

pupils made about him.

But it was difficult not to hear any more. On my arrival home I found my uncle and aunt engaged in a very warm debate on the subject. My uncle wished to conceal the fact that he was among those who had whipped him. But he gave the details so precisely, he was so merry over the adventure, that it was easy to see that he had a hand in the plot. My aunt was indignant, and used the most energetic expressions to show her disapprobation.

That bitter debate annoyed me so that I did not stay long to hear it all. I withdrew to my study.

During the remainder of the day I changed my resolution many times about going to the secret meeting in the evening. At one moment I would decide firmly not to go. My conscience told me that, as usual, things would be uttered which it was not good for me to hear. I had refused to go to the two last meetings, and a silent voice, as it were, told me I had done well. Then a moment after I was tormented by the desire to know precisely what had taken place the evening before. The flagellation of a priest in the midst of a large village was a fact too worthy of note to fail to excite the curiosity of a child. Besides, my aversion to the priest, though I concealed it as well as I could, made me wish to know whether everything was true on the subject of the chastisement. But in the struggle between good and evil which took place in my mind during that day, the evil was finally to triumph. A quarter of an hour before the meeting my friend came to me and said:

"Make haste, the members of the association are coming."

At this call all my good resolutions vanished. I hushed the voice of my conscience, and a few minutes later I was placed in an angle of that little room, where for more than two hours I learned many strange and scandalous things about the lives of the priests of Canada.

Dr. Tache presided. He opened the meeting in a low tone of voice. At the beginning of his discourse I had some difficulty to understand what he said. He spoke as one who feared to be overheard when disclosing a secret to a friend. But after a few preliminary sentences he forgot the rule of prudence which he had imposed upon himself, and spoke with energy and power.

Mr. Etienne Tache was naturally eloquent. He seemed to speak on no question except under the influence of the deepest conviction of its truth. His speech was passionate, and the tone of his voice clear and agreeable. His short and cutting sentences did not

reach the ear only; they penetrated even the secret folds of the soul. He spoke in substance as follows:

"Gentlemen:—I am happy to see you here more numerous than ever. The grave events of last night have, no doubt, decided many of you to attend debates which some began to forsake, but the importance of which, it seems to me, increases day by day.

"The question debated in our last meeting—'The Priests'—is one of life and death, not only for our young and beautiful Canada, but in a moral point of view it is a question of life and death for our families, and for every one of us in particular.

"There is, I know, only one opinion among us on the subject of priests; and I am glad that this opinion is not only that of all educated men in Canada, but also of learned France; nay, of the whole world. The reign of the priest is the reign of ignorance, of corruption, and of the most barefaced immorality, under the mask of the most refined hypocrisy. The reign of the priest is the death of our schools; it is the degradation of our wives, the prostitution of our daughters; it is the reign of tyranny—the loss of liberty.

"We have only one good school, I will not say in St. Thomas, but in all our county. This school in our midst is a great honor to our village. Now see the energy with which all the priests who come here work for the closing of that school. They use every means to destroy that focus of light which we have started with so much difficulty, and which we support by so many sacrifices.

"With the priest of Rome our children do not belong to us; he is their master. Let me explain. The priest honors us with the belief that the bodies, the flesh and bones of our children, are ours, and that our duty in consequence is to clothe and feed them. But the nobler and more sacred part, namely, the intellect, the heart, the soul, the priest claims as his own patrimony, his own property. The priest has the audacity to tell us that to him alone it belongs to enlighten those intelligences, to form those hearts, to fashion those souls as it may best suit him. He has the impudence to tell us that we are too silly or perverse to know our duties in this respect. We have not the right of choosing our school teachers. We have not the right to send a single ray of light into those intellects, or to give to those souls who hunger and thirst after truth a single crumb of that food prepared with so much wisdom and success by enlightened men of all ages.

"By the confessional the priests poison the springs of life in our children. They initiate them into such mysteries of iniquity

as would terrify old galley slaves. By their questions they reveal to them secrets of a corruption such as carries its germs of death into the very marrow of their bones, and that from the earliest years of their infancy. Before I was fifteen years old I had learned more real blackguardism from the mouth of my confessor than I have learned ever since in my studies and in my life as a physician for twenty years.

"A few days ago I questioned my little nephew, Louis Cazeault, upon what he had learned in his confession. He answered me ingenuously, and repeated things to me which I would be ashamed to utter in your presence, and which you, fathers of families, could not listen to without blushing. And just think, that not only of little boys are those questions asked, but also of our dear little girls. Are we not the most degraded of men if we do not set ourselves to work in order to break the iron yoke under which the priest keeps our dear country, and by means of which he keeps us, with our wives and children, at his feet like vile slaves!

"While speaking to you on the deleterious effect of the confessional upon our children, shall I forget its effect upon our wives and upon ourselves? Need I tell you that, for most women, the confessional is a rendezvous of coquetry and of love? Do you not feel as I do myself, that by means of the confessional the priest is more the master of the hearts of our wives than ourselves? Is not the priest the private and public confidant of our wives? Do not our wives go invariably to the feet of the priest, opening to him what is most sacred and intimate in the secrets of our lives as husbands and as fathers? The husband belongs no more to his wife as her guide through the dark and difficult paths of life: it is the priest! We are no more their friends and natural advisers. Their anxieties and their cares they do not confide to us. They do not expect from us the remedies for the miseries of this life. Towards the priest they turn their thoughts and desires. He has their entire and exclusive confidence. In a word, it is the priest who is the real husband of our wives! It is he who has the possession of their respect and of their hearts to a degree to which no one of us need ever aspire.

"Were the priest an angel, were he not made of flesh and bones just as we are, were not his organization absolutely the same as our own, then might we be indifferent to what might take place between him and our wives, whom he has at his feet, in his hands—even more, in his heart. But what does my experience tell me, not only as a physician, but also as a citizen of St. Thomas? What does yours tell you? Our experienœ