with a profound reverence for the pomp and solemnity of the Church's public offices, and with a tender love for even the most homely religious traditions and practices of our Catholic forefathers.

While some of us may be more attracted by the Church's conservatism and others by her vigorous modernity, we are all bound to respect equally Catholic antiquity and papal sanction. Both these authorities of the highest kind—are, in fact, identical. Rome permits no deviation from the Catholic standard in her devotions, and the freshest flowers in her “garden of the soul” have their roots deep down in the rich soil of the Church's past.

Cardiff, Feast of St David, 1903.