

## THE STORY OF A CONVERT.

THE LIGHT OF FAITH.

Our dear Lord knew that I was sincerely seeking the truth, and ready to receive it when found. He had given me to understand that by a certain sign I would know His Church, and now through this blessed woman He made known to me, in His own good time, that this sign was made manifest in the holy Roman Catholic Church. That through all time, and adown the ages, it was given her to prove her sacred mission as the depository of the one true faith, through miraculous power.

And this saintly woman, so favored of God, who had been sent to me as a torch-bearer, through whom my soul was to receive the light of faith, was none other than the venerated Mrs. Mattingly.

The story of the miraculous cure of this saintly woman, proven by the most unimpeachable concurrent testimony collected or published by Bishop England, as well as made known through various other credible sources, will be handed down to future generations as among the most precious traditions of the Church in America.

It was indeed a privilege to hear the recital from her own lips. Her simplicity of manner, so devoid of any attempt at dramatic effect, brought with it an indefinable but entire conviction of the absolute truth of every word she uttered.

As she began her story, she took from her girdle a crucifix, which she handed to me, saying: "Hold this crucifix, my dear: it was my companion in all my sufferings."

After this interval of time I do not recall precisely her exact words, but this was in substance what she said:

"In 1817 I fell ill of what was declared to be a malignant cancer. During the first year, although I was in constant pain, I did not take to my bed, but the virulence of the disease so increased that for six years I was not only bed-ridden, but in unceasing torment. During those six years I became quite helpless, and I had so many strange symptoms, and I remained for so long a time in an apparently dying state, that my case attracted the attention of the medical faculty far and near. It got to be so, that when a doctor came to Washington, he would wish to be permitted to see me, and in this way my condition became very well known among physicians. This was permitted for the greater glory of God. I constantly vomited blood and purulent matter, and often in great quantities, attended with agonizing pains and swooning away with exhaustion. My back and shoulders were covered with open sores from my being bed-ridden so many years, and I grew so stiff that I felt like one bound with tightened cords. My mouth was always parched with the dreadful thirst of internal fever, and my tongue so hard and swollen that at times I could scarcely swallow."

"At any moment during these six years, had our dear Lord so willed it, death would have been a welcome deliverance. But I prayed to have no will of my own, but only God's will. So, I was not anxious to live, or die. There was a holy priest in Europe—Prince Hohenlohe—and our dear Lord answered his prayers so that through his intercession miracles were performed."

"As in the time of Christ?" I asked tremblingly.

"Just the same, my dear," she answered quietly: "why not?"

Tears of joy fell on the crucifix as I pressed it to my lips. It was my first Catholic act, as my heart echoed: "why not?"

Her compassionate eyes seemed to read my soul, as bending a little forward, and with deep earnestness, she resumed:

"Now, a good priest, Father Dubuisson, proposed that a novena should be made, uniting our supplications with those of Prince Hohenlohe in Europe, for my miraculous cure. Finally, it was all arranged. There were many pious souls made it, and it was to be in honor of 'the sacred name of Jesus,' and in proof of the adorable mystery of the Holy Eucharist. When this was first proposed to me, I was worse if possible, than I had ever been before. I was at death's door, and I wished it might be the will of God to let me die. But when I saw that it would be for the greater glory of God to cure me by a miracle, I prayed that God's will might be done."

"During the nine days of the novena I got worse and worse, and the night before the morning of the tenth and last day, I seemed as one dead. In the early dawn an altar was dressed in my room, and when Father Dubuisson came with our Lord, the Pyx was placed on this altar, and the Blessed Sacrament brought to me. At first it was feared I was dying, for when I received the Holy Host, for some moments I could not swallow."

"Then," she said with fervor, "suddenly, like a lightning flash, a taste of sweetness filled my mouth, my whole frame thrilled, and in a twinkling I felt as if all the cords that bound my body down were cut. I was free. I was cured; and I cried out: 'Lord Jesus! What have I ever done to deserve such a favor?'"

