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# Almost a Nun.

God will not leave me all alone  
He never will forsake His own.  
When not another friend I see,  
The Lord is looking down on me.

Yon ?  
MEU  
560

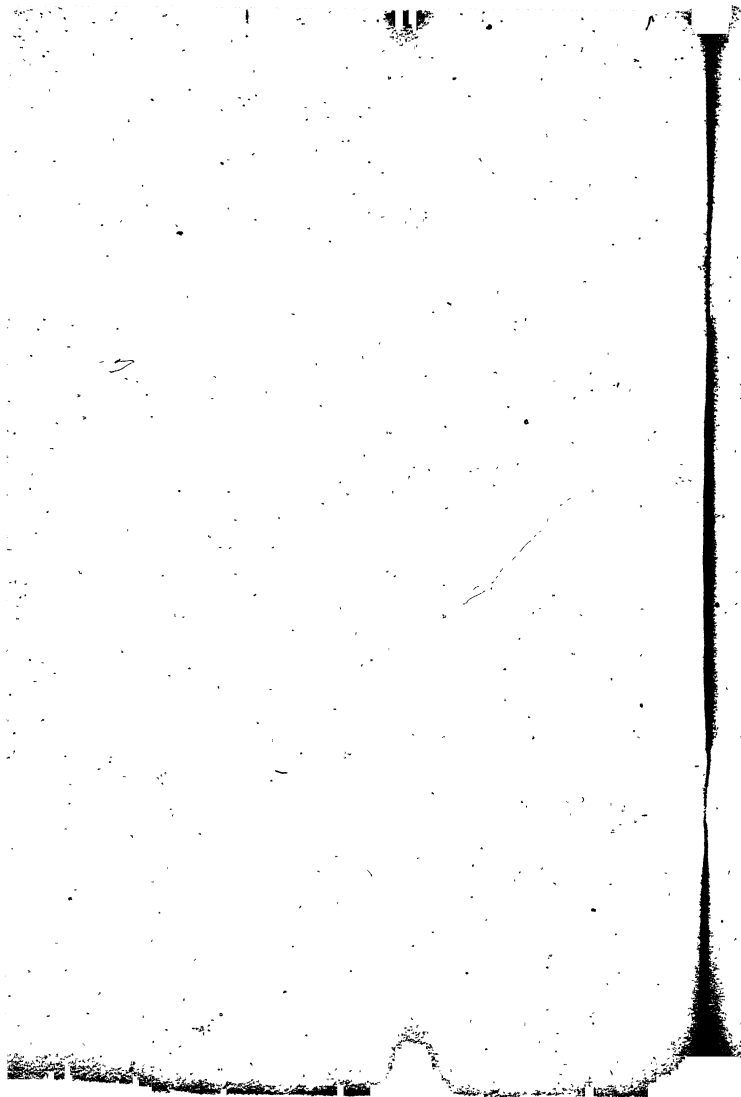
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# Almost a Nun.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FIRST YEARS IN THE CONVENT.

**I** WAS born in Montreal, in the year 1846. My father was Canadian born, and bailiff of the superior court. My mother was Parisian French. I had two brothers and two sisters. One of my sisters was a grey nun, and I went to the convent at the age of seven.

My first thoughts about religion, I remember distinctly; it was when I was very small. In Canada, when they bring the sacrament to the sick, a man goes before, on horseback, ringing a bell, and the priest follows in a carriage, carrying the host. When they pass, everyone

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must kneel, just where they may be, in mud, or snow, or water, and they must all bow their heads. I did not kneel and a woman near by, pushed me down, telling me to kneel, for God was passing. I went into the house and asked my mother if God wore a stove-pipe hat. She said yes, and that we must kneel.

When I was twelve years old I made my first communion.

At the convent we got up at five, had fifteen minutes in which to dress, and then had one hour in the chapel, where we prayed and said our beads. Afterwards we had to make our beds, then we went to mass, and after that breakfast, and then one hour of study before school. At 11.30 we came to dinner. From twelve to one was recess, when we played, under the care of the nuns. At one we went back to school, which lasted until four. Then we had a collation, which con-

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sisted of a piece of dry bread and a glass of milk, or dry bread and an apple. Then one hour for fancy work, one hour to study, then supper at six. After that another hour for play, one hour for devotion, and at eight all had to go to bed.

Every Thursday morning we put on big aprons and went into the kitchen to learn to cook, and in the afternoon we did fancy work. On Saturday there was no school, but we worked hard all day. Some made wafer gods, others trimmed up the altar.

