



JULES MARION

REV. P. PERNIN, MISSIONARY PRIEST.

THE  
**FINGER OF GOD**  
IS THERE!

OR,

**THRILLING EPISODE**

OF A STANGE EVENT RELATED BY AN EYE-WITNESS,

**REV. P. PERNIN,**

*United States Missionary.*

PUBLISHED WITH THE APPROBATION OF HIS LORDSHIP  
THE BISHOP OF MONTREAL.

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For the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Mari-  
nette, State of Wisconsin.

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Transivimus per ignem et aquam,  
Et eduxisti nos in refrigerium."—Ps. 65.

We have passed through fire and water,  
And thou hast brought us out into a refreshment.

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**Montreal:**

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## APPROBATION.

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We the undersigned, bishop of Montreal, have read the work called, *The finger of God is There, &c.*, by Rev. P. Pernin, and have been deeply touched by it.

As we are fully convinced that this narration cannot but interest the faithful of our diocese, whose hearts ever respond to the appeal of the afflicted, we earnestly recommend its perusal to them. We even deem it right to advise them to have a copy of this work in their homes, so as to read and re-read it frequently in the family circle, thus keeping constantly before them striking examples of God's goodness towards those whom He wishes to save, as well as of His terrible justice when compelled to stretch forth His arm to punish.

Besides, as the profits arising from the sale of this book are to be devoted to the Church of *Our Lady of Lourdes*, now building at Marinette, all will doubtless make it a duty to purchase copies, and thus encourage an excellent enterprise, tending to promote the glory of God and the good of souls.

Montreal, 24th May, day consecrated by the Church to honoring Our Lady of Good Succor, in the year 1874.

† Ig., Bishop of Montreal.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
Approbation of His Lordship the Bishop of Montreal.....	5
Preface.....	7
Chap. I.—Before the Catastrophe.....	11
Chap. II.—During the Catastrophe.....	33
Chap. III.—After the Catastrophe.....	52
Conclusion.....	90
Appendix .....	94

# The Finger of God is there!

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## PREFACE.

Why publish this narrative two years and a half after the great catastrophe it relates has occurred?

For two important reasons:

1st. My health, weakened by the ordeal through which I had passed, has been too uncertain since that fatal period to permit of my undertaking the work before.

2nd. The countless pre-occupations accompanying my efforts to attend to the spiritual wants of my people, deprived of all they had once possessed, and the trials through which I myself had passed, absorbed my time completely.

Why write to-day this recital, which, though describing an episode of one of the most thrilling phenomena of our time, commences nevertheless to be a fact of the past, forgotten more completely each succeeding day?

For two reasons also:

1st. Several distinguished personages, among others two eminent bishops, one residing in the United States and the other in England, have urged me to write this narrative, representing that its perusal might be of service to many souls. 'Tis a duty for me to yield to the advice of those who possess so entirely my esteem and affection.

2nd. In publishing these pages I hope also to enlist the sympathies of charitable souls on behalf of the good work now going on at Marinette, and to obtain from them the pecuniary means necessary to the happy termination of the enterprise.

The two following extracts, taken from a couple of articles published in the *Freeman's Journal of New York*, will sufficiently explain the nature and the difficulties of my undertaking :

“ NEW YORK, 30th June, 1873.

“ *A desert blossoming out anew.*

“ Sunday, the eight of June, will be long remembered by the catholics of Marinette. On that day His Lordship Bishop Melcher, of Green Bay, came to bless the foundation stone of a new church destined to replace the one destroyed during the terrible conflagration of 1871, which covered this part of the country with ruins.

The ceremony was imposing, &c.....

The document placed in the foundation-stone was as follows :

“ Under the Pontificate of Pius IX, Pope,  
Joseph Melcher, being Bishop of Green Bay,

“ U. S. Grant, President of the United States,  
C. C. Washburn, Governor of the State of Wisconsin,  
The Rev. P. Pernin, parish priest of the Catholic  
Church of Marinette,

And the Rev. W. Corby, of the Society of the Holy  
Cross, Preacher on the occasion.

In presence of several priests, and a large concourse of people, this foundation stone was blessed by the

Ordinary of the Diocese of Green Bay, for the church to be here built in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, and for the salvation of many."

"All this displays the zeal of our Beloved Pastor, as well as his devotion to the welfare of his people. His parish, though overwhelmed by the enormous losses inflicted on it by fire promises to soon become under his energetic direction one of the best organized in this part of the country. Whilst evincing such proofs of interest and devotion, the zealous pastor cannot fail in winning the love and respect of his parishioners, and furthering the cause of Religion among them."

The second extract from the same New York journal is dated January 18th, 1874. It was sent to the Editor of the *Freeman*, on the occasion of my silver wedding, that is to say the twenty-fifth anniversary of my admission to the priesthood. I will only quote that portion of the article which relates to the buildings now in course of reconstruction.

"The catholics of Marinette have been cruelly tried by the terrible fires which ravaged about two years ago the North of Wisconsin. Their church, presbytery and school were completely destroyed, and since then they have been doing their best to replace what they have lost. Their Pastor, the Rev. Mr. Pernin, has labored unceasingly, but his resources being very limited, he has only succeeded as yet in rebuilding the half of his church. Father Pernin, notwithstanding the disadvantages he has had to contend with, has not forgotten the children confided to his care, and, after continued and courageous efforts, has suc-



ceeded in building a parish school. His zeal has been generously seconded not only by the Catholics of Marinette, but also by the Protestant portion of its inhabitants. Still but a part of the task is accomplished. Owing to want of resources, the school is not yet opened, but it is hoped that help may arrive before long from some unknown quarter."

I have dedicated my church to *Our Lady of Lourdes*, celebrated to-day throughout the entire world for the miracles of love and mercy that she is operating everywhere.

It is, I believe, the first church in the United States consecrated to the Blessed Virgin under this her new title. My intention, in selecting her as patroness, was to render doubly dear to her this town which already bears her name, for Marinette is but a corruption of Marie, and thus draw down on it her special blessings.

May this tender mother deign to look favorably on my intention and bless the object I have in view!

It is all done for her honor and the salvation of souls.

## CHAPTER I.

### BEFORE THE CATASTROPHE.

*A glance at the country.*—A country covered with dense forests, in the midst of which are to be met with here and there, along newly opened roads, clearings of more or less extent, sometimes a half league in width to afford space for an infant town; or perhaps three or four acres intended for a farm. With the exception of these isolated spots where the trees have been cut down and burned, all is a wild but majestic forest. Trees, trees everywhere, nothing else but trees as far as you can travel from the bay, either towards the north or west. These immense forests are bounded on the east by *Green Bay* of Lake Michigan, and by the lake itself.

The face of the country is in general undulating; diversified by valleys overgrown with cedars and spruce trees, sandy hills covered with evergreens, and large tracts of rich land filled with the different varieties of hard wood, oak, maple, beech, ash, elm and birch. The climate of this region is generally uniform and favorable

to the crops that are now tried there with remarkable success. Rains are frequent, and they generally fall at a favorable time.

*Natural causes of the conflagration.*—The year 1871 was, however, distinguished by its unusual dryness. Farmers had profited of the latter circumstance to enlarge their clearings, cutting down and burning the wood that stood in their way. Hundreds of laborers employed in the construction of a railroad had acted in like manner, availing themselves both of axe and fire to advance their work. Hunters and Indians scour these forests continually, especially in the autumn season, at which they ascend the streams time for trout-fishing, or disperse through the woods deer-stalking. At night they kindle a large fire wherever they may chance to halt, prepare their suppers, then wrapping themselves in their blankets, sleep peacefully, extended on the earth, knowing that the fire will keep at a distance any wild animals that may happen to range through the vicinity during the night. The ensuing morning they depart without taking the precaution of extinguishing the

smouldering embers of the fire that has protected and warmed them. Farmers and others act in a similar manner. In this way the woods, particularly in the fall, are gleaming every where with fires lighted by man, and which, fed on every side by dry leaves and branches, spread more or less. If fanned by a brisk gale of wind they are liable to assume most formidable proportions.

Twice or thrice before October 8th, the effects of the wind, favored by the general dryness, had filled the inhabitants of the environs with consternation. A few details on this point may interest the reader, and serve at the same time to illustrate more fully the great catastrophe which overwhelmed us later. The destructive element seemed whilst multiplying its warnings to be at the same time essaying its own strength. On the 22nd September, I was summoned, in the exercise of my ministry, to the Sugar Bush, a place in the neighborhood of Peshtigo, where a number of farms lie adjacent to each other. Whilst waiting at one of these, isolated from the rest, I took a gun, and, accompanied by

a lad of twelve years of age, who offered to guide me through the wood, started in pursuit of some of the pheasants which abounded in the environs. At the expiration of a few hours, seeing that the sun was sinking in the horizon, I bade the child re-conduct me to the farm house. He endeavored to do so but without success. We went on and on, now turning to the right, now to the left, but without coming in view of our destination. In less than a half hour's wanderings we perceived that we were completely lost in the woods. Night was setting in, and nature was silently preparing for the season of rest. The only sounds audible were the crackling of a tiny tongue of fire that ran along the ground, in and out, among the trunks of the trees, leaving them unscathed but devouring the dry leaves that came in its way; and the swaying of the upper branches of the trees announcing that the wind was rising. We shouted loudly, but without evoking any reply. I then fired off my gun several times as tokens of distress. Finally a distant hallo reached our ears, then another, then several coming from different directions,

Rendered anxious by our prolonged absence, the parents of my companion and the farm servants had finally suspected the truth and set out to seek us. Directed to our quarter by our shouts and the firing, they were soon on the right road when a new obstacle presented itself. Fanned by the wind, the tiny flames previously mentioned had united and spread over a considerable surface. We thus found ourselves in the centre of a circle of fire extending or narrowing, more or less, around us. We could not reach the men who had come to our assistance, nor could we go to them without incurring the risk of seriously scorching our feet or of being suffocated by the smoke. They were obliged to fray a passage for us by beating the fire with branches of trees at one particular point, thus momentarily staying its progress whilst we rapidly made our escape.

The danger proved more imminent in places exposed to the wind, and I learned the following day on my return to Peshtigo, that the town had been in great peril at the very time that I had lost myself in the woods. The wind had risen, and, fanning

the flames, had driven them in the direction of the houses. Hogsheads of water were placed at intervals all round the town, ready for any emergency.