At this moment her pale face lighted with a heavenly rapture, and I wept with the indescribable joy of a newfound faith, as I embraced the crucifix again and again. I can only say, I believed. The grace of faith was mine, then, and thus, and there bestowed. There was much I did not then understand; in fact, I had to be instructed in everything. But all the same, I was

ready to believe, and thanks forever be to God! I had received the priceless gift of faith. Mrs. Mattingly continued:

"At once I arose. I knelt before the altar. I gave thanks to Jesus, to our Blessed Lady, I had been covered with open sores; my body was instantly whole and sound, and the touch of our Lord left a sweet odor that filled the room. There was no trace of my cancer: no abrasion of the skin even. I was well, and I was strong. I received, it is said, on that very day, at least five hundred people, and some who came out of curiosity went away converted. Blessed be Jesus!"

"And," said Sister Veronica, the dear infirmarian, "eight years after that, my child, Mrs. Mattingly was miraculously cured in this very convent by our Blessed Mother. This miracle was through her prayers to the Mother of God, and by using a miraculous medal."

My whole heart was indeed melted. Here was also a miraculous proof of our Mother in Heaven, that I had so long desired. These two things, I had prayed for light to see clearly. My prayer was granted, and I now had met one whom Christ had healed as He healed when He walked among men—He, the Holy One. It seemed to me that I had touched the hem of His garment as I leaned upon her whom He had visited. And beside the Christ, I beheld my ardently longed-for mother. Catholics will understand, that from that hour, when the grace of faith was bestowed, I did not doubt or question the truth of what I heard, while, on the other hand, those who are not one of us will consider it senseless and silly to have believed so extraordinary a story upon a mere recital and without submitting it to every possible proof. Nor would such examination and all possible tests have been unwise. In fact, these precautions would only have led to a full corroboration.

But I was in no wise seeking at that time to convince others. I was simply questioning my own soul. And my soul received, without doubt, this heavenly wisdom it had sought, but not until then found. There is no greater miracle than the grace of God when it enlightens the soul. Faith is a pure gift. The most lowly, the most ignorant, do thus receive an interior illumination often denied to the most powerful and the most learned.

Years later, as I stood beside the saintly death-bed of one more precious to me than my own life, I beheld the marvellous, instantaneous miracle of this gift of faith upon the soul; only in this wonderful instance, seraphic love was joined to faith. With faith and charity, wisdom was infused, and the ardent soul rose on the wings of prayer, to its Creator.

And with the ecstasy of heavenly love, was the martyr's transfigured joy because of the Cross, when with each access of the death agony rose the enraptured prayer: "Thanks, blessed Jesus, that I am permitted to suffer for Thee!" Such is the holiness of faith and charity united.

Soon after the ever memorable event to me, of meeting Mrs. Mattingly, another happiness was mine, that had a sustaining spiritual influence; I allude to the consolation of the friendship of Sister Eulalia.

This most charming of women had just entered the convent. She was a convert, and filled with an enthusiasm that was delightful and most refreshing. She was a Bostonian, and of great cultivation and intelligence; and she was a musician, not only understanding music, but a fine performer on both harp and piano. Being a postulant, she was at the very first only given one music pupil, and I was that fortunate one. At the close of my music lesson we were allowed a walk in the Academy grounds, if the weather permitted, or an hour for conversation. Never to be forgotten hours, for her conversational talent was remarkable and elevating. Her thoughts were not of earth, but of Heaven. She was, without exception, the most fascinating person I have ever met, and my admiration for her character increased with time. To the day of her death she remained devoted friends. Sister Eulalia never tried to exert an influence, yet I venture to say no one ever came within the power of her personal magnetism without recognizing that power.

To begin with, she was utterly unconscious of self, and had no selfish motives whatever. This generosity of her nature once recognized, and it inspired confidence. Then she had extraordinary personal charm—eyes of lambent flame and heavenward look, a winning smile, and exceeding grace and pliancy of figure and movement.

