

My Religious Experience,

BY THE EDITOR.

My first religious experience was when a boy at Salmon River.

We were many miles distant from a church of any kind, but our good mother partly supplied the deficiency by teaching us our prayers and instructing us in the catechism and prayer book, and the sweetest memories I have are of the evenings at the old broad-mouthed fire-side when the snow was drifting in eddying gusts without, the timbers cracking with the frost, with the cheerful glow of the hardwood logs only equalled by the moon and stars or the sanguinary northern lights, or when spring clothed with its mantle of green the little meadow nearly under our window and the silvery river rippled by in the moonshine while the frogs piped clear and loud in the pond close by and the crickets sang in the old hearthstone.

Then we—my brother John, my sister Eliza and I, would sit by our mother's side and drink in her precious instructions and counsels, for though not an educated woman in the general acceptance of the term, she was a widely read woman and had a very retentive memory and was well versed in church history. We listened in open mouthed wonder to her stories of the piety, self sacrifice and martyrdom of the saints, and were moved to tears at the story of the Cross, the actors in the tragedy being to us not mere abstract figures, but veritable realities, whom we could see in fancy and hear the cry of the Jews:—"Crucify him! crucify him!" At that cry our hearts were bursting with indignation and if we had been there we felt that we would not have even heeded the command of the Divine Redeemer to pray for them, but should have visited upon them then and there swift and sure retribution.

Our father occasionally took a hand, more to show that he did not wish mother to have a monopoly of our instruction, but in a very different way. He would call us summarily up and drill us in the "four cardinal virtues" which we are forced to admit he did not possess himself to a marked degree, as trembling before him we came as culprits to execution, and should we show the slightest inattention or refuse to answer promptly he would thrash them into us with a birch switch.

On leaving the home of our childhood we removed to the St. John river and were thrown largely into the company of persons of a different belief, who though good people in their way thought it their duty never to lose an opportunity of poisoning our minds against the religion of our mother, and ignorant and inexperienced as we were we were unable to answer their arguments and were consequently often unsettled in our minds, but we had only to go to our mother to have every difficulty smoothed out and every perplexing problem satisfactorily explained, and judging rightly that our best earthly friend must of necessity be our best spiritual adviser, we were as a consequence more deeply grounded in the faith.

My brother John and I would often accompany our brother Ephraim (who had joined the Methodists some years before) to the Baptist and Methodist Sabbath Schools, and our parents inter-

posed no objection, for while tenaciously clinging to their faith as a precious treasure they had a very high regard for their Protestant neighbors and were destitute of a single vestige of bigotry.

To their credit be it said that neither the teachers or the ministers with whom we came in contact ever spoke a word to us against our religion, but the books handed out to us at the close of the services were full of it.

Shortly after, I went to live with a gentleman who pitied my poverty or "lost" condition, and the family showed great solicitude for my soul's welfare. I was clad decently and to do the man justice I must say that he never disciplined me more than I deserved, but it was largely the New Woman who ruled in that household, and while I was called punctually to my prayers I had to wait until the family had finished their meals and come in to a cold bite and gulp that down as fast as I could while the lady of the house was clearing the table; which with sundry slight punishments, such as a sound thrashing with a carriage whip that left the black and blue lumps all over my neck, shoulders and face, for the heinous offences of picking an apple off a tree or dallying over the saw horse when I was tired "bucking" wood drove me to the conclusion that she cared far more for my soul than my body. But if she snatched me as "a brand from the burning" she got her fingers badly burned in handling me, for seeing her destitute of all the Christian graces of mercy, forbearance and common fair play I did all I could to vex her and torment her, knowing my case could not be any worse, whereas if she had appealed to my better nature and given me a fair show she could have won me over to have been her willing slave, as I have always been susceptible to kindness and affection, but never could be driven.

That fall finished my connection with this family, who, securing one of the "Lambs of the Lord" in the person of a minister's son, dropped me like a hot potato, but the aforesaid lamb turned out to be a very perverse sheep, and when she attempted to play her tricks on him he butted vigorously, and the result was that he did not stay as long as I had.

My folks, moving over to Maine, I accompanied them, and going to work in the tannery of Shaw Bros, was thrown into the company of many wicked young men, and old ones too. Owing to the before mentioned gentleman's training I had a horror of profanity and was inexpressibly shocked at the blasphemy of my fellow workmen, but as "evil communications corrupt good manners," my scruples gradually wore away and I got so that I could curse and swear as well as the rest. I still retained my Catholic principles, but as there was no church near, and the local congregation I knew to be a nest of hypocrites, who preached temperance and peddled rum, and some who ran off with other men's wives, I began to get disgusted with religion, and as there were several Free-thinkers among my companions who cheerfully lent me the works of Paine and Ingersoll and others destructive of reverence in God and faith in humanity I easily fell in with them, and became both an infidel and a cynic.

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