SISTER MARY ELLEN O’HANLON, O.P.

THREE CAREERS
Highlights and Overtones

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Introduction and Conclusion
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1882 - 1961
THREE CAREERS

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Sister Mary Ellen O’Hanlon, a member of the Rosary College faculty during the first 30-some years of its existence, a demanding professor of botany, was well-known in college and professional circles. Characteristic were her imperious bearing, her confident statements of opinion, her strong and perhaps domineering manner, and with that, her friendly and engaging personality. Members of the Rosary faculty knew her well. Yet for many of our younger sisters, her name means only a prayer on the list of our deceased sisters. So I somewhat rashly decided to prepare an account of her life and accomplishments, since our Mound archives are replete with information about almost any subject pertaining to our congregation.

I expected to find therein data for a "curriculum vitae," with appropriate dates, lists of publications, professional memberships and possibly some correspondence, and, in her obituary, an account of her last days. What I did find changed my plans completely. Sister Mary Ellen left a typed autobiography, THREE CAREERS, clearly intended for publication. My astonishment and delight increased exponentially as I read, and I knew at once that her own presentation was infinitely superior to any summary I could make. Therefore the following pages offer THREE CAREERS as she wrote it, beginning with a table of contents and a list of illustrations for her proposed work.
THREE CAREERS is not an autobiography in the strict sense of the term; neither is it a book of fiction. It is rather a portrayal of some of the highlights and overtones of some personal experiences. It embraces an outline of the forty-some years lived as a Dominican religious, as well as recollections from childhood and youth, which finally ripened into a religious career. Much of the narration is entirely from memory, here and there prompted by recollections and suggestions from the surviving members of my family; from my sisters in religion and other interested friends; from letters, scrapbooks, programs, and such other documentary matter as accumulated through the years and somehow escaped the incinerator.

The story is factual in the sense that all of the main issues are self-evident. It is a brief account of some of the most decisive steps and turns throughout a very full life. Certain details deviate from complete accuracy for various reasons. Here I have taken liberties with exactness for the sake of smoother and more pleasant reading or to close small gaps in minor details. It is by no means a full picture but is rather a silhouette which brings into focus various incidents that we hope are representative of the life of a Third Order Dominican sister: as a person, as a biologist, and as a humanitarian.

I would not have my readers think that I believe the call to religious life is often as sharp and as definitely pronounced as was my own. It seems that I needed a jolt and, in His goodness, God gave it to me. Most religious vocations evolve by a more gradual and less acute pointing up. But what is more important, and what I should like to emphasize here, is the fact that every vocation to the religious state, however casual and matter-of-course it might appear to be, is a most precious gift from God. Why some of us have received it, when others, although far more worthy, have not, will be a mystery unanswerable short of eternity.

As one often hears said and can find in books, the essentials
for success in following the religious life are: reasonably good physical health, at least ordinary mental ability, and the desire to serve God in this special calling.

Now this desire need not be a natural desire. To take on the livery of a religious (sometimes a kind of dress that may be quite distasteful); to give up home and friends and many pleasures, perfectly legitimate in themselves; to take on the yoke of obedience—all of these sacrifices are out of accord with the natural desires of humankind unassisted by divine grace. The desire referred to, therefore, applies to the will to serve God in a special way—a way which purports, at least, to be more sacrificial than the usual course of human life. It is on a much higher plane than a purely natural desire. It is a supernatural desire.

Certainly, alongside the supernatural desire to serve God in religion, that is to make a complete surrender of one’s self, there can exist, at least in the beginning, natural repugnances. Neither can we compare natural with supernatural desires any more than we can weigh physical pleasures against intellectual and spiritual joys. This is so, precisely because we are here considering two distinct levels of human living.

To the average reader of THREE CAREERS, that of the biologist will be the "glamorous" one. Actually, it has been definitely subordinate. In fact, it is the one which of itself might have remained almost strictly on the natural plane: while the career of the religious must be on the supernatural level. Therefore the biologist who is also a true religious must live a supernatural life.

One sometimes hears it said that it is strange that so many students of the natural sciences seem to have no religion at all. The natural scientist may be impressed with what he learns of the beauties and wondrous workings of the natural world: but this knowledge alone will not raise him above the natural level.

Faith, divine Faith, is a gift from God and comes directly from Him and not alone through His works in creation. In other
words, he who wishes to know God and things divine, must study to learn directly about God and not only about His works in creation. It is also true that created beings--plants, animals, people--take on deeper and more sublime meanings when viewed through the eyes of Faith. Without a doubt, there is much matter for serious and reverent thought for the student of nature who knows and loves God first of all and, consequently, all His creatures and the many wonderful manifestations of His creation, each in its proper order.

The part of my life in which the career of a humanitarian is most prominent has been for me the most interesting and soul-satisfying. It has provided for a fuller life--a life in which the love of neighbor, in the love of God, are fast-knit both in truth and in deed.

It is difficult to write of one's self; but the author about whom this sketch is concerned has been very fortunate because of her close associations with so many noble and interesting persons throughout her life. Thus, whatever is of interest or useful to the reader in these rambling reminiscences owes its merit to these happy associations.
Chapter I: DECISIVE STROKES

It was one of those cold, dark, dreary days of late November, 1909—a Saturday afternoon. One of my best friends, Nellie Martin, a fellow teacher, and I had been waiting our turns in the dentist's office in the small town of Coon Rapids, Iowa. At length a farmer with several small children entered the waiting room. The children were tired and very fretful, probably hungry too. Presently their mother who had been in the dentist's chair, I know not how long, came out with bleeding jaws and tearful eyes. She had just had every tooth in her head extracted. The children ran to her and the smallest one pulled at her skirts, saying "Let's go home, Mommie." The good woman's hands were already more than occupied with the pads of gauze which she pressed to her bleeding gums. I believe I have never witnessed since or before such patience and forbearance. This good mother was evidently more concerned about her children's immediate needs than her own acute suffering and the necessary care of her murdered mouth.

As I looked at this almost tragic situation, as it then seemed, I speculated on what was before this young mother as her evening program. She would probably not reach her farm house until after nightfall. It would be just as she had left it earlier in the day, only now cold and dark. While her husband put away the team, fed the farm animals, and probably milked the cows and did the other farm chores, she would have to light a lamp, make a fire and prepare supper for the family, trying as best she might to satisfy the children's demands which every good mother always tries to meet. None of these children seemed old enough to be of real help to her in all that she would have to accomplish before she could really call one minute strictly all her own. Thus it seems that if she were exercising such patience and faithfulness to duty for
the love of God and not alone for the natural love of her children, which every normal mother must bear, she might well be considered a veritable saint.

My whole reaction to the situation was one of extreme admiration. It was indeed a real challenge. It lifted me out of myself. It struck me so hard that I lost control of my emotions and I found myself wiping away the tears. I turned to my good friend and whispered: "Oh, Nellie, I could never be like that." Before she had time to make reply a decisive voice within me penetrated the very depths of my soul. It spoke with convincing finality in no unmistakable terms: BUT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO.