I will now mention another incident that happened a few days before the great catastrophe:—

I was driving homeward after having visited my second parish situated on the banks of the River Ménominié, about two leagues distant. Whilst quietly following the public road opened through the forest, I remarked little fires gleaming here and there along the route, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. Suddenly I arrived at a spot where the flames were burning on both sides at once with more violence than elsewhere. The smoke driven to the front, filled the road and obscured it to such a degree that I could neither see the extent of the fire nor judge of the amount of danger. I inferred, however, that the latter was not very great as the wind was not against me. I entered then, though at first hesitatingly, into the dense cloud of smoke left darkling behind by the flames burning fiercely forward. My horse hung

back, but I finally succeeded in urging him on, and in five or six minutes we emerged safely from this labyrinth of fire and smoke. Here we found ourselves confronted by a dozen of vehicles arrested in their course by the conflagration.—“Can we pass,” inquired one? “Yes, since I have just done so, but loosen your reins and urge on your horse or you may be suffocated.”

Some of the number dashed forward, others had not the hardihood to follow, and consequently returned to Peshtigo.

It may thus be seen that warnings were not wanting. I give now another trait, more striking than either of those just related, copied from a Journal published at Green Bay. It is a description of a combat sustained against the terrible element of fire at Peshtigo, Sunday, 24th September, just two weeks before the destruction of the village: “Sunday, the 24th inst, was an exciting, I might say a fearful time, in Peshtigo. For several days the fires had been raging in the timber all around, north, south, east and west. Saturday, the flames burned through to the river a little above the town; and on Saturday night, much



danger was apprehended from the sparks and cinders that blew across the river, into the upper part of the town, near the factory. A force was stationed along the river, and although fire caught in the sawdust and dry slabs, it was promptly extinguished. It was a grand sight, the fire that night. It burned to the tops of the tallest trees, enveloped them in a mantle of flames, or, winding itself about them like a huge serpent, crept to their summits, out upon the branches, and wound its huge folds about them. Hissing and glaring, it lapped out its myriad fiery tongues while its fierce breath swept off the green leaves and roared through the forest like a tempest. Ever and anon some tall old pine, whose huge trunk had become a column of fire, fell with a thundering crash, filling the air with an ascending cloud of sparks and cinders, whilst above this sheet of flames a dense black cloud of resinous smoke, in its strong contrast to the light beneath, seemed to threaten death and destruction to all below.

Thousands of birds, driven from their roosts flew about as if uncertain which way

to go, and made the night still more hideous by their startled cries. Frequently they would fly hither and thither, calling loudly for their mates, then hovering for a moment in the air suddenly dart downward and disappear in the fiery furnace beneath. Thus the night wore away while all earnestly hoped, and many hearts fervently prayed, for rain.

Sunday morning the fires had died down, so that we began to hope the danger was over. About 11 o'clock, while the different congregations were assembled in their respective churches, the steam whistle of the factory blew a wild blast of alarm. In a moment the temples were emptied of their worshippers, the latter rushing wildly out to see what had happened. Fire had caught in the sawdust near the factory again, but before we reached the spot it was extinguished. The wind had suddenly risen and was blowing a gale from the north-west. The fires in the timber were burning more fiercely than ever, and were approaching the river directly opposite the factory. The air was literally filled with the burning coals and cinders, which

fell, setting fire all around, and the utmost diligence was necessary to prevent these flames from spreading. The engine was brought out, and hundreds of pails from the factory were manned; in short, everything that was possible, done to prevent the fire from entering the town.

But now a new danger arose. The fires to the west of the town were approaching rapidly, and it seemed that nothing short of a miracle could save it from utter destruction. A cloud of hot blinding smoke blew in our faces and made it extremely difficult to see or do anything; still prompt and energetic means were taken to check the approaching flames.

“The Company’s teams were set to carrying water, and the whole force of over three hundred of the laborers in the factory and mills were on the ground, besides other citizens. Goods were packed up, and moved from buildings supposed to be in immediate danger. Indeed a general conflagration seemed inevitable. I have seen fires sweep over the prairies with the speed of a locomotive, and the prairie fire is grand and terrific; but beside a timber

fire it sinks into insignificance. In proportion as the timber is denser, heavier, and loftier than the prairie grass, the timber fire is intenser, hotter, grander, than the prairie fire. The fire on the prairie before a high wind will rush on and lap up the light dead grass, and it is gone in a breath. In the timber it may move almost as rapidly, but the fire does not go out with the advance waves which sweep over the tops of the trees and catch the light limbs and foliage. Nor is there the same chance to resist the approach of fire in the forests. It is as though you attempted to resist the approach of an avalanche of fire hurled against you. With the going down of the sun the wind abated and with it the fire. Timber was felled and water thrown over it—buildings were covered with wet blankets and all under the scorching heat, and in blinding suffocating smoke that was enough to strangle one; and thus passed the night of Sunday.

“Monday, the wind veered to the south, and cleared away the smoke. Strange to say not a building was burned—the town was saved. Monday the factory was closed to

give the men rest, and to-day, 27th September, all is quiet and going on as usual."

What did these repeated alarms filling the minds of the people with anxiety during the three or four weeks preceding the great calamity seem to indicate!

Doubtless they might have been looked on as the natural results of the great dryness, the number of fires lighted throughout the forests by hunters or others, as well as of the wind that fanned from time to time these fires, augmenting their strength and volume, but who will dare to say that they were not specially ordained by Him who is master of causes as well as of their effects? Does He not in most cases avail Himself of natural causes to execute His will and bring about the most wonderful results? It would indeed be difficult for any one who had assisted as I had done at the terrible events following so closely on the above mentioned indications not to see in them the hand of God, and infer in consequence that these various signs were but forerunners of the great tragedy for which He wished us to be in some degree prepared.

I cannot say whether they were looked on by many in this light or not, but certainly some were greatly alarmed and prepared as far as lay in their power for a general conflagration, burying in the earth those objects which they specially wished to save. The Company caused all combustible materials on which a fire could possibly feed to be taken away, and augmented the number of water hogsheads girdling the town. Wise precautions certainly, which would have been of great service in an ordinary case of fire but which were utterly unavailing in the awful conflagration that burst upon us. They served nevertheless to demonstrate more clearly the *finger of God* in the events which succeeded.

As for myself, I allowed things to take their course without feeling any great anxiety as to consequences, or taking any precautionary steps, a frame of mind very different to that which I was destined to experience on the evening of 8th October.

A word now about my two parishes.

*Peshtigo*.—*Peshtigo* is situated on a river of that name, about six miles from Green Bay with which it communicates by means

of a small railroad. The Company established at Peshtigo is a source of prosperity to the whole country, not only from its spirit of enterprise and large pecuniary resources but also from its numerous establishments, the most important of which, a factory of tubs and buckets, affords alone steady employment to more than 300 workmen. The population of Peshtigo, including the farmers settled in the neighborhood, numbered then about two thousand souls. We were just finishing the construction of a church looked on as a great embellishment to the parish.

My abode was near the church, to the west of the river, and about five or six minutes walk from the latter. I mention this so as to render the circumstances of my escape through the midst of the flames more intelligible.

*Marinette.*—Besides Peshtigo, I had the charge of another parish much more important situated on the River Ménomonie, at the point where it empties into Green Bay. It is called Marinette, from a female half breed, looked on as their queen by the Indians inhabiting that district.

This woman received in baptism the name of Mary, *Marie*, which subsequently was corrupted into that of *Marinette*, or little *Marie*. Hence the name of *Marinette* bestowed on the place. It is there that we are at present building a church in honor of our Lady of Lourdes. At the time of the fire, *Marinette* possessed a church, a handsome new presbytery just finished, in which I was on the point of taking up my abode, besides a house in course of construction, destined to serve as a parish school.

The population was about double that of Peshtigo.

*Singular Coincidence.*—Before entering into details, I will mention one more circumstance which may appear providential in the eyes of some, though brought about by purely natural causes.

At the time of the catastrophe our church at Peshtigo was ready for plastering, the ensuing Monday being appointed for commencing the work. The lime and marble dust were lying ready in front of the building, whilst the altar and various ornaments, as well as the pews, had all been removed. Being unable in consequence to officiate



that Sunday in the sacred edifice, I told the people that there would be no mass, notifying at the same time the Catholics of *Cedar River* that I would spend the Sunday among them. The latter place was another of my missions, situated on Green Bay, four or five leagues north of Marinette. Saturday then, 7th October, in accordance with my promise, I left Peshtigo and proceeded to the Ménomonie wharf to take passage on the steamboat *Dunlap*. There I vainly waited her coming several hours. It was the only time that year she had failed in the regularity of her trips. I learned after that the steamboat had passed as usual but stood out from the shore, not deeming it prudent to approach nearer. The temperature was low, and the sky obscured by a dense mass of smoke which no breath of wind arose to dispel, a circumstance rendering navigation very dangerous especially in the neighborhood of the shore. Towards nightfall when all hope of embarking was over, I returned to Peshtigo on horse back. After informing the people that mass would be said in my own abode the following morning, I prepared a temporary altar

in one of the rooms, employing for the purpose the Tabernacle itself which I had taken from the church, and after mass I replaced the Blessed Sacrament in it, intending to say mass again there the next Monday.

In the afternoon, when about leaving for Marinette where I was accustomed to chant vespers and preach when high mass was said at Peshtigo, which was every fortnight, my departure was strongly opposed by several of my parishioners. There seemed to be a vague fear of some impending though unknown evil haunting the minds of many, nor was I myself entirely free from this unusual feeling. It was rather an impression than a conviction, for on reflecting, I saw that things looked much as usual, and arrived at the conclusion that our fears were groundless, without, however, feeling much re-assured thereby.

But for the certainty that the Catholics at Marinette, supposing me at Cedar River, would not, consequently come to vespers, I would probably have persisted in going there, but under actual circumstances I deemed it best to yield to the representations made me and remain where I was.

God willed that I should be at the post of danger. The steamboat which I had expected to bear me from Peshtigo, on the 7th October, had of course obeyed the elements which prevented her landing, but God is the Master of these elements and to Him they obey. Thus I found myself at Peshtigo Sunday evening, 8th October, where, according to all previous calculations, projects and arrangements, I should not have been.