When we first met she was scarcely more than twenty years old, and had the brightest worldly career before her. She must have been a very distinguished woman, with her conversational and musical talent, her sprightliness and irresistibly captivating manner, had she remained in the world. But the revelation of the one true faith was received by her with a rapturous joy impossible to describe, and with its glad acceptance was given the most decided religious vocation. The bleak air of the world became to her insupportable, and she literally fled to the protecting, sacred shelter of convent walls.

There never was a more joyous being than Eulalia on her arrival. It is said that she was radiant with the happiness of being received in the community, where her life was to be a continuous self-sacrifice.

She had a fine, quick sense of humor and a pungent wit, and the keen and pleasant way in which she saw society shams, and stripped the seeming something into their actual nothingness, was delicious. She thus inadvertently

ly gave one a key-note by which to measure the vanity of earthly things. But these flashes of humor were not frequent, for her thoughts were too earnestly absorbed in the great mysteries of Eternity to take much heed of Time.

A volume of eulogy—of analysis, of praise, of description—would not do justice to this gifted and heroic woman, this dear, saintly nun. I often pause to think of her now, and feel that it is impossible to imagine the ecstasy of her having put on immortality. For, even if she is undergoing purgatorial delay, yet she is no longer mortal—she, who so longed for the Beatific Vision!

I knew her during a lifetime, yet I never once knew her enthusiasm to diminish. This consuming zeal must have cut short her length of days. Blessed Eulalia! Our dear Lord sent me to her just when I most needed her. The good Sisters, as I have said, do not proselytize.

I was agitated with new emotions after meeting Mrs. Mattingly, and I was at heart thereafter a Catholic, yet I was in actual ignorance of the teachings of our holy Church. I was a convert, yet to be instructed.

I at once gave Sister Eulalia my confidence, and tried to explain to her my convictions. She had a fine perception of the spiritual, and must at once have understood that I was being led onward by a "kindly light." But she was under obedience, and she knew that Protestant pupils, especially where the parents objected, as was the case with my father, were not to be instructed in the faith. She said to me, from the first:

"I am not permitted to instruct you, Madeleine; but we may talk of heavenly things."

So without teaching me dogma, she inspired a desire for true knowledge, she purified my intentions, she fortified my resolutions, she suggested Catholic truths of thought, she dwelt upon the transitoriness of earth and the nothingness of human desires.

Had I been elected for a religious vocation, she would have developed it. But whatever faculties the Lord had granted me, received, through her, an expansion, for which I am forever grateful. In earlier years I had rhapsodized over Ossian, but now, under her inspiration, imagination gained a serene atmosphere, a healthier scope, and higher aspirations.

At last the scholastic year was closing. Eulalia had changed her postulant's cap for the white veil of the novice. She had taken her first vows, and was now the affianced of Christ. When the time came for me to return to my father, and re-enter society, I left her, I might almost say, in the intoxication of a religious vocation.

On the eve of my leaving, we had a long and serious conversation. She knew, better than I could then foresee, all the obstacles to be encountered at that period by a Catholic convert, for such she regarded me; and there were special trials for any one destined to lead a society life, and fill a certain social official place in the world.

Sister Eulalia was as yet the only Catholic of her family, and she had met with a storm of opposition, as well as encountered the supercilious wonder of society at her choice of creed. She knew, that which I did not then realize, that it was considered, to say the least, "very bad form" to join a Church where one would be surrounded by a class of people whom no one knew socially! It is absurd now even to think of it, but such were the least of the contradictions a convert might then expect.

At the present day, when the Church in the United States has gained in power, and to an extent has its social representatives everywhere among us, it is not easy to give an idea of the almost social ostracism which the convert of fifty years ago had to meet.

Sister Eulalia dreaded these perils for me, and I had her fervent prayers; for, after all, I had yet to be instructed, and perhaps under severe pressure I might fail to correspond to grace. She was therefore overjoyed when I assured her that I had made a solemn resolution to find a priest, and ask to be instructed on my return to Washington.

Herself a stranger in the district, she could not advise me whom to seek, but she said she would daily remember my intentions, and ask our Blessed Lady to lead me to the right person, and leave to her motherly care to shape my course directly into the one true fold.