It was as simple as that. My future was settled. I was destined to enter the religious life and I knew it. There could be no refusal, no turning aside. Neither did I, even for a single moment, ever change or try to change my resolve which I then made so suddenly and so irrevocably. No, I had really never thought of this life, for myself, at all seriously before that never-to-be-forgotten day. I had thought of it for others, my friend who was with me then, for example, and who, I knew, had a strong desire to do the same thing. I had known this for some time and had encouraged her in her determination which was receiving only opposition in her own family. Nellie's home was in Coon Rapids and I was often a guest of the Martin family.

Before that decisive moment, I remember only two occasions when the religious state suggested itself as even a possibility for me. Once when I was a teen-ager, there was a remark made by one of my teachers, Sister Mary Hortense, BVM, about whom we shall have more to say in a later chapter. One day she and a group of us school girls were chatting informally. She was, as I thought then, not too seriously speculating on our various aptitudes and possibilities. I remember that she picked me out for the religious life. I was not displeased with the suggestion but thought very little
about it then nor at all seriously afterward.

The second time was a few years later when one Sunday morning a boy friend and I were driving to Mass. We passed the line of sisters as they approached the church. With less sincerity than strategy, I believe, I somewhat playfully said to him that that was what I intended to be. I am of the opinion, now particularly, that I said this more to let him know just what claim he had in my interests for I knew that he would be much less disappointed with such a prospect than if he would have to concede to a human rival. I was right about this because, when the time for the cessation of our friendship came, he did ask me whether there was some one else who had replaced him. I assured him, and honestly, that there was no one, but I am very certain, too, that the religious life was not really then on my mind as the alternative.

As time advanced, occasionally I seemed to regret that I was not doing anything really sacrificial, much less heroic, toward the all-important goal of eternal salvation. I was quite successfully established as a school teacher. I liked my work and enjoyed my associations with friends, fellow teachers, and the children that I taught. I was perfectly free to go and come as I pleased, but my life was not fully satisfying and there was a certain urge to do something more which might make life fuller and more worthy. Even assisting in the choir and helping around the altar did not seem to fill a certain spiritual void that often asserted itself, although only vaguely, perhaps.

But that cold November afternoon did settle, as by a lightning stroke, every doubt and misgiving. I went to a party that evening and apparently took ordinary interest in everything as usual, but my mind was far away from all that went on. Time continued to pass pretty much the same. I suppose I was a little more prayerful. I had only one definite plan but would wait to see my home pastor before making any further decisions. Of course, I mentioned it to a
local confessor who, after a few questions, encouraged me in my conviction. In the summer vacation, I went home but told no one there, except, of course, my pastor. I first mentioned it to him in the confessional. But as his time at that moment was at a premium with a long line of penitents waiting their turn, he told me to speak to him outside of the confessional about the matter. Subsequently, I called at the rectory and waited his entrance to the reception room. After a few remarks were exchanged about the weather and the health of the members of my family and other such routine attempts at conversation, I realized that I would have to break the ice.

No priest will ever make any reference whatsoever to any penitent outside the confessional about any matter which might have been discussed under the seal of the sacrament itself. This rigid rule applies to everything, even to matters which had nothing to do with the sins confessed. Information which he receives under the seal is regarded as absolutely not his. The penitent, of course, either inside or outside the confessional is free to bring into a subsequent conversation with his confessor any matter whatsoever if he so chooses. Thus I appreciated this fact, and despite my embarrassment I saw that I had to open this very important topic of conversation, right-about-face. Finally, I stammered something about having a very serious intention and would be glad to have his advice. That still was not sufficiently explicit and even then he feigned not to understand me. He playfully answered me by asking me whether it would be in June or a little later perhaps. Partly because this annoyed me and probably more because marriage was then making no personal appeal, I must have made a wry face when I answered that question. So at last, he seemed to conclude that since he had evidently made a snap judgment the first time, it must be the religious life about which I had come to seek advice. This helped me a little to get my tongue loose enough to say what
I wanted him to know, this time as my pastor and not only as my confessor.

I asked him also to direct me as to the particular convent he thought I should seek admission and he recommended a religious organization of teaching sisters in which he had a special interest but which was quite strange to me. Nevertheless I went away quite happy. It would be about two years I thought before I could take the final step and everything seemed quite settled.

One thing I vividly remember that Father Schulte told me by way of advice and caution: "It will sometimes be monotonous, Kate," he said. Well, with this I must entirely disagree. In the forty-three years that I have lived in community life, I must say that I have never experienced a monotonous hour. On the contrary, at times one would welcome a little more circumscribed routine. I can explain my good pastor's opinion now only by the fact that he was a diocesan priest--not a regular, that is, one who lives under rule in community life. I am certain that no order priest could ever see anything monotonous in the religious life. The unexpected too often happens and frequently, too, it is a very welcome surprise.

I went back to Coon Rapids that September and again took up my teaching of teen-agers. Another teacher friend joined me, Margaret Mueller, also of Iowa City, who had accepted a position in the high school there. Ever since her high school days she had had the intention of entering the convent, she told me, but it still seemed far away and less definite for her.

That school year at Coon Rapids there were five of us--all looking toward the same goal and all of us very close friends--Mary Carroll, ex-teacher, buyer and saleslady for one of the large general stores there; Grace Trites, a music teacher; Margaret Mueller, teacher of English and history in the high school; Nellie Martin, primary teacher; and myself,
the eighth grade teacher. Of the five, three of us, Mary, Grace, and I, later became religious. The other two never left the world, as we say, and both have since gone to their eternal reward--Nellie much sooner, Margaret, only recently (September, 1953), after a long teaching career in the public schools. The other two survivors--Mary, now Sr. Bonaventure, R.S.M., and Grace, now Sr. Theophane of the Order of Saint Benedict--are still in the ranks of their respective religious organizations. We have had happy chance meetings a few times since. For example, I spent a week with Grace when she was in Chewelah, Washington, and later had a short visit with her when she was at the Perpetual Adoration Convent, Mundelein, Illinois. Mary paid me a visit when I was at Rosary College. All of us have kept up few-and-far-between-letter-contacts throughout.

That one year together was interrupted in March by the sudden leaving of Mary, the oldest in the group. She slipped away to enter the convent of Sisters of Mercy in Council Bluffs, Iowa, without even saying a formal goodbye to any of us. It seemed the easiest way for her, but it was almost too much for us to accept from one we all admired and loved so ardently.

I left Coon Rapids in April of that school year to take a position in the Des Moines Public Schools. The rest of that year and the following I had opportunity for daily Mass and other religious advantages that a small country town could not offer. Mary’s youngest sister, Catherine Carroll, was there in clerical work, and we were roommates at Saint Catherine’s Home. This is a hostel for women in employment conducted by the congregation which Mary was joining.

I began to realize however that it was one thing to be fully convinced of a religious vocation and still another to settle upon the exact religious institute in which my life was to be dedicated. There are differences in the particular kinds of religious institutes which affect the life and work
of the individual; but most of all there is a spirit, an almost indefinable atmosphere, which seems to pervade the very walls and cloister walks of each. These differences really matter to the individual candidate, and however inexplicable they may be at the time, they take on a very real importance later.