On Sunday we had eight o'clock mass, then breakfast, after that we could study, draw, paint or practice until dinner. After dinner we went for a walk, then vespers, devotion and recreation until bed time.

The first day of every month was a day of penance. We could not talk at all, except by signs, until night.

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Sometimes for penance, I would cut my wrist with a pen knife, and when it began to bleed would put pepper and salt in the cut, thinking to please God by enduring the pain.

During Lent and Advent we fasted until noon then we ate a hearty dinner, and then had nothing else until evening when we had a piece of dry bread and water.

We made a great many relics in the convent, which were sold as relics of St. Joseph and St. Patrick; and some were even supposed to contain the bones of the Virgin Mary. Once, when I was making a relic of beautiful pink silk, which was supposed to contain a bone of the Virgin, I asked, how, since she was supposed to have ascended bodily up to heaven, they could still have her bones on earth. As a punishment for asking such a question, I had to do penance for a week, and could have

no play time and no recess. Before I left the convent, I found out that these relics, instead of containing the bones of the saints, contained chicken bones.

There was an orphan asylum connected with the convent, and in the main room they kept a lamp burning all night. It was suspended from the ceiling. One night one of the orphans was hungry, and she got up and climbed the step-ladder which was kept near by, so that one could reach the lamp. She was trying to turn up the wick when she fell to the floor, breaking her arm. But the superior would not let any of us go to her, and she lay there crying and moaning all the rest of the night. They said that it was a just punishment for the little thief. In the morning they took her up, and one of the nuns set the broken bone; but all her life that arm was deformed.



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During meal time one of the nuns read to us of the lives of the Saints, and out of a book called the Directory. In this book we were told to respect the bishop and priest as Jesus Christ, and the superior as the mother of Christ; and at any time she would call on us and we were obliged to repeat what she had last read about.

It was very cold in the convent, in the winter time, and we suffered greatly with the cold, but in the evening we were permitted to sit in the Community Room, which was warm, and it seemed to us like Heaven after being in cold rooms all day. Then the mother superior would tell us stories about the heretics, as they called the protestants. This was one of them;—

A Catholic girl worked for a protestant lady, and the lady told her, that if she would bring her one of the

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hosts that she would give her a silk dress. The next time that the girl went to communion she took the host out of her mouth and tied it in her handkerchief. When she got home, she put it in a drawer and went out into the garden where the mistress was, and told her that she had it. When she took it out of the drawer, the little host had become a heart of flesh. The lady put a nail through it, and put it up on the wall, and called it the god of Rome. One of her boys stuck his jack-knife into it, and it commenced to bleed. Soon the floor was covered with blood. There was a man passing with a span of horses, and when in front of the house, the horses went down on their knees. So the man entered to see what was the matter. He then went for the priest, but he would not stop it until the whole family had promised to be Catholics. They became

Catholics, and the servant girl went to the covent to be a Magdalen, to do penance all the rest of her life. But it was said that she was the instrument in God's hands of saving the whole family. Then we would be sent to bed trembling, to dream of the terrible things that would happen if we should fall into the hands of the heretics.

They use a great deal of holy water in the convent, and they make money by means of it also. They sell it at twenty-five cents a quart. It is made of spring water and salt, and blessed on Holy Saturday, the Saturday before Easter. One night there was a terrible thunder storm, and we were all afraid, and called to the nuns. One of them got up, and went to the closet where the bottles were kept and took what she thought to be a bottle of holy water. She poured some in our hands, that we

might make the sign of the cross with it, and she sprinkled it over the floor and on the beds and windows. We were not afraid then, and went to sleep. But next morning what was our consternation to find that instead of holy water, the nun had taken a bottle of ink. She had to do penance for a week, and had to get down on her knees and scrape the floor with glass.

Our teachers went to Europe quite often. The mother superior came in one day and said that Sister Eugene was going to start for Europe the next day, and we, her scholars, ought to make her a present. So we took up a collection and got twenty-five dollars. The next day she bid us all good-bye. When she arrived in Europe, she sent a letter to the superior, and sent her love to the boarders. About two months afterward, I wanted some hot water, one evening,

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and rang the bell. No one answering, I went to the kitchen with my pitcher, to get the water myself. And there, in a rocking-chair by the fire, with her feet on a hassock, was Sister Eugene. As soon as I opened the door, she put her finger on her lips, and told me that the same night she was going to start for Europe, she was taken with inflammatory rheumatism, (*enceinte*) and so could not go. Then she made me promise not to tell, saying, that she would be banished from there, if it were known. In about three months the superior said that Sister Eugene was coming back, and then we had to give money again to prepare a fete for her. She had gone away for her health, but we all remarked that she was paler than when she went away. But she said that she had had a very pleasant voyage.