### CHAPTER V. SOME OBSTACLES.

Sister Eulalia had foreseen, but I had not, the depressing effect of the world's atmosphere upon spiritual growth. I had insensitively felt the change of my surroundings when I left the academy, without at all realizing what it was that dampened the exaltation of sentiment to which I had been raised.

The world hates enthusiasm, and only tolerates devotion to those objects and aims connected with its own successes. Besides, society is most exacting, and a hard task master.

The very first obstacle that I encountered to my resolution of immediately seeking religious instruction, was the entire occupation of my time. I was kept engaged from morning till night. There was an endless succession of trivial things that must all be at once attended to.

The session of Congress was about to close when I emerged from my dream-land with literally nothing to wear that fashion would accept. So there was shopping galore. Presently Congress adjourned, and I had taken no

steps whatever, as I had intended.

My father, as was his wont, went for a time to Saratoga, and I asked to be allowed to spend the summer with my Aunt Madeleine. She was my mother's only sister, loved me for my dear mother's sake, and I was tenderly attached to her.

I scarcely know why women, who are the moral and intellectual benefactors of a community, should not have statues erected to their memories for public veneration. It is acknowledged that humanity has no better friend than an unselfish, cultivated, tender-hearted, capable, and broad-minded woman. All of this my aunt was. At the close of her honored life her children with one voice justly pronounced this valiant woman "blessed."

There was in her household an intellectual activity, a freedom from conventional trammels, a liberty of thought, a wide range of subjects discussed, an earnestness of purpose, and a simplicity of living in the midst of wealth, that expressed her gracious womanhood as of the best that America produces.

She was a Presbyterian, but always ready to embrace truth when recognized as such; nor was she held back by human respect. She was in no sense narrow, as her creed might indicate.

At that time there was no Catholic church in that community, and no Catholic that I can remember, except the excellent mother of James G. Blaine.

During my visit to aunt, I mentioned to her my belief that the Catholic Church was the true Church; but she gave no serious attention to what I said, considering me but as a romantic child. She said "she had noticed that I loved to live in cloudland, and this was my latest idiosyncrasy."

At all events, I would have been quite unable to sustain a religious argument with her, as she had multiplied texts of Scripture at her command which I was not prepared to meet.

But amid all adverse influences, there ever rested in my soul that leaven of faith that sustained the resolution I had formed—to be instructed in Catholic dogma.

In the latter days of November I returned to Washington with my father. Upon my arrival there was a little flurry of shopping again, of engagements with modistes, and official calls that I must make with my father. I was to be my coming-out season, a short session and a gay winter, and I was duly impressed with all these facts.

The "season," however, scarcely began before Christmas, and so, after all, I had some weeks of comparative leisure. During the day, while my father was in Congress, I occupied myself as American girls are permitted to do, without surveillance, so that I could carry out my resolution.

It was high noon of a clear, cold December day, when I walked out to find the nearest Catholic church, and to enquire for its pastoral residence. In a seemingly hap-hazard way I was directed to the priest's house on Fifteenth street, adjoining dear, dear, old Saint Matthew's.

When I rang the bell, the door was opened by a rather tall, slight, benevolent-looking young priest.

"What is wanted, my child?" he enquired in a kindly tone, as I stood for the moment silent, suddenly realizing how odd my coming, thus introduced, must seem to a person whose name in turn was unknown to me.

I little knew then the demands upon the daily life of the pastor of a large congregation, the extraordinary events in the order of grace that claim his attention, and the deep insight into the human heart and wisdom to meet its needs, given to the Lord's anointed.

"I have come, sir," I replied, "to be instructed!" There was a slight start of surprise, followed by a gracious smile, as if he might always have known me, and Father Donelan invited me into his parlor.

Had I sought the world over, I could not have done better. Truly, we are led onward in ways we know not of!

The first pleased surprise was followed by deep interest and benign patience in giving me instruction.

The Catholic priest is not an adept in the conduct of worldly affairs, but he does know about the supernatural action of grace on the soul, and how to meet its subtle needs and apply the remedies.