I next went to see my pastor during a vacation visit to tell him how I had come to feel and that I did not believe I could go to the novitiate he had recommended. He soon made it clear that the choice was mine to make and that he had only made suggestions as I had asked him to do.

The summer following my transfer from the Coon Rapids Public schools to those of Des Moines in April of that school year was the last complete summer passed in my parental home. I did not believe that anyone at home actually knew my intentions although I was convinced that my mother strongly suspected them. I did know that she would never oppose them. During that summer I had a small house party including as guests Nellie, Grace and Margaret. They, of course, all knew my plans although Grace, who was reared a good Baptist, was not yet a baptized Catholic. She was conditionally baptized the following year which she spent as a student at Mount St. Joseph’s College, now Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa--just across the Mississippi from Saint Clara. Their visit with me and my family was a very happy one for all of us. All of my family were most gracious in helping to entertain my friends, two of whom, Grace and Nellie, they had never seen before. During the previous summer, Mary Carroll was my house guest for a few days. Now she was preparing to receive the habit of the Sisters of Mercy in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

After my guests had left I told my mother about Nellie’s hopes of becoming a religious and of her parents’, particularly her mother’s, opposition. My mother’s comment was typical of the wisdom which it seems to me never failed her. After hearing the details of the story, she said simply:
"Nellie’s mother will need her just as long as she keeps her." This proved to be most pathetically true. Nellie’s father went totally blind soon after and since she was the only child left at home, it became her obvious duty to help her mother care for him in his declining years. Indeed, I doubt that any religious institute would have accepted her under such circumstances, even if she had applied for admission.

Before each decisive step, such as formal reception to the habit, simple profession, and final vows, the candidate must face up to several examinations. One of these is administered by a committee chosen by the Mother General, usually from members of her council; another is given by the Mother General herself; and a third, the canonical examination, is held by the bishop of the diocese or his clerical representative. Among the questions the candidate must answer then is whether or not she may have any dependents, for example, a parent or even a grandparent, whose financial support or special care might be her obligation. This question seems to rank as no less important than those which concern the candidate’s motives in embracing the religious state, such as: whether there has been undue human influence or coercion or other unworthy motives involved in her decision; whether there are any broken promises still unreconciled or any other moral obligations left unfulfilled. Any one of these and some others can be serious impediments which must hinder the candidate’s acceptance. Obviously anyone who would fail to recognize serious responsibilities before entering would probably be a failure as a religious also.

That fall (1910), unlike the preceding one when the five of us started out together in Coon Rapids, all of us were separated. Nellie was back in Coon Rapids, her home town, and again in the school room; Mary, as we have already indicated, was in Council Bluffs as a postulant; Margaret had taken a position in the high school at Independence, Iowa; Grace went
to college; and I went back to Des Moines to teach departmental work in the grammar department of the Frances E. Willard School.

When I packed my trunk that fall I included such things as I knew were required or would be useful in whatever novitiate I might enter, disposing of all superfluous articles of the "worldly" type. I remember asking my mother for a silver knife and fork and spoon but without telling her why I was making such a request. She simply gave me the permission to take them as though I might have asked permission to bake a cake. It seemed not to matter to me either that the sets from which I took this silver would be left incomplete; but I did not seem to know how to go about buying one piece of each kind. I was one of a large family where one more or less of anything never seemed make much difference. Whatever my two younger sisters really thought about things they might well have observed, they seemed to say very little. Anyhow I would wait to tell my Mother my plans at Christmas time. I knew that I would have no difficulty there, no matter how much it might cost her to give me her blessing.

Thus I left home early in September with the intention of entering a convent the following June, although I had not the slightest idea of where it would be. I planned to return home for the Christmas vacation--probably for the last time. In this I was mistaken for I had the privilege of spending the next Christmas vacation at home also, that is, as a postulant, about which we shall say something a little later.

I realized that it was high time that I should decide on the exact place. Once during the previous autumn, while we were still all in Coon Rapids, Mary, Grace, Margaret and I all went up to Templeton, Iowa, for a week-end. Although we regularly had two Sunday Masses in Coon Rapids, there was one Sunday in each month in which we had none because the pastor celebrated the Holy Sacrifice at a rather distant (for that time) out-mission. Thus sometimes on these "out Sundays" we
used to spend the week-end in one of the surrounding towns where we might enjoy the privileges of full-fledged Catholics. The church at Templeton was beautiful and had a thriving parish with a parochial school taught by Dominican Sisters. While we waited for our train on Sunday afternoon, we called on the sisters there. These sisters were the first Dominicans I had ever met. They impressed all of us very favorably, but I do not remember having any urge to go immediately to Racine, Wisconsin, where the motherhouse of their congregation is located, in order to put in an application for admission to their novitiate.

Right here it may be well to clear up a little of the terminology which, as religious, we often use so casually but which may not be so clear to our readers. There will be many, no doubt, who will be unaccustomed to the precise meaning of certain otherwise well-known words which apply in a more particular sense to religious and their institutions. In my own experience in ordinary conversation, I have often had to explain the exact connotation of certain words, as they are used in such a context.

The term congregation is one of these words. Here it applies to a particular institution or foundation together with its subordinate institutions—all governed under one head. In the case of women religious, this administration includes a mother general and her council. Saint Clara is such a congregation of Dominican Sisters; the motherhouse at Racine is another. These are only two of some thirty such Third Order Dominican Congregations in the United States of America. These total about twelve thousand sisters of Saint Dominic in the United States alone. They represent only a relatively small part of the numerous other organizations of Catholic women religious: Franciscans, Benedictines, Ursulines, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Sisters of Charity, of many and various institutions, throughout our great country.
The more recent statistics show that there are 160,000 Catholic women religious in the United States of America. At the present writing there are a little more than 1,700 Sinsinawa Dominicans and these, therefore, are only a little more than 1% of the total and probably not more than 12% of the total number of Dominican Sisters of the Third Order in the United States of America.

St. Clara is the motherhouse of the congregation established by Father Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli of the Order of Preachers--the order which was founded by St. Dominic in the thirteenth century. All sisters of St. Dominic, no matter of what congregation, irrespective of their geographical location, the date and prime mover of their establishment, are essentially alike in spirit, in dress, in customs, etc. That is to say, they are Catholic women religious who are all members of the Order of Preachers. According as they belong to some one of the different congregations of the Dominican Order, they are under distinct administration and government; but all adhere to all of the fundamental characteristics of the order from which they stem. St. Clara, as the motherhouse, is the center of administration therefore of a little more than seventeen hundred sisters. This motherhouse controls about one hundred schools and colleges throughout the United States and includes two European foundations. All of these institutions, as subordinates to St. Clara Motherhouse, are often referred to as "missions" or "communities." The term "community" very aptly applies to any group of religious residing in a given convent under a local superior. This term, however, is often loosely used and is not infrequently applied to a whole congregation or to any religious organization, however extensive, as well as to its other subdivisions. Conversely, the term "order" is sometimes applied to any of its subordinate groups, such as a congregation or even a community. Also, the organizer of a congregation within an order, such as St. Clara, is often
spoken of as the founder, as is the case with our reverend
Father Mazzuchelli. This is true only in the sense that
Father Mazzuchelli, as a Dominican himself, set up a
congregation of the great Dominican Order of which the
original founder was St. Dominic.