The afternoon passed in complete inactivity. I remained still a prey to the indefinable apprehensions of impending calamity already alluded to, apprehensions contradicted by reason which assured me there was no more cause for present fear than there had been eight or fifteen days before, indeed less, on account of the precautions taken and the numerous sentinels watching over the public safety. These two opposite sentiments, one of which persistently asserted itself despite every effort to shake it off, whilst the other, inspired by reason was powerless to re-assure me, plunged my faculties into a species of mental torpor.

In the outer world everything contribut-

ed to keep alive these two different impressions. On one side, the thick smoke darkening the sky, the heavy, suffocating atmosphere, the mysterious silence filling the air, so often a presage of storm, seemed to afford grounds for fear in case of a sudden gale. On the other hand the passing and repassing in the street of countless young people bent only on amusement, laughing, singing, and perfectly indifferent to the menacing aspect of nature, was sufficient to make me think that I alone was a prey to anxiety, and to render me ashamed of manifesting the feeling.

During the afternoon, an old Canadian, remarkable for the deep interest he always took in every thing relating to the church, came and asked permission to dig a well close to the sacred edifice so as to have water ready at hand in case of accident, as well as for the use of the plasterer who was coming to work the following morning. As my petitioner had no time to devote to the task during the course of the week, I assented. His labor completed he informed me there was abundance of water, adding, with an expression of deep satisfaction: "Father,

not for a large sum of money would I give that well. Now if a fire breaks out again it will be easy to save our church." As he seemed greatly fatigued, I made him partake of supper and then sent him to rest. An hour after he was buried in deep slumber, but God was watching over him, and to reward him doubtless for the zeal he had displayed for the interests of his Father's House, enabled the pious old man to save his life; whilst in the very building in which he had been sleeping more than fifty people, fully awake, perished.

What we do for God is never lost, even in this world.

Towards seven in the evening, always haunted by the same misgivings, I left home to see how it went with my neighbors. I stepped over first to the house of an elderly kind-hearted widow, a Mrs. Dress, and we walked out together on her land. The wind was beginning to rise, blowing in short fitful gusts as if to try its strength and then as quickly subsiding. My companion was as troubled as myself, and kept pressing her children to take some precautionary measures, but they refused, laugh-

ing lightly at her fears. At one time, whilst we were still in the fields, the wind rose suddenly with more strength than it had yet displayed and I perceived some old trunks of trees blaze out though without seeing about them any tokens of cinder or spark, just as if the wind had been a breath of fire, capable of kindling them into a flame by its mere contact. We extinguished these; the wind fell again, and nature resumed her moody and mysterious silence. I re-entered the house but only to leave it, feeling restless, though at the same time devoid of anything like energy, and retraced my steps to my own abode to conceal within it as I best could my vague but continually deepening anxieties. On looking towards the west, whence the wind had persistently blown for hours past, I perceived above the dense cloud of smoke overhanging the earth, a vivid red reflection of immense extent, and then suddenly struck on my ear, strangely audible in the preternatural silence reigning around, a distant roaring, yet muffled sound, announcing that the elements were in commotion somewhere. I rapidly resolved to return

home and prepare, without farther hesitation, for whatever events were impending. From listless and undecided as I had previously been, I suddenly became active and determined. This change of mind was a great relief. The vague fears that had heretofore pursued me vanished, and another idea, certainly not a result of anything like mental reasoning on my part, took possession of my mind; it was, not to lose much time in saving my effects but to direct my flight as speedily as possible in the direction of the river. Henceforth this became my ruling thought, and it was entirely unaccompanied by anything like fear or perplexity. My mind seemed all at once to become perfectly tranquil.

## CHAPTER II.

### DURING THE CATASTROPHE.

It was now about half-past eight in the evening. I first thought of my horse and turned him free into the street, deeming that in any case, he would have more chance of escape thus than tied up in the stable. I then set about digging a trench six feet wide and six or seven feet deep, in the sandy soil of the garden, and though the earth was easy enough to work my task proved a tedious one. The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive, strangely affecting the strength and rendering respiration painful and laborious. The only consideration that could have induced me to keep on working when I found it almost impossible to move my limbs, was the fear, growing more strongly each moment into a certainty, that some great catastrophe was approaching. The crimson reflection in the western portion of the sky was rapidly increasing in size and in intensity; then between each stroke of my pick axe I heard plainly, in the midst of the unnatural calm



and silence reigning around, the strange and terrible noise already described, the muttered thunder of which became more distinct as it drew each moment nearer. This sound resembled the confused noise of a number of cars and locomotives approaching a railroad station, or the rumbling of thunder, with the difference that it never ceased, but deepened in intensity each moment more and more. The spectacle of this menacing crimson in the sky, the sound of this strange and unknown voice of nature constantly augmenting in terrible majesty, seemed to endow me with supernatural strength. Whilst toiling thus steadfastly at my task, the sound of human voices plainly audible amid the silence and species of stupor reigning around fell on my ear. They betrayed on the one hand thoughtlessness, on the other folly.

*Thoughtlessness of some.*—A neighboring American family were entertaining some friends at tea. The room which they occupied at the moment overlooked my garden, thus they could see me whilst I could as easily overhear them. More than once, the smothered laughter of some of

the guests, especially of the young girls, fell on my ear. Doubtless they were amusing themselves at my expense. About nine, the company dispersed, and Mrs. Tyler, the hostess, approached me. The actions of the priest always make a certain impression, even on Protestants.

“Father,” she questioned, “do you think there is any danger?”

“I do not know,” was my reply, “but I have unpleasant presentiments, and feel myself impelled to prepare for trouble.”

“But if a fire breaks out, father, what are we to do?”

“In that case, madam, seek the river at once.”

I gave her no reason for advising such a course, perhaps I had really none to offer, beyond that it was my innate conviction.

Shortly after, Mrs. Tyler and her family started in the direction of the river and were all saved. I learned later that out of the eight guests assembled at her house that evening, all perished with the exception of two.

*The folly of others.*—At a short distance from home, on the other side of the street,

was a tavern. This place had been crowded all day with revellers, about two hundred young men having arrived that Sunday morning at Peshtigo by the boat to work on the railroad. Many were scattered throughout the town, where they had met acquaintances, while a large number were lodging at the tavern just mentioned. Perhaps they had passed the holy time of mass drinking and carousing there. Towards nightfall the greater part of them were too much intoxicated to take any share in the anxiety felt by the more steady members of the community, or even to notice the strange aspect of nature. Whilst working in my garden, I saw several of them hanging about the verandah of the tavern or lounging in the yard. Their intoxicated condition was plainly revealed by the manner in which they quarrelled, wrestled, rolled on the ground, filling the air the while with wild shouts and horrid blasphemies.

When hastening through the street, on my way to the river at the moment the storm burst forth, the wind impelled me in the direction of this house. A death-like

silence now reigned within it, as if reason had been restored to the inmates, or fear had suddenly penetrated to their hearts. Without shout or word they re-entered the place, closing the doors as if to bar death out—a few moments later the house was swept away.

What became of them I know not.

After finishing the digging of the trench I placed within it my trunks, books, church ornaments, and other valuables, covering the whole with sand to a depth of about a foot. Whilst still engaged at this, my servant, who had collected in a basket several precious objects in silver committed to my charge, such as crosses, medals, rosaries, etc., ran and deposited them on the steps of a neighboring store, scarcely conscious in her trouble of what she was doing.

She hastily returned for a cage containing her canary, which the wind, however, almost immediately tore from her grasp—, and breathless with haste and terror she called to me to leave the garden and fly. The wind, fore-runner of the tempest, was increasing in violence; the redness in the sky deepening; and the roaring sound like

thunder seemed almost upon us. It was now time to think of the Blessed Sacrament—object of all objects, precious, priceless, especially in the eyes of a priest. It had never been a moment absent from my thoughts, for of course I had intended from the first to bring it with me. Hastening then to the chamber containing the tabernacle, I proceeded to open the latter, but the key, owing to my haste, slipped from my fingers and fell. There was no time for farther delay, so I caught up the tabernacle with its contents and carried it out, placing it in my wagon as I knew it would be much easier to draw it thus than to bear it in my arms. My thought was that I should meet some one who would help me in the task. I re-entered to seek the chalice which had not been placed in the tabernacle, when a strange and startling phenomenon met my view. It was that of a cloud of sparks that blazed up here and there with a sharp detonating sound like that of powder exploding, and flew from room to room. I understood then that the air was saturated with some special gas, and I could not help thinking if this gas lighted up from mere

contact with a breath of hot wind, what would it be when fire would come in actual contact with it. The circumstance, though menacing enough, inspired me with no fear, my safety seemed already assured. Outside the door, in a cage attached to the wall, was a jay that I had had in my possession for a long time. The instinct of birds in foreseeing a storm is well known, and my poor jay was fluttering wildly round his cage, beating against its bars as if seeking to escape, and uttering shrill notes of alarm. I grieved for its fate but could do nothing for it. The lamps were burning on the table, and I thought, as I turned away, how soon their gleam would be eclipsed in the vivid light of a terrible conflagration.

I look on the peculiar, indeed almost childish frame of mind in which I then found myself, as most providential. It kept up my courage, in the ordeal through which I was about to pass, veiling from me in great part its horror and danger. Any other mental condition, though perhaps more in keeping with my actual posi-

tion would have paralyzed my strength and sealed my fate.

I vainly called my dog who, disobeying the summons, concealed himself under my bed, only to meet death there later. Then I hastened out to open the gate so as to bring forth my wagon. Barely had I laid hand on it, when the wind heretofore violent rose suddenly to a hurricane, and quick as lightning opened the way for my egress from the yard by sweeping planks, gate and fencing away into space. "The road is open," I thought, "we have only to start.

*The General Flight.*—I had delayed my departure too long. It would be impossible to describe the trouble I had to keep my feet, to breathe, to retain hold of the buggy which the wind strove to tear from my grasp, or to keep the tabernacle in its place. To reach the river even unencumbered by any charge, was more than many succeeded in doing, several failed, perishing in the attempt. How I arrived at it is even to this day a mystery to myself.

