

# THE STORY OF A CONVERT.

II.

LED ONWARD.

I began to realize that the welfare of the soul was the all important thing for an immortal being, and that although the operations of the mind were full of curious interest, and most fascinating, yet that deep awakening of religious feeling that I experienced was more profound than any mental perception.

Of course I had heard of the Bible as the Sacred Word, and was somewhat familiar, in the range of my desultory reading, with the mention of, or allusion to, its revelations; but as a matter of fact, I had never before read the Scriptures, or had any desire to do so.

But now, hearing chapters read and commented upon every day, and the sacred text constantly spoken of, not only as a guide, but as the sole criterion of right and wrong, I commenced in earnest to examine for myself as to what this wonderful, this God-given book, contained.

I had studied rhetoric with pleased interest, and here was a syllogism I was ready to accept: Premise—the Bible is the Word of God; being the Word of God I must try to understand it; conclusion: As I understand it, I must accept it as a rule of life.

The Catholic mind will at once perceive that the inherent fault of conclusion from a true premise came from the mistaken doctrine of private judgment and my ignorance of the necessity of a divine authority to interpret a divine revelation.

It is the same fallacy that has filled the world with the clamor and confusion of sects through all the ages; and it had its rise, as had the revolt of the fallen angels, in pride. With eager curiosity, in order to get a clear idea of the whole connected plan, I began at the beginning.

It was an unexpected revelation. The orientalism of Volney had struck my fancy; but these vivid pictures of patriarchal life were full of subtle charm; and when I read the poetic psalms of David and the sublime utterances of Job, I experienced an exaltation such as could never be described, for it was an arousing of the soul that looked upward, and sent forth its aspirations to its Creator. The first feeble ray of light illumined the hitherto darkness.

Yet, this awful sense of an omnipotent source that I recognized might perfectly have had its existence in the heart of any Jewess, for while I was deeply impressed with the grandeur of the imagery and the awe of a creative Power, I had no emotion of tenderness, no recognition of a redemptive sacrifice.

It was indeed a new phase, and I had reached a higher plane than the mere intellectual gratification I had before enjoyed.

Religious reverence had found a place in the vague depths of my soul, but not love of God.

It must be borne in mind that I am trying to describe the first effect produced upon my sensitive and imaginative, but ill-trained mind, by the examination of the Old Testament, according to the plan of private judgment, and absolutely without any recognized criterion.

The Bible was devoured somewhat as Voltaire had been; only, from the one source, there rested an indelible imprint, while the other, by some unexplained mercy of God, had swept over my mind's surface unheeded.

The constant foreshadowing of a coming Redeemer, the interposition of Deity in the affairs of men, the perplexing rewards and punishments of which I often failed to perceive the meaning, the dramatic history of the chosen race, I read with ever increasing interest.

During the perusal, I selected verses of special value or beauty, wrote them out upon little cards, and tacked them around, within easy reading distance, upon the walls of my bedroom, so as to be able to refresh myself at any time with sentiments of so elevating a nature.

My good aunt would come into my room, read one passage of Scripture, and then another, with the greatest satisfaction and approval.

She would say to me with emotion: "My dear, you are experiencing a change of heart."

I could see that my calm reply dismayed her as I explained, "I doubt it, dear aunt; these cards are simply reminders of the true and the beautiful."

It was evident that a purely esthetic enjoyment of the Bible was a sad puzzle to her, and I was conscious that she had an ever-increasing solicitude in my behalf.

Thus I studied the Jewish Dispensation in the Old Testament, and was at last ready to open the pages of the New Testament, where the soul-harrowing, touching record of the Saviour's expiatory suffering and transcendent love is given. But just at this time a new study absorbed me, and for some months I fairly revelled in the delight of Euclid.

It seems absurd, too, knowing young girls as I now know them, to make the assertion that a damsel of fifteen was positively carried away with the charms of old Euclid. Yet so it was, paradoxical as it may sound.

That which enchanted me was the absolute certainty of proof. This certainty was such a relief in contrast to all the subjects that had hitherto occupied my attention.

I had rejoiced in the dreamy speculations of theorists, in the imagery of literature, in the (to me) oracular tone

of the Old Testament, which I was of course unable to understand or properly interpret, so that my unrest was rather augmented.

But geometry was of a satisfying exactitude. One problem led to another, and each was clear, and of precise proof.

I commenced with a class. After a few lessons I was permitted to recite alone, and to give just as many demonstrations on the blackboard as I desired.

I ran rapidly through the first five books, when I knocked at the door of trigonometry, and was refused admittance, for at that point the then system of female instruction ended.