To sum up, any sister from St. Clara Motherhouse,
Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, for example, might introduce herself by
saying that she is a Third Order Religious\footnote{The Order of Preachers is composed of certain divisions. The First includes the priests and brothers; those of the Second Order are the cloistered women religious, nuns, rightly so called; the Third Order Religious are the Dominican Sisters who include the great majority of Dominican women religious; the Third Order Secular includes both clergy and laity--among the latter, both men and women, married and single. Our present Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, became a professed Dominican Tertiary when he was still Cardinal Pacelli.} of the Order of
Preachers, founded by St. Dominic in the thirteenth century.
More specifically, she might add that she is a Dominican
Sister of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary
located at Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, which was immediately
instituted by Father Mazzuchelli, O.P. She might further
identify herself by saying that she is a member of a sub-
division of that congregation, the community of sisters in
residence at Saint Clara Convent, or at Rosary College, or at
Villa des Fougeres, Fribourg, Switzerland, or any of more than
a hundred communities of this congregation. Saint Clara is
the patron saint of the whole organization located at
Sinsinawa and therefore the name applies equally to the
motherhouse, the convent, the novitiate, and the academy for
girls--all of which are located here.

Now to return to my quest for the religious institute in
which I was to dedicate my life. I had had conferences during
that last summer at home. These were with Sister Philomena,
B.V.M., my sister Genevieve's former teacher in high school.
I had become well acquainted with Sister Philomena and greatly
admired her; but it never occurred to me to ask for admittance to Mount Carmel, her motherhouse, in Dubuque, Iowa. Neither did she suggest it to me. It was then that I told her that Genevieve would enter college at St. Clara that fall. She made a little exclamation to the effect that she was sorry that Genevieve was not going to their college then immediately recalled it by saying it didn’t matter so long as she was choosing a college of the St. Clara type. Sister Philomena, a woman of great character and discernment, no doubt realized I had no vocation to their religious congregation and was as convinced as I myself seemed to be even then that the choice of place, next to the religious vocation itself, is of the greatest importance. So I continued to look around.

Later that fall, Margaret Mueller, from Independence, and Grace Trites, from Dubuque, came to Des Moines en route to Mary Carroll’s reception to the religious habit. As I have already said, Mary’s youngest sister Catherine was also living at Saint Catherine’s home, a hospice conducted by the sisters of Mercy from Council Bluffs. Incidentally, Catherine Carroll, now Sister Catherine, R.S.M., is at this writing herself the superior at Saint Catherine’s Home.

All four of us made the trip to Council Bluffs together to attend Mary’s reception to the religious habit. But in spite of the fact that I was already acquainted with some of these sisters and liked them very much, my attendance at the reception convinced me that I would not fit in there. So, I kept on making inquiries and, incidentally, I read the life of Mother Seton, the Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Greenburg, Pennsylvania. Again, this made no personal appeal. Finally, perhaps because of my visit to the convent of Racine Dominicans at Templeton the year before, I hit upon the plan to make a visit to Saint Clara.

I had a very plausible reason for such a visit without revealing my primary purpose. My youngest sister, Genevieve, long since deceased, and a first cousin, Catherine Sullivan,
now Mrs. John Bradley, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, were both in school there at the time—Genevieve in the college, and Catherine in the academy. The latter, whose home was in Denver, had spent the Christmas holidays at our home the preceding year; and I had then quizzed her about many things without, as I thought, giving her any inkling as to why I wanted this information.

It was Thanksgiving Day, 1910, still in the wee hours of the morning when my train reached Dubuque, Iowa. Grace Troutner, principal of the school in which I was teaching, had travelled with me from Des Moines as far as Charles City. I had known previously that I stood well with her and that my chances for promotion were good should I remain in her school. I was really not interested in such prospects but she had not the slightest idea of what was running in my mind while we chatted about the near future.

This was in the horse-and-buggy and, most emphatically, prepavement days. It was still very dark when the train reached Dubuque, so I waited in the station until near daylight before ordering a conveyance over the six or seven miles to Saint Clara. Soon after the break of dawn the driver of a single horse hitched to the old-time top buggy arrived to take me over the hills and through the muddy, rutty roads—roads so bad as to defy description. I was born and reared in the country and consequently had seen and traveled some very bad Iowa mud and clay roads, but this seemed to be a record in my travel experience.

As the daylight increased and long before we were even near to the Mound the driver pointed it out to me in the distance. It looked dark and almost colossal and very majestic. Certainly it was like a true beacon to me, silent and somber though it really was, for again, I was certain. Yes, this was it! I had not yet seen a single person with whom I knew I would cast my future lot, but I knew then that I would not have to conceal the main purpose of my visit at all once I arrived.
The greeting I received from the sister portress was typically Dominican, as we say. Sister Mary Rose Sweeney, long since with Him she served so long and so well at St. Clara's front door, met me. She must have come down from the chapel--two full--very full flights of stairs to answer the bell, as it was during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that I happened to arrive.

Up to that time I had never liked coffee and simply loathed it with cream and sugar. But Sister Rose stepped out of the reception room for a brief moment, and when she returned she carried a cup of steaming coffee just as though she might have picked it off the hall tree. It was, moreover, almost yellow with cream, but I accepted it as graciously as if it were my favorite beverage. In spite of the fact that it was also "sickly" sweet, I found myself drinking it as though it were entirely to my taste. This was another indication that this was my future home. But I did not need any so natural a confirmation. My mind was already fully made up.

That was a profoundly happy Thanksgiving for me. Genevieve and Catherine were glad to see me and we had an enjoyable visit together. In the meantime I had access to certain of the sisters who should be consulted about my intentions. After a few preliminary questions and answers on both sides, the matter was settled--even the time of my entrance, almost to the day!

The students were having a party that evening and I stayed for an hour or so. Then, when I found that other guests were driving to Dubuque, I decided to leave also. This was very disappointing to Genevieve, and she wrote me afterwards that she left the party and retired early. That has ever been one of my great regrets--especially since her early death--the fact that I did not remain long enough to make my visit seem more worthwhile to her. The truth was I had accomplished my main purpose in coming to St. Clara, and I knew that Christmas vacation was very near when we would all
be together again.

Christmas came quickly after that Thanksgiving visit. Everything was settled now. Therefore on Christmas morning as Mother and I went to the late Mass together, I brought up the subject by speaking to her about my recent visit at Saint Clara and my sister Genevieve’s adjustments in the college there. I ended by saying, quite casually, "I am going there myself."

"But not in the capacity of a student, but rather to become a sister," she immediately answered.

I had only to say, "Yes."