The air was no longer fit to breathe, full as it was of sand, dust, ashes, cinders, sparks,

smoke and fire. It was almost impossible to keep one's eyes unclosed, to distinguish the road, or to recognize people, though the way was crowded with pedestrians, as well as vehicles crossing and crashing against each other in the general flight. Some were hastening towards the river, others from it, whilst all were struggling alike in the grasp of the hurricane. A thousand discordant deafening noises rose on the air together. The neighing of horses, falling of chimneys, crashing of uprooted trees, roaring and whistling of the wind, crackling of fire as it ran with lightning like-rapidity from house to house, all sounds were there save that of the human voice. People seemed stricken dumb by terror. They jostled each other without exchanging look, word or counsel. The silence of the tomb reigned among the living, nature alone lifted up its voice and spoke. Though meeting crowded vehicles taking a direction quite opposite to that which I myself was following, it never even entered my mind that it would perhaps be better for me to follow them. Probably it was the same thing with them. We all hurried blindly on to our fate.



Almost with the first steps taken in the street the wind overturned and dragged me with the wagon close to the tavern as already mentioned. Farther on, I was again thrown down over some motionless object lying on the earth; it proved to be a woman and a little girl, both dead. I raised a head that fell back heavily as lead. With a long breath I rose to my feet, but only to be hurled down again. Farther on I met my horse whom I had set free in the street. Whether he recognized me—whether he was in that spot by chance, I cannot say, but whilst struggling anew to my feet, I felt his head leaning on my shoulder. He was trembling in every limb. I called him by name and motioned him to follow me, but he did not move. He was found partly consumed by fire in the same place.

Arrived near the river, we saw that the houses adjacent to it were on fire, whilst the wind blew the flames and cinders directly into the water. The place was no longer safe. I resolved then to cross to the other side though the bridge was already on fire. The latter presented a scene of indescribable and awful confusion, each one thinking they

could attain safety on the other side of the river. Those who lived in the east were hurrying towards the west, and those who dwelt in that west were wildly pushing on to the east so that the bridge was thoroughly encumbered with cattle, vehicles, women, children and men, all pushing and crushing against each other so as to find an issue from it. Arrived amid the crowd on the other side, I resolved to descend the river, to a certain distance below the dam, where I knew the shore was lower and the water shallower, but this I found impossible. The saw mill on the same side, at the angle of the bridge, as well as the large store belonging to the company standing opposite across the road, were both on fire. The flames from these two edifices met across the road, and none could traverse this fiery passage without meeting with instant death. I was thus obliged to ascend the river on the left bank, above the dam, where the water gradually attained a great depth. After placing a certain distance between myself and the bridge, the fall of which I momentarily expected, I pushed my wagon containing the Tabernacle as far into the

water as possible. It was all that I could do. Henceforth I had to look to the saving of my life. The whirlwind in its continual ascension had, so to speak, worke d up the smoke, dust and cinders, so that, at least, we could see clear before us. The banks of the river as far as the eye could reach were covered with people standing there, motionless as statues, some with eyes staring, upturned towards heaven, and tongues protruded. The greater number seemed to have no idea of taking any steps to procure their safety, imagining, as many afterwards acknowledged to me, that the end of the world had arrived and that there was nothing for them but silent submission to their fate.—Without uttering a word—the efforts I had made in dragging my wagon with me in my flight had left me perfectly breathless, besides the violence of the storm entirely prevented any thing like speech—I pushed the persons standing on each side of me into the water. One of these sprang back again with a half smothered cry, murmuring: “I am wet;” but immersion in water was better than immersion in fire. I caught him again and

dragged him out with me into the river as far as possible. At the same moment I heard a splash of the water along the river's brink. All had followed my example. It was time; the air was no longer fit for inhalation, whilst the intensity of the heat was increasing. A few minutes more and no living thing could have resisted its fiery breath.

*In the water.*—It was about ten o'clock when we entered into the river. When doing so I neither knew the length of time we would be obliged to remain there, nor what would ultimately happen to us, yet, wonderful to relate, my fate had never caused me a moment of anxiety from the time that, yielding to the involuntary impulse warning me to prepare for danger, I had resolved on directing my flight towards the river. Since then I had remained in the same careless frame of mind, which permitted me to struggle against the most insuperable obstacles, to brave the most appalling dangers, without ever seeming to remember that my life might pay the forfeit. Once in water up to our necks, I thought we would at least be safe from fire, but it

was not so ; the flames darted over the river as they did over land, the air was full of them, or rather the air itself was on fire. Our heads were in continual danger. It was only by throwing water constantly over them and our faces, and beating the river with our hands, that we kept the flames at bay. Clothing and quilts had been thrown into the river, to save them, doubtless, and they were floating all around. I caught at some that came within reach and covered with them, the heads of the persons who were leaning against or clinging to me. These wraps dried quickly in the furnace-like heat and caught fire when ever we ceased springing them. The terrible whirl wind that had burst over us at the moment I was leaving home had, with its continually revolving circle of opposing winds, cleared the atmosphere. The river was as bright, brighter than by day, and the spectacle presented by these heads rising above the level of the water, some covered, some uncovered, the countless hands employed in beating the waves, was singular and painful in the extreme. So free was I from the fear and anxiety that might naturally have been expected

to reign in my mind at such a moment, that I actually perceived only the ludicrous side of the scene at times and smiled within myself at it. When turning my gaze from the river I chanced to look either to the right or left, before me or upwards, I saw nothing but flames; houses, trees and the air itself were on fire. Above my head, as far as the eye could reach into space, alas! too brilliantly lighted, I saw nothing but immense volumes, of flames covering the firmament, rolling one over the other with stormy violence as we see masses of clouds driven wildly hither and thither by the fierce power of the tempest.

Near me, on the bank of the river, rose the store belonging to the factory, a large three story building, filled with tubs, buckets and other articles. Sometimes the thought crossed my mind that if the wind happened to change, we should be buried beneath the blazing ruins of this place, but still the supposition did not cause me much apprehension. When I was entering the water, this establishment was just taking fire; the work of destruction was speedy, for, in less than a quarter of an hour, the large beams

were lying blazing on the ground, while the rest of the building was either burned or swept off into space.

*Incidents of the fire.*—Not far from me a woman was supporting herself in the water by means of a log. After a time a cow swam past. There were more than a dozen of these animals in the river, impelled thither by instinct, and they succeeded in saving their lives. The first mentioned one overturned in its passage the log to which the woman was clinging and she disappeared into the water. I thought her lost; but soon saw her emerge from it holding on with one hand to the horns of the cow, and throwing water on her head with the other. How long she remained in this critical position I know not, but I was told later that the animal had swam to the shore, bearing her human burden safely with her; and, what threatened to bring destruction to the woman had proved the means of her salvation.

At the moment I was entering the river, another woman, terrified and breathless, reached its bank. She was leading one child by the hand, and held pressed to her

breast what appeared to be another, enveloped in a roll of disordered linen, evidently caught up in haste. O horror? on opening these wraps to look on the face of her child it was not there. It must have slipped from her grasp in her hurried flight. No words could portray the look of stupor, of desolation that flitted across the poor mother's face. The half smothered cry: "ah? my child?" escaped her, then she wildly strove to force her way through the crowd so as to cast herself into the river. The force of the wind was less violent on water than on land, and permitted the voice to be heard. I then endeavored to calm the anguish of the poor bereaved woman by suggesting that her child had been found by others and saved, but she did not even look in my direction, but stood there motionless, her eyes wild and staring, fixed on the opposite shore. I soon lost sight of her, and was informed subsequently that she had succeeded in throwing herself into the river where she met death.

Things went well enough with me during the first three or four hours of this prolonged bath; owing in part, I suppose to my



being continually in motion, either throwing water on my own head or on that of my neighbors.

It was not so, however, with some of those who were standing near me, for their teeth were chattering and their limbs convulsively trembling. Reaction was setting in and the cold penetrating through their frames. Dreading that so long a sojourn in the water might be followed by severe cramps, perhaps death, I endeavored to ascend the bank a short distance, so as to ascertain the temperature, but my shoulders were scarcely out of the river, when a voice called to me; "Father, beware, you are on fire." The hour of deliverance from this prison of fire and water had not yet arrived—the struggle was not yet over. A lady who had remained beside me since we had first taken to the river, and who, like all the others, had remained silent till then, now asked me: "Father, do you not think that this is the end of the world?" "I do not think so," was my reply; "but if other countries are burned as ours seems to have been, the end of the world, at least for us, must be at hand." After this both relapsed into silence.

There is an end to all things here below, even misfortune. The longed for moment of our return to land was at length arriving, and already sprinkling of our heads was becoming unnecessary. I drew near the bank, seated myself on a log, being in this manner only partly immersed in the water. Here I was seized with a violent chill. A young man perceiving it threw a blanket over me which at once afforded me relief, and soon after I was able to leave this compulsory bath in which I had been plunged for about five hours and a half.

## CHAPTER III.

### AFTER THE CATASTROPHE.

*Ensuing prostration.*—I came out of the river about half-past three in the morning, and from that time I was in a very different condition, both morally and physically, to that in which I had previously been. To-day in recalling the past, I can see that the moment most fraught with danger was precisely that in which danger seemed at an end. The atmosphere previously hot as the breath of a furnace, was gradually becoming colder and colder, and, after having been so long in the river, I was of course exceedingly susceptible to its chilly influence. My clothes were thoroughly saturated. There was no want of fire, and I easily dried my outer garments, but the inner ones were wet, and their searching dampness penetrated to my inmost frame, affecting my very lungs. Though close to a large fire, arising from heaps of burning fragments, I was still convulsively shivering, feeling at the same time a complete prostration of

body and spirit. My chest was oppressed to suffocation, my throat swollen, and, in addition to an almost total inability to move, I could scarcely use my voice, utter even a word.

Almost lifeless, I stretched myself out full length on the sand. The latter was still hot, and the warmth in some degree restored me. Removing shoes and socks I placed my feet in immediate contact with the heated ground, and felt additionally relieved.

I was lying beside the ruins of the large factory, the beams of which were still burning. Around me were piles of iron hoops belonging to the tubs and buckets lately destroyed. With the intention of employing these latter to dry my socks and shoes, now the only possessions left me, I touched them but found that they were still intolerably hot. Yet, strange to say, numbers of men were lying—some face downward—across these iron circles. Whether they were dead, or, rendered almost insensible from the effects of damp and cold, were seeking the warmth that the sand afforded me, I cannot say; I was suffering too intensely myself to attend to them.