I explained, as clearly as I could, the state of my soul and the concurrent motives that led me to take this step. I was ready to believe with an unreasoning faith, but I was ignorant.

When I left, that morning, Father Donelan gave me Challoner's "The Catholic Christian Instructed," a catechism, and a Kempis, and as I had explained to him that in a few weeks my time would be taken up by the demands of social life, it was arranged that I was to come every day for instruction until I could give a reason for faith.

In the course of these visits other books were given me; among them I especially remember Millner's "End of Controversy," Gallatin's books, and a work that suited me because it gave strength, as its name denoted—"The Spiritual Combat."

I recall that it helped me then, more than a Kempis. Doubtless the deep spirituality of the "Imitation of Christ" was not understood. I never for an instant found any difficulty whatever in accepting any dogma presented.

There was no merit of overcoming doubts on my part, for I had none to overcome. On the contrary, it seemed to me that I was only having clearly explained to me precisely what I had all along been in search of.

What a beautiful revelation of the wisdom of God! What an unbroken chain of logical sequence! There was the revealed Word, and with it, the divine authority to interpret. All was absolute, positive, certain, just as it must be where the eternal salvation is at stake. I at once understood why I had formerly been so perplexed. I had had the Bible in hand, but was quite unable to define and apply all that its teachings involved. Of course, it had only been here and there, as it were, that I could catch glimmerings of the sacred truth.

How good God was to have vouchsafed me even these! As there was no point upon which I had doubts, it was simply a matter of defining dogma, supplemented by my reading, and so this instruction progressed rapidly.

The mystery of the Holy Eucharist made Heaven of earth. It was the crowning act of the redemption, and as it was fully explained to me and fervently received. I felt as if fallen man was restored to walk with God on earth, and converse with Him as in the Garden of Eden, face to face.

Ah! no; it was a more endearing, a more intimate reunion. With the all-abounding generosity of our Lord, He had restored to fallen humanity far more than He had deprived us of in consequence of sin.

On every Catholic altar throughout the world dwelt the living God. Oh, why could not every one adore Him in His sacrament of love! I recalled my school-girl's delight in Euclid because it was of absolute proof; yet geometry was but a feeble expression of the architecture of the universe, while the science of the soul as defined by Catholic dogmas was indeed as sure as God Himself. The heavens and the earth might pass away, but His immutable word must remain.

Oh, how dazzlingly clear, how radiant, is the light of faith!

Some weeks after I had introduced myself to Father Donelan he thought me ready to declare my faith, and he advised me, as a preliminary step, to let my father know that I was a convert to the Roman Catholic Church. Until now I had been silent regarding this all important step I wished to take.

My father held, at that time, a position of prominence as a Whig leader in the House of Representatives, and he was so busy a man, so hard at work, always so pre-occupied when we were alone, that it was not easy to claim his attention.

He loved to have me seated near him in his study, for I was the only object to cherish left him in the world, in the desolation of my mother's death. But it was rather the consciousness of my presence that he expected, than any actual interruption.

So I was compelled, as indeed I had expected would be the case, to disturb him. Drawing my chair close to his writing-table, I asked him if he could spare me a few minutes, as I had something of greatest importance to confide to him. He continued writing for a moment, apparently finishing his sentence, for my father was never excited, whatever might happen. He had wonderful control over other men as a leader, because he had such splendid self-control.

Presently, having laid down his pen, he calmly turned around in his study-chair, and gave me one of those penetrating looks of his, before which most men quailed.

His eye could scarcely have been called severe, but it had the investigating coldness of abstract intellectuality, and when fixed upon an opponent, it meant scathing exposure. But to me this regard always acted like a challenge, and aroused a power of resistance that must have been a transmitted part of his own nature. Yet if appealed to through the affections, I was womanly weak. I felt sure that I was called upon to do battle for my new-found faith, and my imagination, which was always readily enkindled, was at once aroused by the idea of the heroic.