"I knew it," she said. And both of us seemed relieved to have that over and immediately spoke of other things.

I might have spent the next summer at home and put off my entrance to the convent until September, but it seemed easier to make the break in June from Des Moines direct. When I wrote to my pastor requesting my baptismal record, I told him of my final plans. He immediately answered and told me that he thought that I should make a home visit in order to say good-by properly and to receive my parents' blessing. This was probably sometime in the early spring, and so I compromised by making a week-end visit in early May. Then they all knew. My leaving this time was not particularly difficult because I was really only going back to Des Moines. Some of the members of the family no doubt thought that there still could be a change of mind. Probably only my Mother could see further.

Time flew after that last Christmas vacation. I had a fairly full teaching program and, among the teachers in the school where I was located, about seven or eight of them were brides-to-be. That meant no end of showers and parties, and the rest of us took it upon ourselves to provide the places for these social functions, as most of us were not living in our own homes. The Sisters at St. Catherine’s graciously permitted me to use their guest dining room and reception
rooms for the shower we sponsored there.

Then my sister Isabelle, not quite seventeen months my junior, made me a visit and announced to me her recent engagement. I was busy too getting my own "trousseau" ready. This I did surreptitiously, excepting for my room-mate, Mary's sister, long since Sister Catherine, R.S.M. and, as we already said, superior of St. Catherine's at the present time.

None of the girls for whom we were giving shower parties were Catholic and so I kept my own secret. But when time came to sign our contracts for another year, word got out that I was leaving the school, too. They of course immediately thought that I, too, had recently become a bride-to-be. Then I had to tell them the truth or they would probably stage a shower for me! I told them as simply as I could. To them it was as though I had read my death warrant. They were completely aghast. This was the group--some nine or ten of us--who always had our lunch together. Included was the principal and the three or four of us who did departmental work in the grammar grades and a larger number of primary teachers. All of them were greatly surprised and obviously disappointed, even bewildered. I had been one of the liveliest and jolliest of the group! What could it all mean?

I assured them, finally, that the step I was about to take was a try-out and not one of the finality that theirs must be. Perhaps I suggested that I might not be accepted. The principal assured me of her backing and promotion possibilities if and whenever I wished to return. I thanked her cordially, feeling, of course, that these were favors I would never want to accept. My own reaction to their disappointment I necessarily kept to myself but I really felt sorry for all of them, who so completely seemed to miss anything like a reasonable understanding of sacrifice at the supernatural level. This gave me one more reason to thank God. Obviously He had given me lights and gifts for which I had not even asked and now the grace to understand and accept
them. Nevertheless, I seemed fully to understand their attitude. Indeed, I expected their reaction to be just what it was.

The last day of the school year was a beautiful one in early June. I felt certain that it would be my last one in the service of the public schools. I had been appointed to take the eighth grade graduates to East High, where they would register for the following year. I celebrated by wearing my very best street dress with all the proper accessories.

Soon the day came when I expressed my trunk to Sinsinawa but went myself to Independence, Iowa for my last visit with Margaret. Grace came from Dubuque and Nellie from Coon Rapids and the four of us had a very happy week-end reunion. At that time both Grace and Nellie were planning to follow me to St. Clara, but Margaret was still undecided. Now, again, I was happy that all this was completely settled for me.

I arrived in Dubuque, this time on a beautiful June day about noon. I was met and duly conducted to my future home over much better roads this time. It was the day before commencement and Genevieve, my beloved sister, and Catherine Sullivan, my cousin, were still there. I stayed with them in the students’ section that night and did not go over to the convent side until after they left the next day.

Then I put on the postulant’s garb.
Chapter II: LIFE AS A POSTULANT

Was I homesick? Yes, desperately. It was so acute that it proved to be a severe test of my vocation; for I had never been really homesick since the time I was a very young child, only four years old. That time I went to visit my maternal grandmother in the company of my sister Ann, second oldest of the family. Even now, I can recall the awful feeling that came over me just as they went to take off my shoes at bedtime. I cried so much that they took me up the street to some cousins of my mother, hoping that I might stop crying at least. In this family there were a lot of girls who tried to amuse me and obviously to make me forget home and mother and everything that I so much wanted just then. This proved to be worse than useless because their efforts only made me very spunky and, finally, tormented by their attempts to distract and entertain me, I slapped at each one of them as she came near me. In despair, Grandma and Ann took me back and I do not know how they at last got me asleep. Up until the beginning of my postulancy, that was my first and only really serious attack of this intangible malady called homesickness. As the years passed and I had suffered no real relapses during any of the numerous periods I was away from home, I naturally thought I had outgrown any such childish behavior and was completely immune to it. But alas, I was mistaken.

There were a considerable number of postulants at St. Clara when I entered. Most of them had been there for several months. They were well adjusted and showed no signs of discontent. Therefore the sudden nostalgia that I experienced was not only surprising but almost overwhelming. I recalled my first onslaught of this painful sickness. There was this difference now—a difference which gave me no consolation. I was no longer a child. But the pain of loss, the indefinable sense of utter loneliness in my adult mind, seemed harder to
bear. Even as a child, I knew that sooner or later I would be back with Mother and the others in the one place on earth that I really wanted to be just then. But now I was cutting myself off by my own deliberate act--not for a few days or weeks or months or years even, but for the rest of a lifetime.

It was a real shock--even a temptation. Maybe all this sacrifice was unnecessary or possibly not for me! I must have turned over in my mind all of the pros and cons and probably did not fail to reiterate the solemn words:

"He who loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

These attacks were always relieved by a good hard cry out loud and alone with God. Therefore I used to go out behind the old exhibition hall, as it was called, and have it out. I was afraid, too, that if anyone knew of my homesickness and my fits of weeping, that I might be considered emotionally unstable, even an hysterical young woman--certainly not the type that would make a religious. I did not want to be sent home for any such reason or for any cause whatsoever that might come under my own control.

I had always been naturally of a buoyant disposition and I am certain that there was considerable evidence of this between the attacks--none of which lasted very long a time. Recently a sister religious reminded me of an incident which proves that even then I could be and was really my true self most of the time. It seems that a number of novices and some of the postulants were being sent to the garden on a hot evening in early July (I had entered June 13th). Recently there had been a heavy rain and the furrows between the rows of bean plants were soft and muddy. Carrying baskets, our aprons and rubber, we were on our way to the bean patch. Someone called to us to take a different route in order to avoid the beehives, adding that otherwise we might be stung. This sister told me that I made them all laugh when I, a brand
new postulant, came out with: "We're stung already." This, together with many other such incidents that might be cited, indicate clearly to me that between the fits of homesickness I was really much at home.

I did my best to get rid of the homesickness, and, in due time, it wore off completely. In the meantime, I did not want any of my family to know about it. Some years after, during a home visit, one of my sisters told me that they all knew from my letters that I was having a struggle in the beginning. I had thought that I was revealing none of this to them, but our own can always read between the lines. I asked her then if they had thought that I would not persevere. Her answer was, "We did not know." She admitted that, for one, she had hoped that I would come back home. Certainly my mother never had any such desires or hopes, although she undoubtedly missed me most. I remember that after all was finally settled, and not until then, did she ever express herself or seem to anticipate the outcome of my probation. But this time, she wrote very simply, "I had great confidence in you." Then I knew her real joy, but I did not fully sense the pain that must accompany it.