My eyes were now beginning to cause me the most acute pain, and this proved the case, to a greater or less extent, with all those who had not covered theirs during the long storm of fire through which we had passed. Notwithstanding I had kept head and face streaming with water, the heat had nevertheless injured my eyes greatly, though at the moment I was almost unconscious of the circumstance. The intense pain they now caused, joined to a feeling of utter exhaustion, kept me for a length of time extended on the earth. When able, I dried my wet garments, one after the other, at the blazing ruins, and those near me did the same. As each individual thought of himself, without minding his neighbor, the task was easy even to the most scrupulous and delicate. Putting on dry clothes afforded immediate relief to the pain and oppression of my chest, enabling me to breathe with more ease. Finally day dawned on a scene with whose horror and ruin none were as yet fully acquainted. I received a friendly summons to proceed to another spot where the greater number of those who had escaped

were assembled, but the inflammation of my eyes had rapidly augmented, and I was now perfectly blind. Some one led me, however, to the place of refuge. It was a little valley near the river's edge, completely sheltered by sand hills, and proved to be the very place where I had intended taking refuge the evening previous, though prevented reaching it by the violence of the hurricane. Some had succeeded in attaining it, and had suffered comparatively far less than we had done. The tempest of fire had passed as it were above this spot, leaving untouched the shrubs and plants growing within it.

Behold us then all assembled in this valley like the survivors after a battle,—some safe and well, others more or less wounded; some were very much so, especially a poor old woman who, fearing to enter the river completely, had lain crouched on the bank, partly in the water, partly out of it, and consequently, exposed to the flames. She was now stretched on the grass, fearfully burned; and suffering intense agony, to judge from her heart-rending moans and cries. As she was dying, and had asked

for me, I was brought to her, though I fear I proved but a poor consoler. I could not uncloze my inflamed eyes, could scarcely speak, and felt so exhausted and depressed myself, that it was difficult to impart courage to others. The poor sufferer died shortly after.

Those among us who had sufficient strength for the task, dispersed in different directions to seek information concening the friends whom they had not yet seen, and returned with appalling tidings relating to the general ruin and the number of deaths by fire. One of these told me that he had crossed to the other side of the river, and found all the houses as well as the church in ashes, while numbers of corpses were lying by the way side, so much disfigured by fire as to be beyond recognition.

“Well,” I replied, “since it is thus, we will all proceed to Marinette, where there is a fine church, new presbytery and school house, capable of lodging a great number.”

About eight o'clock, a large tent, brought on by the company, was erected for the purpose of sheltering the women, children and the sick. As soon as it was prepared some

one came and urged me to profit of it. I complied, and stretched myself in a corner, taking up as little place as possible, so as to leave room for others. But the man employed by the company to superintend the erection of the tent, had evidently escaped all injury to his eyes during the night, for he perceived me at once. He was one of those coarse and brutal natures, that seem inaccessible to every kindly feeling though he manifested a remarkable interest in the welfare of the ladies, and would allow none but them under his tent. As soon as his glance fell on me he ordered me out, accompanying the rude command with a perfect torrent of insulting words and blasphemies. Without reply I turned over, passing beneath the canvass and quickly found myself outside. One of the ladies present raised her voice in my defence, and vainly sought to give him a lesson in politeness. I never heard the name of this man, and rejoice that it is unknown to me.

*A breakfast on the grass.*—Ten o'clock arrived. After the sufferings of the night previous, many longed for a cup of hot tea or coffee, but such a luxury was entirely out



of our reach, amid the desolation and ruin surrounding us. Some of the young men after a close search, found and brought back a few cabbages from a neighboring field. The outer leaves, which were thoroughly scorched, were removed, and the inner part cut into thin slices and distributed among those capable of eating them. A morsel of cold raw cabbage was not likely to prove of much use in our then state of exhaustion, but we had nothing better at hand.

At length the people of Marinette were informed of our condition, and, about one o'clock, several vehicles laden with bread, coffee and tea arrived. These vehicles were commissioned at the same time to bring back as many of our number as they could contain. Anxious to obtain news from Marinette, I enquired of one of the men sent to our assistance if Marinette had also suffered from the fiery scourge.

"Thank God, Father, no one perished, though all were dreadfully alarmed. We have had many houses, however, burned. All the mills and houses from your church down to the Bay have gone."

"And the church?"

“ It is burned.”

“ The handsome presbytery ?”

“ Burned.”

“ The new school house ?”

“ Burned also.”

Ah ? and I had promised the poor unfortunates of Peshtigo to bring them to Marinette and shelter them in those very buildings. Thus I found myself bereft in the same hour of my two churches, two presbyteries and schoolhouse, as well as of all private property belonging to them or to myself.

*General state of feeling at Marinette and Ménomonie.*—Between one and two o'clock I left in one of the wagons for Marinette, and after arriving there, sojourned for some time at the residence of one of my parishioners, Mr. F. Garon, receiving under his hospitable roof all the care my condition required.

The two banks of the river respectively named Marinette and Ménomonie, and which united formed another parish, were strangely changed in appearance. These two sister towns, one situated on the south and the other on the north side of the river

were no longer recognizable. Life and activity had entirely given place to silence and a species of woeful stupefaction. A few men only were to be seen going backwards and forwards, looking after their property, or asking details concerning the conflagration at Peshtigo from those who had just arrived from that ill-fated spot. No women were to be seen in the streets nor even in the houses, the latter having been abandoned. The children too with their joyous outcries and noisy mirth had disappeared from the scene. These shores, a short while since so animated, now resembled a desert, and it was a movement of overwhelming and uncontrollable terror that had created as it were this solitude, a terror which dated from the preceding night when the tempest of fire came surging on from Peshtigo, consuming all that part of Marinette that lay in its path. Intelligence of the fate that had overtaken Peshtigo farther increased this general feeling of alarm till it culminated in a perfect panic. Dreading a similar catastrophe to that of Peshtigo, many families hastened towards the Bay, embarking on the stea-

mers, *Union*, *Dunlop* and *St. Joseph*, which had been kept near the shore so as to afford a refuge to the terrified inhabitants. The consternation was indescribable, and one unfortunate man on arriving, panting and breathless, at the boat, fell dead from fear or exhaustion. These boats afforded anything but a safe place of refuge, for if the conflagration had broken out as suddenly and raged as fiercely as it had done at Peshtigo, nothing could have preserved them from the flames, and the only alternative left to those on board would have been death by fire or water. Fear, however, is generally an untrustworthy counsellor, and the expedients it suggests, remarkably ill-chosen. The inhabitants of *Marinette* and *Ménomonie* passed the night of October 8th dispersed in the different boats, and it is unnecessary to add that few slept during those hours of strange anxiety. Terror effectually banished slumber, producing the result fear generally does on the christian soul, turning it instinctively to prayer, even as the terror-stricken child casts itself into the arms of the mother it has summoned to its help. What are we,

poor mortals, exposed to the wild fury of the unchained elements, but helpless children? The Catholics present with one accord cast themselves on their knees and prayed aloud, imploring the Ruler of the elements to stay His vengeful arm and spare His people. They prayed without shyness or human respect. Doubtless, there were present those who had perhaps never learned to pray, or who had forgotten how to accomplish that all important duty, and these latter might in other circumstances have felt annoyed at such public manifestations of devotion, but in this hour of common peril, all hearts involuntarily turned towards heaven as their only resource. There were no tokens of incredulity, impiety or bigotry evinced by any. The Protestants who were present, being unacquainted with the Catholic formula of prayer, could not unite their supplications with those of the latter, but they encouraged them to continue their devotions, and when they paused, solicited them to recommence. Danger is a successful teacher, its influence immediate and irresistible. No reasoning succeeds so quickly in mak-

ing men comprehend the greatness of God and their own insignificance, His almighty power and their own helplessness. Naught else detaches souls so completely from earth and raises them towards Him on whom we all depend. The preceding details, furnished by individuals coming and going from the boats, were full of interest to me. During this time I remained with my kind host Mr. Garon, being too ill to even leave the house. The kind attentions of which I was the object soon restored me in some degree to health. Tuesday evening, I was able to visit several persons who had been injured more or less grievously by fire, and to prepare the dying for their last end, as far as lay in my power, in the total absence of every thing necessary on the sad occasion. Feeling strong enough, I resolved to return to Peshtigo on Tuesday night, and commenced my preparations. The clothes I wore had been greatly injured by my long sojourn in the water, and I would willingly have replaced them, but found this impossible. The storekeepers, fearing a similar misfortune to that which had over taken the merchants of Peshtigo,

had packed up the greater part of their merchandize and buried it. I could get nothing save a suit of coarse yellow material such as workmen wear whilst engaged in saw mills. In the absence of something better it had to answer, and about ten o'clock at night I went on board a steamboat about leaving for Green Bay, calling previously, however, at Peshtigo. The night was very stormy, and it was only about day-break that we ventured to land, the water being very rough when we reached Peshtigo, landing which was about nine or ten in the morning. I remained there only a few hours, during which time I visited the sick beds of several victims of the conflagration.

*Return to Peshtigo.*—About one o'clock in the afternoon a car was leaving for Peshtigo, conveying thither men who went daily there for the purpose of seeking out and burying the dead. I took my place with them. The locomotives belonging to the company having been burned, were now replaced by horses, and we progressed thus till we came up with the track of the fire. We walked the rest of the way, a distance of half a league, and this gave me ample

opportunity for examining thoroughly the devastation and ruin wrought, both by fire and wind. Alas, much as I had heard on the sad subject, I was still unprepared for the melancholy spectacle that met my gaze.

*The field of battle.*—It is a painful thing to have to speak of scenes which we feel convinced no pen could fully describe nor words do justice to.