We had a good many American girls in the convent, and our music

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teacher was a young lady from Boston, Miss Husworth. Our English teacher was an American also. This music teacher was converted to the Catholic faith, "the only true church." On Easter Sunday she was christened and made her first communion. She then decided to become a nun, the bride of Christ. She entered the noviciate three months after she was baptised. Every Friday night they practised for high mass on Sunday, and she had to play the organ. The priests and the ecclesiastiques came to practise-also. The choirster was a young ecclesiastique. He stood beside her and turned the music. They fell in love with each other. It was noticed by one of the nuns that they passed letters to each other, so he received his *conge*, and they had an old priest to act as choirster. Then the young people made a confident of the baker, and exchanged

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letters in this way. She had one hour in the music room every night to herself, when she was not disturbed; so she got a girl to take her place, and to loan her some clothes, and she went out into the garden. He had a carriage at the gate, and thus they went to the minister's and were married. After eight, when she did not appear with the other nuns, they began to look around. They found her habit and veil and a note on her bed, saying good-bye to the cloister and to Romanism, that she was sorry for the step she had taken, and that she had not had a happy day, since she left her own church. The mother superior was very angry and the priests also, and they cursed her, saying that she should never have any children. While I was in the convent she had two boys, and she and her husband were members of the Methodist Church. The curse did not have much effect.

## CHAPTER II.

### LIFE AS A NOVICE.

**A**T the age of eighteen, I had decided to become a nun. So I had to pay six hundred dollars, provide an iron bed and twelve each of all such things as towels, sheets, and pillow-cases. Everyone has to do this, and if ever they should leave, they can take away nothing with them.

I was first a postulant, then I received the white veil, and was in the novitiate for several years.

The novices dress the same as the nuns, except that they have no cross at their neck, and no keys hanging at their side.

My mother was very ill at this time with consumption, and if I became a nun I could not go to see her,



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or attend her funeral, so I delayed taking the final vows.

We had, in the convent, a "Crying Infant Jesus," that made a good deal of money for us. The pope sent it from Rome. It was as large as a baby, and lay, in a beautiful crib with candles lighted around it, just before the altar. Anyone who would go and pray before it and put money into the box, would get a plenary indulgence. There was a spring on the inside, and back of the altar, behind a curtain, was stationed a boy, who could see out, but could not be seen. When anyone came and did not put any money in the box, he would pull the spring, and it would cry just like a child. Then the people would return and leave money.

We were told never to look at or smile at the priests, or do anything to tempt them, because it was said that if anyone were intimate with a

priest, that when they died a tree would grow up out of their body, a weeping-willow, from which water would drop continually, meaning that they were weeping in hell for their crime. Or another case was told, how a serpent came and wound about the coffin, and could not be driven away or killed until the priest came and sprinkled holy water upon it, then it went away with flames of fire escaping from its mouth. The girls there were told never to marry protestants, or be married by a minister. If they did they would turn black after they were dead. I think that Mr. Dewey and some of the other protestants must have heard and believed this story, and that is why they were married by a priest.

Every three months the nuns have a retreat for a week. They make a general confession and fast and pray and meditate, and do not talk at all,

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except half an hour in the evening. The bishop led it, and he would exhort us to make full confessions, and he would tell us of a nun, whom everyone thought was a saint. She died, and the sisters were around her coffin praying, not for her, but to her, for her to intercede for them. And she arose with flames of fire coming out of her mouth, and said, "do not pray to me, my sisters, I am damned for all eternity, for a sin of impurity. I hid in confession, when I was a girl." And she went out in a flame of fire.

Before taking communion, we had to fast from mid-night. Nothing must enter our mouths, not even a pin...