I must say that the effect of this hurried way of learning was disastrous as to the permanency of any knowledge thus acquired. At all events, all that I thus hastily ran over presently took its place among forgotten mental excursions. But I think that the effect was salutary on the development of my erratic mind, as it gave me ever after a clearer idea of the plan of the universe.

I mean correlatively, as to its harmonies.

By the time that the Euclid fever, which lasted some months, had abated, my poor aunt was in despair about my soul.

She was aware that I had ceased to read the Bible; but not understanding the cause, it was a riddle to her.

A sort of Salvation Army method was now adopted. It was arranged to have prayer-meetings at stated times in the parlor of the house, and I was invited to be present.

I willingly consented, for it was very interesting to listen to the supplicatory petitions of our social circle.

Again my pious friends felt quite sure that this interest indicated what they were pleased to call "a change of heart," although I never gave any intimations that such was the case.

Now and then from an attentive listener I was called upon to be a participant in these exercises, and "led in prayer."

This, too, I did not find a displeasing task, for were there not many petitions to present before the throne of Grace, any many admiring epithets to bestow upon the Lord? To be candid, I was well satisfied with my success and fluency, when these occasions, unsought, but accepted, were presented.

My self-gratulation, however, had at least the good effect of re-awakening interest. Succeeding this was another phase of spiritual experience. I began to read the New Testament, as I had done the Old, from the beginning to the end.

I must say that the perusal had a very different effect upon me, and softened my obdurate heart and quickened the pulses of my soul as never before had been the case.

There were two Beings therein presented: the Saviour, and His Mother, whose characters filled me with reverential love, and towards whom I sought to draw near.

I was in deep earnest at last, and I attended the evening prayer meetings at the church, and joined in the prayers with my whole soul; and when, towards the close of these meetings, those who wished to be prayed for were invited to come forward and take a certain place appropriately called the "anxious bench," I at last placed myself among these in spiritual desolation.

I never had been troubled by what may be termed human respect; not enough so, perhaps, and a sentiment of indifference as to what others might think made me quite fearless in this respect.

Let me go back a little in order to explain what had led up to my present perturbed state.

I had, as I have already mentioned, been a motherless child from early infancy, and I had repeatedly endured the keenest sorrows because I was motherless.

Often and again, when I would see the mothers of my little friends caressing their children, I would seek the solitude of my room, and weep bitterly over my loneliness. No mother, no sister, no brother, and as to companionship, no father: for my honored father belonged to the wide interests of the outside world, and he was too busy a man to fill up the desolate moments of a young girl's life.

Yet the deepest need of my heart was for the tenderness of maternal love, and I had always had a sort of hopeless feeling about this sad deprivation until the New Testament unfolded to me the plan of salvation, and I beheld the Mother of redeemed man, not the Eve, but the Saviour's Mother, who was mine, just as her Son was mine.

Yes, I had found a Mother in Heaven.

I felt sure that one who could give her Son to save us must watch over us and love us with a mother's heart, and without knowing that this was Catholic, I recognized the Mother of God.

What a strange, solemn, soulful joy! She, the blessed, glorious one, was my Mother—"mine, my very own," I kept repeating to myself as does the enraptured lover who wishes to make sure to himself of a new-found bliss. Our Blessed Lady of Llesse had at last come to me, although then I knew her not.

I must stop to narrate a curious incident of my school-life in this connection. My compositions had always been praised, and I was often called upon to read them aloud. So, with my imagination enraptured and my heart aflame with this new, this grand discovery, I wrote I know not what rhapsody about the mission of the Mother of Christ. I presented this composition to my kind and appreciative instructor.

What was my surprise when it was not only frowned upon, and torn to pieces, but I was told that it was "papistical trash."

This unexpected rebuke greatly puzzled me, for I felt sure that I had written with deeper feeling and a higher motive than I had ever done before.

The harsh word "Papist" conveyed no special meaning to me outside of a general idea of ignorance, image worship, the silly counting of beads, the tortures of the Inquisition, the reign of the bloody Mary, and the vulgarity of under-bred people, and I felt quite innocent as to all these abominations.

Beyond that, I knew that "nunneries," as my friends called our convents, were not as represented, but cheerful homes; for had I not, when scarcely more than a baby, once spent a happy winter in one, behind the bars?

The actual effect of this rebuff was to make me study the New Testament more closely. I examined and re-examined, collected and compared, one text with another, and finally, out of all that I read and sifted and collated and prayed over, I came to this positive conclusion in my own mind, having no other guide: First, that the Mother of Christ was a Mother in Heaven, and must be the highest of created beings. For worlds I would not have given up this belief, and lost my new-found treasure.