Not until a death comes into a family does any member, much less one of the children, sense the void and loneliness which every devoted parent must experience in giving up a child. It was at the death of my youngest sister, Genevieve, while I was still a professed novice, that this came home to me. My own sense of grief and loss, I then realized, was mild as compared with that of my mother and father. They bore this cross bravely, but I could not fail to see how very painfully. When I left home myself, I did not even suspect the price they had paid in that parting. I only knew they missed me, but I was then incapable of fully sensing the depth of their sacrifice, so generously made.

I never fully realized this until a short time ago. It was at a small reception to the religious habit. There were
only a few postulants who had entered too late for the big reception on St. Dominic’s Day. The father of one of these girls knelt in a pew on a parallel with the choir stall that I occupied. He had been at the reception which followed the late Mass on this particular Sunday. At the afternoon Benediction I could see that he had his left hand cupped and was looking into it intensely. Here he held the crucifix of his rosary during the entire service. It was plain that he was uniting his sacrifice to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross. It was not distracting because this good man’s behavior gave me food for meditation. Later, I learned that his daughter who had just put on the Dominican habit was a talented artist whom he had previously sent to Paris for study. Now she was leaving her parental home, not without her father’s consent, but also not without his heart’s struggle. Fortunately he knew where to seek the help and strength he needed, and he was thus able outwardly to control his suffering. I remarked, too, that at times he glanced at the long rows of white-robed novices kneeling in front of all of us. Some one of them was his pride and his joy. Now her very identity was lost. Excepting for a difference of stature, perhaps, it would be difficult to distinguish an individual novice until they all turned around to leave the chapel.

I learned, too, of this good father’s position of distinction, so far as the standards of the world go, and I thought how fortunate that a man of such character should be in so exalted a position of power and trust. I hoped, too, that his young daughter would prove herself worthy of such a father. With God’s grace, no doubt she will.

At the time of my postulantship, now over forty years ago, the teachers in our Catholic school system were almost exclusively religious, that is to say, members of a religious institution. Very few, if any, lay Catholics prepared themselves especially for this kind of apostolic work. In most of the parochial schools, the pastors accepted lay
teachers only quite reluctantly. The attitude, too, among the parents, sometimes making great sacrifices to educate their children in the Catholic schools, was against lay teachers. They seemed to maintain that a Catholic school deserved the name only when all of its teachers were religious or at least were aspirants thereto. Unfortunately this led to a practice which prevailed in a large number of religious institutions for some time.

Postulants who entered with the necessary equipment to teach were sometimes immediately sent out to the "missions" to fill vacancies for which there were no religious teachers. Since I had been a school teacher, having had experience in the public schools of Iowa and Colorado, it was therefore not surprising that I was asked to fill such a vacancy. As we have said, I entered in June but was not told officially anything about this possibility until late August. Conventual rumors, however, were not wanting on this score. I was quite ready, therefore, to answer the Mother General's summons and to be asked if I would be willing to go out for at least a part of that year. Of course I was. Certainly I would rather have stayed at the motherhouse, but I must have had some missionary spirit even at that early date.

In due time I got out my secular clothes, such as I had left, and went off to Bloomington, Illinois. There I was one of four postulants. One of these, like myself, had the baptismal name of Catherine, so she was already being called Sister Catherine. Immediately, with the ingenuity that all sisters possess at remodeling names, they simply gave me the name of Sister Kathleen.

All of the postulants wore the uniform with the sister's black veil, but without the swathing head accessories. When we went on the street or to Mass in the Church, we also wore the black mantle. Consequently, from the back view we were indistinguishable from the real sisters, and we used jokingly to say that we looked better going that coming. So far as
appearances went, we were neither fish nor flesh. Nevertheless, the four of us made our own fun and really had one grand time all year. That does not mean that we had an easy time. Frankly, I believe I never worked as hard since or before as I did that year.

Religious superiors certainly have no time for nonsense, such as the kind one hears about—planting cabbages upside-down or watering-a-dead-stick, as the stories go. There is much work to be done in and around every convent and, at times, it may be a real test of a neophyte’s mettle to fulfill all the duties assigned; but she can at least see that everything she is asked to do is always in perfect accord with common sense and right reason, even if it is not exactly according to her natural taste. If the candidate herself has the right spirit, she will derive some comfort and self-satisfaction, too, seeing that she is another cog in the machinery which helps to keep the wheels of the convent in proper motion.

At that time, of the three Dominican schools in Bloomington, two were under the control of one community, that is, the sisters of one convent. This, of course, complicated things somewhat. One of these was an academy for girls—including all the grades through high school. There were both day pupils and resident pupils. The other, a parochial school, included both boys and girls and also ran the full gamut of twelve grades. It was, of course, entirely a day school. Two of the other postulants taught classes in the elementary department of the parish school, but in their free time—evenings and week-ends—they helped out generally and generously about the convent, including the care of the resident academy girls of all ages. Fortunately, all of us had been brought up as members of large families and thus we had firsthand experience with managing children both in school and out.

I had the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the
girl's academy with only the part-time assistance of one other teacher. There were thirteen girls in the eighth grade graduating class. Besides my teaching duties there were numerous others, ranging from dishwashing, serving table, prefecting in the dormitory, chaperoning groups of girls on downtown shopping tours, etc.

There are, no doubt, some disadvantages for a young woman entering the religious life under such circumstances of expediency, but, on the other hand, such conditions could and did, in my case, present some real opportunities. Sister Gertrude Quinn, who was appointed to give the postulants religious instruction, had had teaching and other experiences similar to my own before entering the convent. She was not much older than I and her four or five years in religious life had not erased from her memory and appreciation some of the new experiences that she saw me facing.

Sister Gertrude was the postulants' religious adviser by her religious superior's appointment and we knew it. But she did not stop there. In spite of her own full teaching program in the parish high school, she managed to slip in, as though it were also a part of her assigned duty, to help us with the dishes in the evening, or whatever else we might be doing. Her generosity and unselfishness did not escape our notice. For myself, my admiration for Sister Gertrude mounted upwards throughout the school year and through all the years that have followed. She was and always has been an example of fidelity to duty, the soul of generosity, and a religious well worthy of imitation.

And so if a candidate is alert, she will see and profit by demonstrations of noble self-sacrifice by those who are already initiated. Thus the formal training and the theoretical instructions that she misses in not attending the routine class exercises as they are conducted at the motherhouse do have some compensations. Classroom study of the full meaning of religious obedience, that is to say
supernatural obedience, for example, is often recognized in the close-up observance of its casual manifestations in experienced religious. Albeit, the postulant may also have occasion to contrast the several model religious with perhaps one or two that she should not imitate. This is because of their tendencies to a lax attitude towards some of the fundamentals.