The bishop has a great deal of power. He came to visit the convent the day before Christmas, and that is a fast day. They had fish on the table, and he asked if they had nothing better than that, and the mother

superior said yes, they had several turkeys cooked, but it was a fast day. He said, "did not our Saviour turn water to wine, and do not I change the host into the body of our Saviour?" They put the turkey before him; he made the sign of the cross over it, making a little prayer in Latin, and said it was a fish. This same bishop, Bourget, was sick, and they said that his lungs were gone, and that it was a miracle that he lived, and the Virgin Mary appeared to him every day to comfort him. The people sent their prayer books and beads and relics to him to be blessed; and they had to pay him a great deal of money for it. The sisters were talking about him one day, when sister Ann, a lay nun, (one that does general work) said that if we could see the tray of food that was brought into his room three times a day, we would not believe that he was

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kept alive by the angels.

It was this same sister Ann that told us that sister Eugene did not have inflammatory rheumatism, nor did not go to Europe, but was about to become a mother. This sister was very unhappy and advised us, the novices, never to become nuns. She said that she had broken her mother's heart when she became a nun. She told us that she had been a mother three times, and had seen her little ones strangled before her. When they were being baptised, as the priest sprinkled them, the nun who held them, held their noses and they died. Then they were put into the cellar and lime was sprinkled over them.

The superior had a great deal of trouble to train her servant girls to suit her. One Irish girl sent in the vegetables when they were not cooked sufficiently. The superior

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went to the kitchen, and told her, that in the future she must taste everything before sending it to the table. The next day there were several priests there for dinner. When the covers were taken off, there was a bite out of every potato, and out of every piece of pie. When she was called up she said, "Shure mum, ye told me to taste everything, and I did."



## CHAPTER III.

### COMING TO THE LIGHT.

**T**HE night before a nun receives the black veil, her hair is shaved off and something is put on her head so that the hair will never grow again. This is so that if she ever escapes, everyone will know that she is a nun. The next morning she is dressed in her habit, with the cross on her breast and a bunch of keys at her belt, and over this, she is dressed in white, like a bride, with a veil and wreath of orange blossoms. The bishop marries her with a ring to Christ. Then he gives her her name, that of some saint. They have a coffin there, and after she is married they take off the white, while all chant the *Libera*, a canticle for the dead, and the bishop puts on the

black veil. Her hair is brought up, and she has to step on it to show that she despises the world. Then she must lie down in the coffin, to show that she is dead to the world, and all its pleasures. Four priests carry the coffin, and all of the nuns follow in procession, chanting, to the Novitiate, her future home. She must take three vows, with her hands on the Bible,—poverty, chastity, obedience. Poverty; she can call nothing her own. If her parents or friends give her money she must hand it all over. Chastity; not to look at any man, (the priests are not men). Obedience; to obey the priest and mother superior in all things.

I had not taken these final vows on account of my mother's illness. Before she died my father attended the meetings held by Rev. Mr. Chiniquy, and under his preaching was converted, and joined the Methodist Church.



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Before he was converted he used to have a spree on every court day, but after he was converted he did not touch liquor at all, and did not use profane language, and my mother noticed the change, for he was kinder than usual to her. But the priest made her leave him, and she went to the Grey Nunnery where my sister was a gray nun, and she died there one year later.

After my mother's funeral I was taken sick with brain fever, caused by worry over my father's conversion, and sorrow over my mother's death, and study. So the doctor ordered a change of air. There were two of the boarders who were going to North Hampton, Mass. for a visit, and it was arranged that I should go that far with them, and from there go on to visit my sister. We had none of us ever been to this country before. The other girls were going to visit relatives

and friends in North Hampton and I visited with them for six weeks. We had promised that the first Saturday we were away, we would go to confession. So accordingly, on Saturday we went to the church. It was a small plain wooden building, not at all like what we had been used to seeing. There was no one in the church, so we went to the priest's house to ask for him. The house-keeper said that he was hoeing in the garden and for us to go back into the church and she would send him to us. We went back and in a few minutes a little bald-headed, red nosed man came in. He put on the stole and cassock and sat down in the confessional. We did not go near him because he was not dressed like a priest, and they had told us in Canada that in this wicked country, the protestants would go into the churches and hear the confessions, so we were afraid to go to him.

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So we went home and left him there.

The next day, Sunday, we all went to mass and sat together, and we saw that it was really the priest that we had seen the day before, with the red nose. As soon as mass was over, he came down and shook hands, saying that he knew we were strangers, and asking where we came from. We told him that we were from Montreal, and told why we did not go to confession, that we thought he was a heretic. He said that he did not wonder that we were disappointed, but if he were to wear a long gown as they did in Montreal, the protestants would hoot at him. We told him that the church was very dirty, so he had women to come and clean it, and had it whitewashed, and would no longer allow the men to spit on the floor but had spittoons brought in. Then he got some gilt paper and fixed up the altar, and put some sta-

tues on it, and it was quite a different looking church when we left. Then they started a Sunday School also.