It was on the eleventh of October, Wednesday afternoon, that I revisited for the first time the site of what had once been the town of Peshtigo. Of the houses, trees, fences that I had looked on three days ago nothing whatever remained, save a few blackened posts still standing, as if to attest the impetuous fury of the fiery element that had thus destroyed all before it. Wherever the foot chanced to fall it rested on ashes. The iron tracks of the railroad had been twisted and curved into all sorts of shapes, whilst the wood which had supported them, no longer existed. The trunks of mighty trees had been reduced to mere cinders, the blackened hearts alone remaining. All around these trunks, I perceived a number



of holes running downwards deep in the earth. They were the sockets where the roots had lately been. I plunged my cane into one of them, thinking what must the violence of that fire have been which ravaged not only the surface of the earth, but penetrated so deeply into its bosom. Then I turned my wondering gaze in the direction where the town had lately stood, but nothing remained to point out its site except the boilers of the two locomotives, the iron of the wagon wheels, and the brick and stone work of the factory. All the rest was a desert the desolation of which was sufficient to draw tears from the eyes of the spectator—a desert recalling a field of battle after a sanguinary conflict. Charred carcasses of horses, cows, oxen and other animals lay scattered here and there. The bodies of the human victims, men, women and children, had been already collected and decently interred—their number being easily ascertained by counting the rows of freshly-made graves. To find the streets was a difficult task, and it was not without considerable trouble that I succeeded at length in ascertaining the site where my

house had lately stood. My next care was to look for the spot where I had buried my trunks and other valuables. This I discovered by means of the shovel which I had employed in digging the trench and which I had thrown to a short distance, my task completed. There it still lay, half of the handle burned off, the rest in good order, and I employed it once again to disinter my effects. On moving the sand, a disagreeable odour, somewhat resembling that of brimstone, exhaled from it. My linen appeared at the first glance to be in a state of perfect preservation, having kept even its whiteness with the exception of the pleats, which were somewhat discolored, but on touching it, it fell to pieces as if the substance had been consumed by some slow peculiar process, or traversed by electricity.— Whilst touching on this subject we may add that many felt a shock of earthquake at the moment that everthing on the surface of the earth was trembling before the violence of the hurricane. Here again was a total loss. A few calcined bricks, melted crystal, with crosses and crucifixes more or less des-

troyed, alone pointed out where my house had once been, while the charred remains of my poor dog indicated the site of my bedroom. I followed then the road leading from my house to the river, and which was the one I had taken on the night of the catastrophe. There, the carcasses of animals were more numerous than elsewhere, especially in the neighborhood of the bridge. I saw the remains of my poor horse in the spot where I had last met him, but so disfigured by the fiery death through which he had passed that I had some difficulty in recognizing him.

Those who have a horse, and appreciate the valuable services he renders them, will not feel surprised at my speaking twice of mine. There exists between the horse and his master a species of friendship akin to that which unites two friends, and which in the man frequently survives the death of his four-footed companion.

Whilst wandering among the ruins I met several persons, with some of whom I entered into conversation. One was a bereaved father, seeking his missing children of whom he had as yet learned noth-

ing. "If, at least," he said to me, with a look of indescribable anguish, "I could find their bones, but the wind has swept away whatever the fire spared." Children were seeking for their parents, brothers for their brothers, husbands for their wives, but I saw no women amid this scene of horror which it would have been almost impossible for them to contemplate. The men, I met, those sorrowful seekers for the dead, had all suffered more or less in the battle against wind and fire. Some had had a hand burned, others an arm or side; all were clothed in blackened, ragged garments, appearing, each one from his look of woeful sadness and miserable condition, like a ruin among ruins. They pointed out to me the places where they had found such and such individuals: there a mother lay prone on her face, pressing to her bosom the child she had vainly striven to save from the devouring element; here a whole family, father, mother and children, lying together, blackened and mutilated by the fire fiend. Among the ruins of the boarding house belonging to the company, more than seventy bodies

were found, disfigured to such a fearful extent that it was impossible to tell either their age or sex. Farther on twenty more had been drawn from a well. One of the workmen engaged in the construction of the church was found, knife in hand, with his throat cut, two of his children lying beside him in a similar condition; while his wife lay a little farther off, having evidently been burned to death." The name of this man was Towsley, and during the whole summer he had worked at the church of Peshtigo. Doubtless seeing his wife fall near him, and becoming convinced of the utter impossibility of escaping a fiery death, his mind became troubled, and he put an end to his own existence and that of his children. There were several other similar cases of suicide arising from the same sad causes.

These heartrending accounts, combined with the fearful desolation that met my gaze wherever it turned, froze my veins with horror!

*A rope wanted to hang a scoundrel.*—Alas! that I should have to record an incident such as should never have happened in he

midst of that woeful scene! Whilst struggling with the painful impressions produced in my mind by the spectacle on which I looked, my attention was attracted to another quarter by the sound of voices, raised in loud excitement. The cause of the tumult was this. In the midst of the universal consternation pervading all minds, a man was found degraded enough to insult not only the general sorrow and mourning but also death itself. Enslaved by the wretched vice of avarice, he had just been taken in the act of despoiling the bodies of the dead of whatever objects the fire had spared. A jury was formed, his punishment put to the vote, and he was unanimously condemned to be hanged on the spot. But where was a rope to be found? the fire had spared nothing. Somebody proposed substituting for the former an iron chain which had been employed for drawing logs, and one was accordingly brought and placed around the criminal's neck. Execution was difficult under the circumstances; and whilst the preparations dragged slowly on, the miserable man loudly implored mercy. The pity inspired

by the mournful surroundings softened at length the hearts of the judges, and, after having made him crave pardon on his knees for the sacrilegious thefts of which he had been guilty, they allowed him to go free. It may have been that they merely intended frightening him.

Weary of noise and tumult, and longing for solitude, I left my previous companions, and followed for a considerable distance that road to Oconto on which I had seen so many vehicles entering, turning their backs on the river to which I was hastening with the Tabernacle. I had not gone far before I saw much more than I would have desired to see. All in this line had perished, and perished in masses, for the vehicles were crowded with unfortunate ones who, flying from death, had met it all the sooner and in its most horrible form. In those places where the flames had enfolded their victims in their fiery clasp, nothing now was to be seen but calcined bones, charred mortal remains and the iron circles of the wheels. It was with some difficulty that the human relics could be distinguished from those of the horses. The workmen of the company

were employed in collecting these sad memorials and burying them by the way-side, there to remain till such time as the friends of the dead might wish to reclaim and inter them in a more suitable manner.

I left them at their mournful task, and returned to the site where our church had so lately stood. There also all was in ashes, nothing remaining save the church bell. The latter had been thrown a distance of fifty feet, one half was now lying there intact, while the other part had melted and spread over the sand in silvery leaves. The voice of this bell had been the last sound heard in the midst of the hurricane. Its lugubrious note yet seems at times to strike on my ear, reminding me of the horrors of which it was a forerunner.

The graveyard lay close to the church, and I entered and waited there; for I expected momentarily the arrival of a funeral. It was that of a young man who had died the evening previous, in consequence of the terrible burns he had received. Never was burial service more



poverty-stricken nor priest more utterly destitute of all things necessary for the performance of the sad ceremony. Nor church, nor house, nor surplice, stole nor breviary: nothing save prayer and a heartfelt benediction. I had felt this destitution still more keenly on two or three previous occasions when asked by the dying for the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which it was out of my power, alas! to administer to them. I left the graveyard with a heavy heart, and turned my steps in the direction of the river, which I had to cross in order to seek for my tabernacle with whose ultimate fate I was unacquainted. A bright ray of consolation awaited me and seldom was consolation more needed.

*The Tabernacle.*—I crossed the river on the half-charred beams of the bridge which had been joined together, so as to offer a means of passage, though a very perilous one, to those who chose to trust themselves to it. I had barely reached the other side when one of my parishioners hastened to meet me, joyfully exclaiming: “Father, do you know what has happened to your tabernacle?”

“ No, what is it ? ”

“ Come quickly then, and see. Oh ! father, it is a great miracle ! ”

I hurried with him to that part of the river into which I had pushed as far as possible my wagon containing the tabernacle. This wagon had been blown over on its side by the storm ; whilst the tabernacle itself had been caught up by the wind and cast on one of the logs floating on the water. Everything in the immediate vicinity of this spot had been blackened or charred by the flames ; logs, trunks, boxes, nothing had escaped, yet strange to say, there rose the tabernacle intact in its snowy whiteness, presenting a wonderful contrast to the grimy blackness of the surrounding objects. I left it in the spot where it had thus been thrown by the tempest for two days, so as to give all an opportunity of seeing it. Numbers came, though of course in that time of horror and desolation there were many too deeply engrossed with their own private griefs to pay attention to aught else. The Catholics generally regarded the fact as a miracle, and it was spoken of near and far, attracting great attention.

Alas! nothing is more evanescent than the salutary impressions produced on the mind of man by divine blessings or punishments. Time, and the pre-occupations of life, efface even the very remembrance of them. How few there are among the rare survivors of the fire that swept Peshtigo from the face of the earth who still see the power of God in the calamity that then overwhelmed them, as well as in the preservation of the tabernacle, events which at the time of their occurrence made so deep an impression on their minds.

When the duties which had detained me three days amid these mournful scenes were completed, I took the tabernacle from the place which it had occupied of late and sent it on to Marinette where I intended soon saying mass. When the right time arrived, I forcibly opened the tiny door. There—circumstance as wonderful as the preservation of the tabernacle in the midst of the conflagration—I found the consecrated Host intact in the monstrance while the violent concussions the Ciborium must have undergone had not caused it even to open. Water had not penetrated

within, and the flames had respected the interior as well as exterior; even to the silky tissue lining the sides. All was in a state of perfect preservation!

These sacred objects, though possessing in reality but little intrinsic value, are nevertheless priceless in my eyes. I prize them as most precious relics, and never look at or touch them without feeling penetrated with sentiments of love and veneration such as no other holy vessels, however rich and beautiful, could awake within me. In the little chapel at Marinette, which replaces the church burned there more than two years ago, the same tabernacle is on the altar and contains the same monstrance and Ciborium which were so wonderfully preserved from the flames, and daily, during the holy sacrifice, I use them with a species of religious triumph as trophies of God's exceeding mercy snatched so marvellously from destruction.

I must beg my readers to return with me for a little while to the banks of the Peshtigo river—but not to linger there long. Before removing the tabernacle, I

was busily occupied three days and two nights, now in seeking for the dead, then in taking up from the water various objects which I had thrown by armsful; at the moment of leaving my house, into the wagon and which had been overturned with it into the river. The most precious of all these was the chalice, which I was fortunate enough to find, together with the paten. My search was greatly facilitated by the opening of the dam and letting out of the waters which were here fifteen or twenty feet in depth. This step was necessary for the finding of the corpses of those persons who, either seized by cramps or drawn in by the current, had been drowned during the night of the hurricane.