Again, there is need of a clear head and ability to draw the right conclusions and to follow the obviously right examples. As a Christian, without any particular study of the manner of religious life, the neophyte must know that perfection is not reached by anyone in this life; that judgment is never hers to make; and that her primary duty is to watch her own step. Ordinarily only such candidates should be sent out to cope with problems for which they have not been previously prepared. But, by the same token, only this type of young woman is the really desirable candidate for the religious life in any case.

Since each postulant was privileged to invite the sister of her choice to clothe her in the religious habit at the reception ceremony, my logical choice was Sister Gertrude and she managed to be there--perhaps at a greater sacrifice than I could then realize. Sister Gertrude has since been a lifelong friend and it was through this friendship that I made the acquaintance of her reverend cousin, the late (d. 1943) Father John T. Gillard, S.S.J.--one of the great apostles to the Negro in the United States of America, about whom we shall speak in a later chapter.

Living as the postulants did--much closer to the sisters of the community than we would have been had we remained in the motherhouse--also had its advantages. Personally, I would never have known much about life on what we call one of the "smaller missions" had I not been sent to Bloomington. It so happened that all of the rest of my religious life, excepting one year in Europe, I was in very large communities--the
motherhouse and Rosary College. Certainly, I spent shorter periods, in the summers, and for other brief visits, in a very considerable number of our smaller convents throughout the United States of America, but that kind of experience does little to acquaint one with the run-of-the-mill in a parish-school-set-up, for example. Nevertheless, from several points of view, this is the most important work of our teaching sisterhoods.

One day during that year, there was a free day for the academy but not for the parish school. The parochial teacher in the seventh grade was absent from duty and so I was sent to hold down her class of boys and girls. I had no misgivings whatever and stepped into the class room like the fully initiated school ma'am I thought I was. These youngsters evidently saw me only through their own eyes, at least for one brief moment. Here, they must have thought, is a counterfeit sister, one "with hair and ears"—really only "just a girl" dressed up to simulate a sister. With that they immediately began to act up. I at once recognized my unexpected problem and realized that I had not come to teach a class of angels, for they were evidently at least attempting to try me out. It was my first experience in a parish school but I knew that I had settled far worse than they could even try to imitate. Nevertheless, it seemed necessary that I get really savage with them. Therefore, I just blew the roof right off and then clamped it right down on top of them. They seemed surprised beyond measure that I could be so tough with them. But as soon as I had completely demonstrated my credentials for good class room performance, they were definitely subdued. And we went through the day very happily and, I hope, very profitably, too.

This kind of incident would never occur if all the children in the Catholic schools, both then and now, were fully accustomed to lay teachers as well as religious. That there are not enough religious teachers is now abundantly
evident and the problem, which is already being solved, is well upon us. We need well-trained lay teachers—many of them. Their rights and their authority, therefore, must be recognized and respected by all, including their religious co-workers, the pupils, the priests and the people of the parishes. They should not be treated as many minorities too often are. They cannot be expected to take their share of responsibilities unless they are in an atmosphere which affords them a full sense of belonging. The lay teachers in our Catholic schools are not only a necessity; they are a most important and essential segment of the Lay Apostolate.

It was during that school year, probably in October, that Grace Trites entered Saint Clara as a postulant. After her arrival she wrote me occasionally and seemed contented enough at first. But before six months had passed she decided that she was in the wrong place. As she was a musician she seemed to fear that by improving and perfecting her talents along this line she might become an artist, but, in doing so, fall short of her personal concepts and ideals of what a religious really should be. It was quite evident that her vocation was to a less active and therefore more fully contemplative religious organization. In such a one she found herself a few years after. There she has since lived a very happy life as a semi-cloistered Benedictine nun. I visited her in Chewelah, Washington in the summer or 1926, and again, in the late thirties, I spent a day with her during her rather short assignment with the community of the Perpetual Adoration chapel in Mundelein, Illinois. The rest of her religious life—now on to thirty-five years or more—has been spent at the motherhouse of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Missouri. As for Nellie Martin, her plans for the religious life fell through completely, and her devotion and energies went to the care of her infirm father. Her own premature death occurred in the early twenties.

Certain incidental privileges came with my school year at
Bloomington. Early in the fall my sister, Genevieve, surprised me with a visit of a few days. This we both greatly enjoyed, and all of the sisters were most gracious in receiving her and freeing me from all duties during her visit. It was not long after her return home that my mother made the request for me to spend the Christmas vacation at home. I was assured by my local superior that this would not cancel the regular home visit that all our postulants are allowed before their reception to the habit. The permission was granted by the Mother General and I began to plan for the vacation. The other postulants were most helpful in getting me ready for the trip. I still had a good looking winter coat of full length which would cover a multitude of inconsistencies, but the hat I wore when I came in late August was certainly out-of-season. One of the postulants, Catherine Hugo, now Sister Edvarda, was more than ordinarily both a milliner and a dress maker. She was and is an artist. So she revamped the rather chic little hat of Panama straw, by covering it with some beautiful velvet she had in her trunk among other things she had planned to use in her fine needle work. Then she added some artistic decorations and I am certain no modiste would have suspected that this creation had not been recently purchased at some Bon Ton shop. When I got home my sisters and Margaret Mueller supplied furs and other necessary accessories for proper wear during an Iowa winter. My mother, too, practical as always, had sensed that my postulant's wardrobe must also be near depletion and so she had bought me a very pretty black dress. It was quite modish without being extreme, so I wore it sometimes while I was home. The removal of a few of the trimmings made it a splendid postulant dress during the rest of the year. In spite of very severe weather with heavy snowstorms, that Christmas vacation was a very happy one.

Back at Bloomington in due time for the reopening of school, the latter part of the school year went rapidly and soon I found myself getting ready to go home again for the
last vacation before receiving the religious habit. During this visit we had delightful early June weather and my brother Will, now deceased, who had recently purchased a Cadillac roadster for his personal use, saw to it that I went all the places that he thought I might like to go. Once when he and I were riding together he speeded up—for that time in automobile travel (1912)—to the very extreme. I soon noted that we were moving extraordinarily fast. He must have thought that I would never again have a fast ride. I looked at the speedometer, then registering over sixty miles, and that on an ordinary dirt road. Naturally, I began to think the same thing, but for quite a different reason. Needless to say, I called a halt.

The morning for my return to Saint Clara arrived. I had to make the five o’clock interurban from Iowa City to Cedar Rapids where I would get my train for Dubuque. My family was up at about four o’clock and most of them went to the car station with me. We drove in the family automobile. It was considered very elegant at that time. Indeed, it was an acquisition made during the year I was a postulant. But all survivors of the same model, I am sure, are now in museums.

At the final parting I was determined that I would show no signs of what I really felt. But, again, I was horribly homesick. I managed, however, to say goodbye to all of them without a tear and, I hope, without any other indications of my really poignant suffering. I was one of only a very few passengers on the electric car to Cedar Rapids. Thus I had the relief of a good, quiet cry practically all the way. So far as I recall now, that was the very last of the relapses of homesickness.