After six weeks the girls went home, and I came on to visit my sister. I expected to return, as soon as I got better, and take the final vows, but my sister and the priest wanted me to stay here. The priest said that this was a more wicked place than Canada, and if I stayed here and worked I would have a greater reward. Then too, they were not so strict here as in Montreal, I could be near my sister, so I was glad to stay.

They did not have any convent here when I came, but soon afterward the priest wanted to build one. After I had rested about two months, the priest started a parochial school, and I was the teacher. I also had a class in Sunday School, and I prepared the children for their first communion, and made the wafer gods. Before I

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came they used to buy the wafer gods in Hartford, and it cost them quite a sum of money, but I had learned to make them in the convent, so we made them, the priest's house-keeper and I. I worked so hard that my head began to trouble me again, and the doctor said that I must stop teaching, or I would have brain fever again. So the priest got me a place in an American family, doing housework. The priest told me that they were all infidels in this family, and it would be my mission to have them converted to the only true church. So when I was out walking one day with the little girl, whose name was the same as mine—Grace—I took her to the church and had her baptised by the priest. It is said that if anyone is baptised by a priest they will eventually become catholics even if they are brought up by protestants. So the priest christened her.

When she came home she told her mother that the man with the pretty white dress, did some funny things on her head, but she liked him because he gave her some candy.

When a priest christens anyone he sprinkles them with holy water, makes the sign of the cross on their forehead, with holy oil, and the sign of the cross on their ears, eyes, nose and hands, and to babies on their feet also. Then he puts salt in their mouths to drive the devil out. Thus all of the senses are anointed.

While I was with this family, the first Sunday in November, the lawyer said that he would harness up and we would all go to Vespers. I was very much pleased, I thought that my prayers were being answered, and that they were all being converted. After Vespers, the priest took them all around to see the church. That evening the lawyer came to the kitchen

and asked me why the church was all draped in black. I told him that the month of November was dedicated to the souls in purgatory, for praying and masses. He wanted to know what purgatory was. I told him that when people died they were not pure enough to get to Heaven and that purgatory was the same as hell, a burning fire, but that there was some hope of getting out. He wanted to know how they got out of purgatory, and I told him it was by praying and fasting, and having the priest say masses. Then he wanted to know how many masses it took but I could not tell him that, for I had been paying all the money I could earn to the priest to get my mother out of purgatory, and had not yet accomplished it, so I said, "Oh, I have not time to talk about religion." He said, "If I saw you lying in a fire and wouldn't take you out until your friends should

give me money, what would you think about it?" I told him that I thought that he would be as bad as the devil, and he said he agreed with me. Then he said, if they can get people out of purgatory and will not do it unless they are paid money, then they are devils. That same evening I went to the priest, and told him about it and asked him to explain to me about purgatory, or else give me books that I might let the lawyer read, that would explain all. His face got very red, and he exclaimed, "Grace, you must leave dat house, dat is von bad house." And it was he who got me the place.

I told him that I would not leave that house, that it was not a bad house. They never meddled with my soul or my religion. They were very good to me, buying fish on fast days that I might not break any vows. The next day I wrote to the mother



superior of the convent where I had been in Montreal, and told her that I was living in a protestant family, and wished to convert them, but could not explain about purgatory, and I asked her to send me books that I might understand about it. All the satisfaction I got was a letter telling me to come home, that this was a wicked country, and that I would lose my soul. Then I began to read all the papers that I could get, to find something to explain about purgatory. The lawyer took the New York Witness, and it contained sermons by Rev. Fr. O'Connor to Archbishop Gibbons. I read these and they helped me very much.

I kept going to mass and teaching Sunday School just the same, but I was losing faith in it, for I could not believe things that they could not explain.

I was treasurer of the Children of

Mary, and one day I went to the sacristy to pay the priest some money. He had been drinking and tried to insult me. I slapped him in the face and that was the last time I ever went to that church. I did not go anywhere but stayed at home and read on Sundays.

There was a protestant family living up stairs, and they had an organ. On Sundays they would play and sing hymns; one of the girls, seeing that I was fond of music, invited me, one Sunday evening, to go with her where I could hear a lot of music. I asked her if it was at a church, but she said no, at a hall. So I put on a thick veil, so that the catholics would not know me, and went with her. The Baptist church had been burned some time before and they were then holding services in a hall, and it was to one of their Sunday School concerts that I went.