Then I felt sure that when the Christ died to save us He must have left one, and only one Church for all Christians.

It was incredible, that in such an all-important point the Saviour could have failed to finish His work. He was man God, and could not have made such a mistake.

Then, strangely enough, I was certain that whichever Church this was, it must be known by being able to perform miracles, or indicated by miraculous proof.

Now, after the lapse of a lifetime, the astonishing thing presents itself that I was entirely ignorant of the fact that the Catholic Church ever claimed this miraculous proof, and that my conclusions, as far as they went, were Catholic.

Thus I was in a state of pitiful dismay. I could not believe in more than one Church, and that Church must give proofs of its mission. Yet, alas! no such Church seemed to exist.

It was while in this desperate state of uncertainty, groping in this outer darkness, that I was thankful to be prayed for, and I took my seat that evening on the "anxious bench."

Was there ever such an anomaly! Perturbed by Catholic truth, without knowing where to find it, I was prayed for in a Presbyterian prayer meeting.

However, my pious friends gave but one meaning to my action: "I had experienced a change of heart, and I had gotten religion."

The next day the excellent, zealous minister came to see me. I knew him very well as a visitor at the house. How well and how kindly I remember him: his pale, thin, ascetic countenance, his thoughtful mien! He was a man of ability, too, and to know him was to respect him.

He came, he said, to read my soul for me, to tell me from his own great experience as to the spiritual life, the fullness of time had now come for me to join the Church, as I gave every proof of having experienced a change of heart. It was now my duty to profess my Saviour before men, and anything that prevented my being a professing Christian I must look upon as a temptation of the devil.

He was so sincere, so in earnest, so expository, that I gave him a full and candid explanation of the state of my soul, and of the reasons why I failed to find in the Presbyterian doctrines that which I sought for and must have when I joined any Church.

And what was it, he asked, adding that he was "sure any difficulties could readily be explained."

But when I made the direct reply: that I must be allowed to have my Mother in Heaven, and that there could be but one only Church, and that one must have the power of working miracles, he was agast.

He said that I perverted the scriptures to my own destruction: that in my ignorance I was, without knowing it, in peril as a "Papist," and that he would beseech the Throne of Grace to turn me aside from my delusions. And my dear aunt was so grievously disappointed! They had patience with me, and prayed for me; and I prayed for light; and amidst all the praying I never could see my way to change one iota of my opinions resulting from this exercise of private judgment in reading Holy Writ.

Well, after all it was not liberty of private judgment they expected, but conformity to the creed of Presbyterianism.

And this I never did or could subscribe to, because it failed to give me what my reason demanded.

Thus, at the end of two years of untiring labor for my soul's good, I left this kind home as I had entered it—an unregenerate.

Loving its dear inmates, I could never embrace their doctrines, and, above all, I must have retained the pious heart of my good aunt. I could not become a Presbyterian, but I have always respected their zeal.

What a farce is this doctrine of the private interpretation of Scripture which, after all, as it is carried out, leads to the acceptance of some formulated creed, without a claim to the authority of Divine guidance!

Thus marvellously was I led out of the teachings of strict Presbyterianism into the kindly light of the very thres-

hold of the one true Faith, without suspecting whither I was going. Blessed forever be our Lady of Llesse!

TO BE CONTINUED.

## Can Christians Consistently Smile?

This is the rather startling heading to an article in the *Dublin Review* from the pen of the learned Father Bridgett, C. SS. R. The article is an answer to George Eliot's suggestion that the Christian who believes in hell's torments ought never to be joyful. Father Bridgett gives various causes why Christians may rejoice though firm believers in eternal punishment. One reason, however, is a sufficient. George Eliot's suggestion has no basis in the laws of our human nature. Though eternal misery bears no comparison with earthly suffering, yet our feelings with regard to both are governed by the same principles. Neither good sense nor practical philanthropy requires that we should keep our souls in perpetual tension and distress by the thought of woes which we have not the duty to alleviate at present. A benevolent and charitable lady, who in due season will co-operate in works of mercy, is not to be thought heartless because she enjoys sweet music in her sheltered drawing room, knowing all the time that within a circle of half a mile acts are being performed or pains are being endured that would thrill her soul with anguish could she witness them. Though thousands may be perishing of famine in India, chimneys may be allowed to smoke in London without any imputation against the benevolence of Englishmen. God has mercifully provided that our lives should not be a perpetual shudder because of the innumerable horrors that we know to exist at every moment on this globe which we inhabit, nor need our lives be a weary nightmare because of what faith reveals to us of another world.—*Liverpool Times*.