Thus nerving myself, I very firmly rected to my father, in a few words as I could to be quite clear, that I had been led to examine the tenets of the Catholic Church in consequence of having accidentally met Mrs. Mattingly, who had told me the story of her miraculous cure.

Up to this point my father had listened very patiently, but when I spoke of a miracle, he simply interjected the exclamation "fudge!" in the most contemptuous tone.

Now, "fudge" was as near swearing as my dignified father ever indulged in, and was a word he used to express his idea of utter and entire silliness.

I was prepared to measure swords with him if he attacked my faith, as I expected he would do in a serious way, but I was exceedingly humiliated to be treated with sheer contempt. As he simply exclaimed "fudge," and then remained silent, I had to go on:

"Why, father," I expostulated, "you must have heard of this astounding miracle, for you were at that time here in Congress, and the city was full of the amazement it created."

"Yes, my child," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, "I do remember hearing something of the sort mentioned; but I really gave the subject no attention, for I had too much of importance to attend to, to investigate hallucinations."

The way in which this was said made me feel as if a big douche of ice-water was being poured down my spine, and I shivered at the hopelessness of the distance between us.

Again there was silence, which I had to break.

"Father, it is my duty to have to tell you that my conscience forces me to

become a Roman Catholic. I have to save my soul, and I beg your consent to my taking this step."

My father never got angry, or perhaps I should say, he never showed anger. He controlled himself, and reasoned against antagonisms. No mind could be clearer than his in all things outside of grace. He was upright and true, and fearless in upholding his convictions. He was of good Puritan stock, and had been carefully and solidly trained in a New England college, and his sagacity regarding the conduct of affairs was extraordinarily wise.

That was conceded to him. One could have no safer adviser in matters great or small, and he was constantly being consulted by the first men of the country. Humanly speaking, he did not make mistakes.

What an instance, that human reason, unaided, cannot understand the mysteries of faith!

Finding me in dead earnest, my father did not oppose me in set words, but he very patiently explained his views to me. He assured me that I "would make a serious mistake, and that I was very dear to him for my mother's sake." As he spoke, his voice trembled just a little.

Again I was unprepared to be met in this way.

How deeply he must have loved this one only woman of his affection, a lifelong fidelity to her memory proved. When she died, he was a man midway in life, but the masses of his beautiful brown hair turned white in his anguish. A pathetic tribute of deep devotion.

My father said he "must appeal to my good sense. That he could not give his consent that I should, in the very outset of a life full of promise, hamper myself by joining such an organization as was the Catholic Church. In fact, he could not advise me to join any Church. That I had never been baptized in order that I might be a perfect free agent, which was of first dignity. That he believed that the Bible was the Word of God, and that he reverently believed in God, but that he did not propose to have his opinions formulated for acceptance by any set of men. That, having carefully considered the problems of existence, he was convinced that all similar associations only served to cripple one, and hamper usefulness. It was far better to be self-reliant, and not willfully put yourself into shackles."

He also said what was perhaps so at the time he said it, "that he objected to my joining the class of people that represented the Catholic Church in the United States, as the average intelligence was not great, and their social standing was undesirable. To be a member of such a body might prove a serious injury to my future prospects."

From first to last my father never for a moment admitted any divine authority to interpret. He reasoned logically from his own standpoint, but his premises had the fatal defect of being based on right private judgment.

He exercised this prerogative when he classed all Churches alike as human organizations, and declined being dictated to by any associations of men. No ray of faith made clear the way. Why this light was withheld God alone knows, for of a surety my father never willfully rejected that which he understood to be the truth.

In conclusion, he added that I "was not only entirely too young to take so serious a step, but, he regretted to observe, of so romantic a temperament as to need wise counsel. However, that he did not propose to control my free will permanently in this matter, which he had no right to do, but that he must exercise his paternal authority in insisting that I should take time for reflection."

Dear father! he little knew how much time I had already taken; how this subject of my soul's salvation had occupied my thoughts for years.

There was a pause. I was absorbed by the reflections he had aroused. Presently he again spoke, and slowly, as with an effort, and he made me the definite promise that if I would wait

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