Toward the last of the meeting a gentleman in the back seat arose, and spoke. When he began to speak, I started because his voice sounded like my father's. I asked a lady beside me, who he was, she said he was the minister. When they had read the Bible and prayed, I had put my fingers in my ears, because although I had left the Catholic church here, I still thought that it was the only true church. But when this minister began to talk, I listened to all that he said, and when I got home that night I offered my first real prayer to God.

By the next day the news that I had been to a protestant church, had spread all over town. The priest called with my sister, and he wanted me to promise that I would not go any more, but I would not promise. I continued to go to the protestant church in the evenings, when it was dark. I also went to prayer meetings.

The priest said that if I would go to the Episcopal church it would not be so bad, for there was only a paper wall between it and the Catholic, but the Baptist church was a viper's nest. But I had been to the Episcopal church two or three times, and I did not like it because it was so much like the Catholic.

I continued going regularly to the protestant services, and after a time I was baptised and joined the Baptist church.



## CHAPTER IV.

### AFTER YEARS.

**A**FTER a little while the Congregational minister came to me, and asked me if I knew of anyone who had been a Catholic and had turned, who would come here and preach to the Catholics. I told him of Fr. Chiniquy, under whose preaching my father had been converted. The ministers of the different protestant churches united and asked me if I would write and ask him to come.

I did so, and in a few days I received an answer saying that he would come, and sending a package of papers to be distributed in the meantime.

In about a week he came, and then no one could be found who would take him to board. At last Mr. A.,

a member of the Baptist church took him. He held services in the hall every evening, and the catholics went to the house to see him. The catholics became greatly stirred up, and at last, in their rage, burned Mr. A's barn which was full of hay and a lot of grain.

One evening Mr. Chiniquy, had invited all to come and see what power the god of Rome had. The hall was crowded. The priest had told them that God would strike him dead. He said once a priest always a priest, and proceeded to consecrate the wafer. Then he ground it up in his hands and hitting his hands together scattered it on the floor. "Now what power has your wafer god," he asked.

Of coures they were very much astonished, and that night there were ten that wanted to leave the Catholic church, and Fr. Chiniquy sent in resignations to the priest for all who signified a desire to leave. He was

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here about ten days and during that time twenty-five of the French came out. Then he went to Webster and Worcester to preach. About a year afterwards he came again, and about one hundred of the French came out. Then when he went away he sent missionaries and they continued to hold French meetings. After I joined the Baptist church the Catholics began to persecute me. One night when I was going to meeting some one threw a stone and hit me on the leg, and there is a scar there to this day. One day I met the priest, and he tried in every way to get me back. He coaxed, he threatened and finally he told me to name a price and get out of town, and when I would not be bought over, he said that he would make it so hot for me, that I would be glad to leave. But I am still here, and he has long since gone.

They continued to persecute me in various ways. They stoned me, they hooted at me on the streets, and everything that was done in town, any fire set, any mischief of any kind committed, it was all blamed upon me. Of course it was very unpleasant, but I managed to endure it with God's help. But what hurt me the most of all was that after a while my sister went away to Meriden to be housekeeper for a priest, and she was taken sick there. When she was dying she kept calling for me, but they would not send me word, and I did not know a thing about it until after she was dead and buried. Some of my friends here advised me to go to a lawyer, and compel the priest to give me her things, but after thinking it over I concluded to let matters be as they were.

I was the first French convert to be baptised, and when I was baptised,



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Mr. A. arose and said before all the people that as long as he and his wife lived I should never want a home. They were Baptists and some thought that it was said for effect, but in all the years that have passed, and through all the trouble that I have had, they have been true to their promise. A good many were baptised afterwards, one was a missionary for several years, and his wife was also baptised. She had been a very strong Catholic, educated in a convent in Montreal. Another is now a Baptist minister in Lowell. One old lady came out of the water singing the "Sweet By and By," and the Catholics stood by and threw dogs into the river. Another old lady was baptised who could not read or write and was seventy years old.

The priest said that they were all nothing but rotten branches that he had thrown over the fence. But

when any of these same rotten branches are sick, they come hurrying around to try and win them over to the Catholic faith.

I have never been sorry that I came out of the Catholic church but I am glad that God in His mercy did not let me know before hand all that it has cost me, and this I know is true, "If God be for us, we need not fear what man can do to us."