## Leisure Times.

Many Catholic women have leisure afternoons at their disposal, after they have attended to the household duties which devolve upon them, and employ these idle hours in doing all sorts of fancy work—embroidery, especially, now-a-days, for centre pieces, lunch cloths, tray cloths, doilies, scarves, and the hundred and one things that go to make up an attractive home. Why do not more of them think to apply their time and talent to the things that appertain to the service of the altar?

In most large cities there are branches of the Tabernacle Society where a knowledge of painting and embroidery could be put to excellent use in decorating vestments; and the fine linens that are made up by such societies offer a field for the daintiest kind of needle work. In smaller cities the altar linens are usually looked after by an altar society; but when new vestments are needed the pastor is obliged to send away to some dealer who supplies such articles.

Catholic women, and young women, especially—who have plenty of time, ought to make it a point to use their skill at embroidery in adding to the stock of vestments of the parish church; for while this branch of the art is distinct from any other, it is not more difficult, and by studying some of the old vestments equal skill and beauty can be displayed in the construction of the new. Old embroideries may be transferred to new goods by applique or by the couch stitch; but the former method is so much the handsomer that it should be used whenever possible.—*Catholic Columbian*.

## The End of the World.

God in His mercy has not revealed the day when this world shall come to an end. This is an open subject. The Church says nothing about it, but there is a well defined opinion that, if the prophecy of St. Malachi is authentic, the world will come to an end with the next century.

The Prophet Daniel, while the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, received revelations which are claimed to give accounts of what was to happen down to the end of the world, the starting-point being the command by Cyrus for the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem.

There are several periods which intervene between that event and the final consummation. Among these are seventy weeks supposed to end with the crucifixion of Christ, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Then there are periods of 1,260 days, 1,290 days, 2,300 days, and "a time, times, and a half time," which are also subdivisions of the grand duration preceding the end. Very much the same periods of time are also specified in the Book of Revelation, and students of prophecy for a thousand years have been endeavoring to harmonize these two sets of data, and to explain just what is meant by the expressions "days" and "times" used by the sacred writers, and to identify the principal events that are to mark the close of the epochs.

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The power for good of the Catholic Church in the true communism which exists within her fold, the communism of charity and unity of doctrine and aim, is recognized by many broad-minded clerics and laymen of non-Catholic Churches, some of whom have the courage of their convictions and do not hesitate to speak of the beauties they see in the Wisdom of the Ages. Rev. Dr. Fields is such a man; and in *The Evangelist* he gives voice to the following incidents and reflections in his article, "How to treat the Roman Catholics":

"Coming up from Italy I had to cross the Alps and having an American friend as a companion, we walked over the Simplon Pass, on the very top of which is the hospice, where the monks spent their lives amid eternal snows, that they may rescue lost travelers. One night we slept in the convent and when in the morning we parted from our kind hosts I could not feel that we were in a condition to compare ourselves with them as to which were the better Christians. Such devotion I have found all over the world. Away off on the other side of the globe, coming from the Island of Java to Singapore, the most southern point of Asia, I observed sitting on the upper deck a Catholic priest, and, approaching him as a stranger, I spoke to him in French, asking the question which could have been the first to address to an American missionary: 'When are you going to return home?' To which I received an answer which I never had before: 'Jamais!' Never! Never! He had given his life to the service of the Church and of his Divine Master.

\*\*\* There is another reason why we should have a care how we disparage the Catholic priest, namely, that some day, not so far off in the next century, we may have to call upon them for help against political and social dangers. The late Professor Roswell D. Hitchcock has often said to me that the time might come when the Roman Catholic Church would prove the greatest bulwark and safeguard against the socialism and communism which have been imported into our country from abroad. That is what all Europe is afraid of at this moment—a cataclysm not from above, but from beneath; an earthquake that will yawn so wide and so deep as to swallow up civilization itself! If such destruction sweeps over the Old World, it will not be long in crossing the ocean to the New. Let us be on our guard that we do not break down any strong barrier against it."

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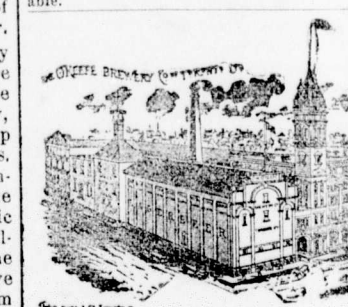
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