For the space of these three days our only habitation was the tent, the shelter of which had been so arbitrarily refused me the preceding Monday. It covered us during our meals, which we took standing, and as best we could, and during the night protected the slumbers of those who could sleep, a thing I found impossible. Our beds were made on a most economical plan—the river sand formed our substitute

for matrasses,—and a single blanket constituted our covering.

During this period I first learned the fate of the city of Chicago. A physician come from Fond du lac, to attend to the sick and burned, brought a newspaper with him, and in it we read of the terrible ravages wrought by fire, on the same night, and, strange to say, about the the same hour, not only at Peshtigo but in many other different places and above all at Chicago. This great conflagration at Chicago, proclaimed to the world by the myriad voices of journal and telegraph, created far and wide an immense out-burst of compassion in favor of the unfortunate city, diverting entirely the general attention from the far more appalling calamities of which we had been the hapless victims.

On the afternoon of Friday, the 13th, I had about finished my labors on the desolate banks of the Peshtigo river. The corpses found had all been decently interred, and the sick and maimed carried to different places of safety. Exhausted with fatigue and privation, I felt I could not bear up much longer, and accordingly took

place in a wagon that had brought us supplies, and was now returning to Oconto in which latter town I had friends who were awaiting my arrival with friendly impatience. I enjoyed two days of rest at the residence of Father Vermore, the excellent parish priest of the French church. Monday following I left for Green Bay to visit his Lordship, Bishop Melcher, dead, alas! even now whilst I write these lines.

As often happens in such cases, the most contradictory rumors had been circulated with regard to myself. Some declared that I had been burned in the church whither I had gone to pray a moment previous to the outburst of the storm, others asserted that I had met a fiery death in my own abode, whilst many were equally positive that I had perished in the river.

On seeing me the Bishop, who had naturally been rendered anxious by these contradictory reports, eagerly exclaimed: "Oh! at last! I have been so troubled about you! Why did you not write?" "My Lord, I could not," was my reply, "I had neither pen, ink, nor paper, nothing but river water."

He generously offered me every thing I required, either from his library or wardrobe, but I declined the kind offer, as there were still a number of my parishioners on the river Ménomie and it was for them to help me, not him. He then wished to appoint me to another parish, declaring that I merited repose after all I had endured, and that a farther sojourn among my people, poor and decimated in number, would be only a continuation of suffering and hard toil. Remembering, however, that my parishioners would be thus left without a priest at a time when the ministrations of one would be doubly necessary to them, recalling, also, how much better it was that their poverty and privations should be shared by one who knew and loved them, I solicited and obtained permission to remain among my flock. Soon, however, the sufferings I had endured began to tell on my constitution; and to such an extent, that, having been invited by the Rev. Mr. Crud, parish priest of Green Bay, to preach on All Saints, he was told by Bishop Melcher he must not count on me as my brain was seriously injured



by the fiery ordeal through which I had passed. I cannot well say whether this was really the case, I only know that I was terribly feeble, and hoping that a few months' repose might restore my health, I resolved to travel, determined to make the trip conducive at the same time to the welfare of my impoverished parishes. My first intention was to visit Louisiana returning by the East, but I was destined soon to learn that my strength was unequal to the task. Arrived at St. Louis, I was attacked by a fever that kept me confined to bed each day for three or four hours, and which made sad inroads on the small stock of health left me. Accordingly I went no farther. The kind people of St. Louis showed me a great deal of sympathy, and I made friends among them whom I can never forget, and whom meeting with once more would be a source of great pleasure. I will not mention their names here, but they are written on my heart in ineffaceable characters. I can do nothing myself to prove my gratitude, but I will whisper their names to our most powerful and most clement Lady of Lourdes, in her church of

Marinette, and she will atone for my incapacity.

Having mentioned the claims of the inhabitants of St. Louis on my gratitude, it would be unjust on my part to pass in silence over those of my own parishioners and friends in Wisconsin, who spontaneously offered me help in my first moments of distress. Ah, they are not forgotten! Very pleasant is it to recall these warm expressions of sympathy, springing directly from the heart. Amongst many similar traits, well do I remember the words of a friend in Oconto who, wishing me to accept decent garments to replace those which I had brought back from the conflagration exclaimed on my persistent refusal, "I insist for well I know that, if I happened to be in your place, you would equally desire to receive me a similar service."

*Some details outside of the narrative.*—It may be as well to record here some of the extraordinary phenomena and peculiar characteristics of the strange fire that wrought so much desolation, though I was not personally a witness to them all. I was too near the inner portion of the circle

to be able to see much of what was passing on the outside. It is not he who is in the middle of the combat that has the best view of the battle and its details, but rather the man who contemplates it from some elevated point overlooking the plain.

*Force of the hurricane.*—Whole forests of huge maples, deeply and strongly rooted in the soil, were torn up, twisted and broken, as if they had been willow wands. A tree standing upright here or there was an exception to an almost general rule. There lay those children of the forest, heaped up one over the other in all imaginable positions; their branches reduced to cinders, and their trunks calcined and blackened. Many asseverated that they had seen large wooden houses torn from their foundations and caught up like straws by two opposing currents of air which raised them till they came in contact with the stream of fire. They then burst into flames, and, exposed thus to the fury of two fierce elements, wind and fire, were torn to pieces and reduced to ashes almost simultaneously.

Still, the swiftness with which this hurricane, seemingly composed of wind and fire

together, advanced, was in no degree proportioned to its terrible force. By computing the length of time that elapsed between the rising of the tempest in the south-west, and its subsiding in the north-east, it will be easily seen that the rate of motion did not exceed two leagues an hour. The hurricane moved in a circle, advancing slowly as if to give time to prepare for its coming.

*Intensity of the heat.*—Many circumstances tended to prove that the intensity of the heat produced by the fire was in some places extreme, nay unheard-of. I have already mentioned that the flames pursued the roots of the trees into the very depths of the earth, consuming them to the last inch. I plunged my cane down into these cavities, and convinced myself that nothing had stayed the course of combustion save the utter want of anything to feed on.

Hogsheads of nails were found entirely melted though lying outside the direct path of the flames.

Immense numbers of fish of all sizes died; and the morning after the storm the river was covered with them. It would be impossible to decide what was the cause

of their death. It may have been owing to the intensity of the heat, the want of air necessary to respiration—the air being violently sucked in by the current tending upwards to that fierce focus of flame—or they may have been killed by some poisonous gas.

*Gas.*—It is more than probable that for a moment the air was impregnated with an inflammable gas most destructive to human life. I have already mentioned the tiny globules of fire flying about my house at the moment I quitted it. Whilst on my way to the river, I met now and then gusts of an air utterly unfit for respiration, and was obliged on these occasions to throw myself on the ground to regain my breath, unless already prostrated involuntarily by the violence of the wind. Whilst standing in the river I had noticed, as I have already related, on casting my eye upwards, a sea of flame as it were, the immense waves of which were in a state of violent commotion, rolling tumultuously one over the other; and all that at a prodigious height in the sky, and, consequently, far from any combustible material. How can this phenomena be explained without admitting the

supposition that immense quantities of gas were accumulated in the air?

Strange to say there were many corpses found, bearing about them no traces of scars or burns, and yet in the pockets of their habiliments, equally uninjured, watches, cents, and other articles in metal, were discovered completely melted. How was it also that many escaped with their lives here and there on the cleared land as well as in the woods? The problem is a difficult one to solve. The tempest did not rage in all parts with equal fury, but escape from its power was a mere affair of chance. None could boast of having displayed more presence of mind than others. Generally speaking, those who happened to be in low lying lands, especially close to excavations or even freshly ploughed earth with which they could cover themselves, as the Indians do, succeeded in saving their lives. Most frequently the torrent of fire passed at a certain height from the earth, touching only the most elevated portions. Thus no one could meet it standing erect without paying the penalty of almost instantaneous death.

*Something stranger still.*—When the hurricane burst upon us, many, surprised and terrified, ran out to see what was the matter. A number of these persons assert that they then witnessed a phenomenon which may be classed with the marvellous. They saw a large black object, resembling a balloon, which object revolved in the air with great rapidity, advancing above the summits of the trees towards a house which it seemed to single out for destruction. Barely had it touched the latter when the balloon burst with a loud report, like that of a bombshell, and, at the same moment, rivulets of fire streamed out in all directions. With the rapidity of thought, the house thus chosen was enveloped in flames within and without, so that the persons inside had no time for escape.

*Destruction wrought by the fire.*—It is somewhat difficult to calculate the extent of territory overrun by the fiery scourge, on account of the irregularity of the course followed by the latter. Still, without exaggeration, the surface thus ravaged, extending from the south-west to the north-east of Peshtigo, may be set down as not far from fifteen to twenty leagues in length

by five or six in width. The number of deaths in Peshtigo, including the farmers dwelling in the environs, was not less than 1000, that is to say about half of the population. More than eight hundred known individuals had disappeared; but there were crowds of strangers, many of whom had arrived that very morning, whose names had not been registered, and whose number will ever remain unknown.

Among those who escaped from the awful scourge, many have since died, owing to the hardships then endured, whilst others are dropping off day by day. A physician belonging to Green Bay has predicted that before ten years all the unfortunate survivors of that terrible catastrophe, will have paid the debt of nature, victims of the irreparable injury inflicted on their constitutions by smoke, air, water and fire. If the prediction continues to be as faithfully realized in the future as it has been in the past, my turn will also come.

May the construction of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, at Marinette, be then completed, so that some grateful hearts may pray there for the repose of my soul!



## CONCLUSION,

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Whilst passing through Indiana on my way to St. Louis, barely two months after the catastrophe of which I have endeavored to relate a few details, I saw a notice in a journal of that place to the effect that a Protestant gentleman was to give a public lecture that very evening on the great event. The subject of the discourse was; *The fires of our day a faithful picture of that fire which shall consume the earth at the end of time.* The topic was so full of interest to me that I resolved to delay my journey so as to assist at the lecture. There was but a small audience present, so true is it that mankind is to-day what mankind was in the time of Noah, and will be till the last hour, indifferent to all the warnings of heaven.

The learned lecturer after much laborious research, had collected many important facts relating to the great fires of the past, and corroborating his words twice by quoting passages from some descriptive

articles of my own published in the journals, proceeded to show how much severer in character were the fires of our days, which, in the strange fierceness of their nature, seemed to be a foreshadowing and image of that which will consume the earth on the last day. And truly we may see in this wild confusion of the elements, roaring of tempests, trembling of the earth, this land and sky in flames, with men looking on, stupefied and withering with fear, a realization of the vivid description given by Holy Writ of the end of the world.

But why these warnings? And why are they sent so unequally to nations equally guilty?

Ah! who can sound the ways of Providence? Perhaps is it because God is often lost sight of in the present day, especially by those who know and consequently ought to serve Him. Do not numbers of Catholics work, act, in a word, live as if they had neither a Creator to obey, a Saviour to love, nor a soul to save? And if it be true that God created man, if it be true that He descended on earth to redeem him, He surely possesses the strictest claims on

this creature of His bounty. These claims being constantly ignored and trampled under foot, our feeble reason itself will tell us that Providence must occasionally recall them to our minds and proclaim them as it were by those great catastrophes which prove at the same time that He is, despite what we may do or say, our Lord and Master, and that we are bound to treat Him as such. Was it not thus that He acted in former times towards His chosen people when they became ungrateful and prevaricating? The sovereignty of God over man and the duty of man towards God, are the same to-day as under the Old Law.

Unquestionably, forgetfulness of these obligations seems to be almost a general thing to-day, but at the same time where is the nation or people really exempt from these chastisements? God's scourges may be varied, but they make themselves felt everywhere. If His justice seems to weigh more heavily on some than on others, if His voice sounds more menacing and terrible here than elsewhere, it is perhaps because He wishes that this punishment of a small number may afford a salutary

lesson to millions of others who, terrified by so formidable a display of Almighty Power, may hasten to return to the way of salvation. When He rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom of old, the Bible does not say that Sodom was the only city deserving of such a fate. In the calamity, awful as that of Sodom, which has overtaken Peshtigo, town, perhaps not more guilty than others that have nevertheless been spared, Peshtigo may be looked on as a modern Sodom in the sense that it can serve as an example to all.

“Et nunc reges intelligite, erudimi qui judicatis terram.” (Ps. 11.)

“And now, O ye kings, understand: receive instruction you that judge the earth. Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with trembling. Embrace discipline, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and you perish from the just way. When his wrath shall be kindled in a short time, blessed are all they that trust in him!”

## APPENDIX.

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The preceding short narrative is not so much a description of a terrible calamity, as an account of what I saw and suffered in person during that time of terror. If I have expressed myself with due perspicuity, the reader must have seen as clearly as I have done the finger of God throughout. I know I will gratify many by adding to the above recital a relation of a fact demonstrating with equal clearness the intervention of the Blessed Virgin, in favor of those who place their confidence in her. The event took place during another storm of wind and fire, similar to that which on the same night and at the same hour overwhelmed us at Peshtigo, but at nine or ten leagues distance from the latter town, farther separated from it by the waters of Green Bay.

I must necessarily abridge details and be guarded in my words so as to avoid wounding the modesty of the personages mentioned in this recital, many of whom are still living and may later read these pages.

Near Green Bay, on a promontory stretching towards the north-east, between Lake Michigan and Green Bay, dwells a colony of Belgians. Their number is generally computed as ranging from eight to ten

thousand souls. They are a religious, simple and industrious people, though the greater part of them seem very indifferent with regard to procuring for their children that instruction which they have never received themselves. Among them dwells an unmarried female of about forty years of age, poor in point of fortune and physical attractions but rich in grace and virtue. Her name is Adèle Brisse. Those who knew her during her childhood in Belgium assured me she had always distinguished herself by her fervent piety, ardent love of her neighbor, and unbounded confidence in the Blessed Virgin. To-day, all those who have any intercourse with her perceive at once that time has only developed and strengthened more fully these virtues in her heart. Ten or twelve years ago, the colony possessed no resident priest, and this fervent Catholic set out early every Sunday morning on foot, and walked to the neighboring parish, seven miles and a-half distant, approached the sacraments, heard Mass and returned in all haste to resume her duties in her humble home.

She was returning one morning, after having approached the Blessed Eucharist. All at once she perceived above the middle of the little path she was following through the woods, a Lady of great beauty and majestic mien, who stood as if suspended between

two trees, bordering the path. Surprised and greatly moved, though not terrified, she fell on her knees, uttered a short prayer, then rose to her feet again. She made no mention to her companions of what she had seen, but they had witnessed her emotion, divined the cause, and the mysterious manifestation, began to be talked about. The week following, Adèle Brisse walked as usual to the neighboring parish to fulfil her religious duties, returning from mass accompanied by a number of her companions when the same apparition appeared to her at the same place. This second mysterious appearance was greatly commented on, and viewed in different lights by different people. Some wondered, some laughed; but no one really believed that the Blessed Virgin had manifested herself to a girl but little different in most things from girls of her station. Still many resolved they would accompany her on her next journey and judge for themselves, which they accordingly did the following Sunday. After having confessed, communicated and heard mass, Adèle Brisse took her homeward way, accompanied this time by a numerous escort, among whom were several men. All were speaking on the topic creating at the moment so much interest, resolving to watch farther developments with care, and giving at the same time their opinions, opinions no doubt

very conflicting. The pious Adèle was calm and untroubled. She had prayed fervently during mass abandoning herself entirely to divine Providence. Whether the thought had been suggested to her, or whether it was an inspiration from on High, she had resolved on addressing the beautiful apparition should it again present itself. Arrived at the place where the Lady had already appeared twice, she showed herself, for the third time, more majestic and loveable than ever. The girl fell on her knees, no feeling of fear agitating her breast, but instead, a sentiment of perfect confidence, and then there ensued between herself and this majestic Lady, a long conversation of which I will repeat only what is necessary to the elucidation of my subject. Adèle began :

“ My good mother, what do you want of me ? ”

“ That you should instruct my children, ” was the Lady’s reply. You have just received my Son within your breast, and you have done well, but these poor children receive Him without knowing what they do, and are growing up in ignorance of their religion. I wish you to instruct and above all prepare them for their first communion. ”

“ How can I do that, my good mother, I am but a poor ignorant creature myself ? ”

“ Go, and fear nothing ; I will help you, ”

From this moment, Adèle Brisse, faithful to her mission, was to be seen going through



the woods from village to village, through rain, snow or heat. Neither fatigue nor ridicule made any impression upon her. She assembled as many children as possible in one place, and, her instructions concluded, she went to another; wearisome and often ungrateful task, which she nevertheless faithfully performed for many years. A worthy priest was at last found to take the spiritual direction of the colony, and he advised Adèle to endeavor to collect sufficient funds to build a schoolhouse, where she could assemble the children around her, instead of wearing out her strength in following them through the woods. This wise counsel was acted upon. To-day she looks with pride on two little buildings most precious in her sight: a schoolhouse capable of containing more than one hundred children who yearly are prepared therein for their first communion; and a little chapel built in the place where the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and in which is kept as a precious relic, the tree sanctified by her apparent touch. These two buildings are in wood, plain, but clean and comfortable. They are surrounded by about six acres of land, a gift bestowed on her, which she in turn made over to the Bishop of Green Bay. These six acres are inclosed by a wooden fence, around which winds a little path, and it is along this little path that

the solemn procession, which takes place twice very year at fixed epochs, passes; procession which attracts more than four thousand pilgrims to the neighborhood.

For a time, Adèle Brisse sufficed for the good work she had undertaken, but it rapidly acquired developments which would soon have rendered it beyond her strength. Providence sent to her assistance five or six young girls, as pious as herself, who now share her labors, and emulate her charitable abnegation.

Such were the marvellous circumstances in which this admirable enterprise originated. Now to relate a fact which will prove in a striking manner the protection vouchsafed by Our Lady to it as well as to those who placed their confidence in her.

On the 8th of October, 1871, this Belgian colony was visited by the same whirlwind of wind and fire that overwhelmed Peshtigo, and though the destruction of human life was less great than in the latter place, it nevertheless reduced to ashes, farms, houses and timber, covering a surface several leagues in extent. Now, when the hurricane burst forth, those pious girls said between each other: "If the Blessed Virgin still has need of us, she will protect our lives; if not, we must succumb to the fiery death awaiting us."

Filled with confidence and resignation,

they hastened to the chapel, reverently raised the statue of Our Lady, and kneeling, bore it in procession around their beloved Sanctuary, reciting their beads. When flame and wind blew so strongly in the direction of the chapel as to prevent their farther progress, unless they exposed themselves to suffocation, they awaited a lull in the storm, or turning in another direction, continued to hope and pray.

Thus passed for them the long hours of that terrible night. I know not if, supported only by nature, they would have been able to live through that awful ordeal, but I feel convinced they could not have done it, at Peshtigo, without a miracle.

Morning's light revealed the deplorable ravages wrought by the conflagration. All the houses and fences in the neighborhood had been burned, with the exception of the school, the chapel and fence surrounding the six acres of land consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. This paling had been charred in several places, but the fire, as if it had been a sentient being, whilst consuming everything in the vicinity, the winding path surrounding the enclosure being only eight or ten feet wide, had respected this spot, sanctified by the visible presence of the Mother of God, and it now shone out like an emerald island amid a sea of ashes. Since that time, these fervent children of Mary continue their labor of

love among the poor Belgians with renewed courage and confidence, strengthened by the additional proof given them during the awful night of October 8th that in doing so they are fulfilling the will of the Blessed Virgin.

*Important consideration.*—In relating the preceding fact I have no intention of pronouncing it a miracle, no more than I would adventure to qualify as miracle the preservation of the tabernacle in the midst of the fires of Peshtigo. These two facts greatly edified myself, enlivening my faith and hope, and in narrating them I have no other aim than that of edifying others.

I have no intention either of passing judgment on the apparition of the Blessed Virgin and on the pious pilgrimages which have resulted from it. Ecclesiastical authority has not as yet spoken on the subject; it silently allows the good work to advance, awaiting perhaps some proof more striking and irrefutable before pronouncing its fiat. Far from me be the thought of forestalling ecclesiastical judgment?

I have but another word to add. If it lie within the power of any of my readers to proceed to the spot, and visit this humble place of pilgrimage, as yet in its infancy, and the only one, I believe, of the nature, in the United States, I earnestly counsel them to go. There, they can see and question Adèle Brisse, who, without having sought it, is the

soul and heroine of a good work, progressing with rapid strides from day to day; and I feel assured that, like myself, and all those who have gone thither with an upright intention, they will return edified and happy at heart, if not convinced of the reality of our Lady's apparition.

THE END.