When I reached Saint Clara this time I met a large number that I knew. There were several postulants who had entered since my leaving the August before, but we lost no time in getting acquainted and happily discussed the approaching event of our reception to the habit of Saint Dominic, most probably
early in August.

The summer was not so different from the one preceding it so far as occupations went. Besides our religious exercises, we studied, attended classes, and worked in the garden or whatnot. But there were no anxieties or misgivings and no real homesickness. Our date for the reception to the habit fell that year on Saint Clara’s day, August twelfth. There were twenty-four of us in the group.

At that time the postulants at Saint Clara dressed as brides for the reception, the habit being put on over the bridal gown. Of course, the wearing of a bridal costume signifies the candidate’s brideship with Christ. Evidently the Dominican Sisters, at least those of Saint Clara, did not believe that a glamorous wedding gown of the latest model was necessary to express this symbolism. I had noted this at the one or two receptions that I had already attended. These bridal costumes varied considerably within a group, from models of the gay nineties down to 1912, the year of my reception. I was indeed grateful that I had bought a white dress of floor length in the late fall preceding my entrance to Saint Clara and soon after my first visit there.

I thought that each candidate was expected to bring a suitable reception dress, but I afterwards learned that many did not. These luckless candidates had poor pickings among the accumulation of out-moded white creations—the left-overs of several previous decades, perhaps, or even more. Of course, historically considered, any style of dress worn during or since the thirteenth century, the period since the foundation of the Sisters of Saint Dominic, might be considered in vogue. I had not, however, yet reached the stage of such total indifference to current styles of attire as to heartily agree with such a theory. At any rate, the custom of dressing as brides for reception to the habit has since been completely abolished at Saint Clara. For a number of years, the postulants, without any such pomp, go up to the
altar in their simple black uniforms. This does away with a lot of unnecessary remodeling and, best of all, it is now a procession which no one might mistake for a period costume show!

So far as I know, it is the custom in most religious organizations to give the incoming members a choice of their religious names. According as the number of members increases in a given institution, the choice is proportionately limited, and exact duplications within a particular organization are almost sure to cause great confusion, and so are not considered, as a rule. The art of name coinage has consequently reached a high degree of efficiency in many religious groups. When all reasonable foreign translations of an especially desirable name, such as Rose, or Martin, or Michael, have been exhausted, the name of the particular saint or angel is then embellished with tails or tentacles. Thus the number of persons in a given organization who can claim the same patron saint and therefore celebrate the same feast day may increase almost indefinitely.

While I was in Bloomington, I learned from the sisters there that there was no Sister Ellen in our congregation. Since this was my mother’s name, I made it my first choice. After my request was granted, I wrote to tell the family about it—several weeks in advance of the reception. Some one of them told me that my mother’s comment was: "She might have done better." I knew, of course, that she was pleased and my new name was evidently most acceptable to my father. Afterwards he still called me "Kate" or "Katie" when addressing me personally; but to others, particularly those outside the family, I was always Sister Ellen. Every sister, of course, has the additional name of Mary besides her distinguishing name. It is often omitted; but in writing the initial M is then used. My students and a number of others seemed to insist upon calling me Sister Mary Ellen from the first, and so it was not long until I found myself using the
After I began to write for publication, I adopted the plan of including my family name. This was especially for the convenience of indexers, abstractors, and librarians; and finally this practice carried over to almost all of my signatures. As time passed, several variations of my name have been given to incoming members of our congregation. For example, there are Sister Marie Ellen and Sister Ellen Mary. Sometimes during short periods, when any two of us were residing in the same convent, I found letters in my box that did not belong to me. At such times, the letter might be addressed with my exact name, minus the family name, of course. I was the one who was embarrassed on such occasions, particularly if I did not discover the mistake until I had opened and read part of the letter. Also, it devolved upon me to make an effort to get the letter to the intended addressee. Often rather ridiculous mistakes are made in telephone calls because of similarities in the sound of sisters’ names. My advice, therefore, to all persons who wish to communicate with sisters, either by mail or by wire, is to make sure of the exact name beforehand.

Each member of our class was permitted to invite two guests to the reception ceremony. I left the choice to the family with the result that my two youngest sisters, Isabelle and Genevieve, came. I did not know that they were there until all was over because they did not arrive until after we had entered the procession to the altar. After the reception we had a very nice visit and they stayed until the next day. They took some pictures of me and of a few of the other novices. When I was collecting illustrations for this book, Isabelle sent me a lot of photographs—among them these novice pictures. I did not remember that they even existed and I would not have recognized myself except for the two other novices in the picture. After my sisters left, someone told me that during the ceremony both my sisters cried when they
heard the director, our beloved Father James Kavanaugh, O.P.,\(^2\) repeat these words:

Received, Sister Ellen, the scapular of our Order. It is the principal part of the Habit of the Order of Preachers. It is the pledge of the maternal love which from Heaven the Most blessed Virgin Mary bears towards us, who has taken us under her protection. Under her shadow you shall find a refuge in the moment of danger; and until the hour of death, it shall be to you a shield and a defense against the attacks of the demon and the perils of this life. Amen.

\(^2\)Father James Dominic Kavanaugh was chaplain at St. Clara for twenty-three years (1910-1933). During that time he received nearly one thousand candidates to the Saint Clara Novitiate. Father Kavanaugh died of a heart ailment at St. Pius Priory, Chicago, Illinois on Sept. 24, 1948, the feast of Our Lady of Ransom. R.I.P.
Chapter III: THE NOVITIATE

Another of those words which sometimes causes confusion is Novitiate. Strictly speaking, it is synonymous with the canonical year, that is to say, the full year of residence in the novitiate house. It is the time of discipline, testing, and training which immediately follows the period of postulantship. The postulantship may vary in duration from six months to a year, or even more; but the minimum for the white veil noviceship is one full year, the canonical year.

In its broadest sense the term novitiate may include the entire period of probation, that is, the postulantship, the canonical year, and whatever period under temporary vows may follow. The length of the period of temporary vows varies in different religious institutions; for our congregation it is three years. Thus the total period of probation varies from a minimum of four and one-half years to five or even more.

The present chapter includes certain of the events of the canonical year; but inasmuch as the author remained at Saint Clara throughout the rest of the probation period and for four or five additional years, we are including under this title some memoirs which do not belong to the novitiate period even in its broadest sense.

At the time of my entrance to the white-veil-novitiate there was a need at Saint Clara College for a teacher of home economics. Someone with sufficient maturity, teaching experience and, probably, a fair amount of intelligence must be put into the class that was then being organized among the college students. Another novice and I were chosen to be trained to teach home economics. This meant cooking and a lot of things for which I had little or no natural tastes or aptitudes. Somehow I was not worried, for, in the first place, it probably would keep me here at Saint Clara. This prospect was in itself a big boost for home economics.

The fact was, I did not feel at all sure that I would be
left in this kind of work. In the meantime, I wrote my mother about my assignment. With her good sense of judgment and her very keen knowledge of her own daughter, she wrote simply: "I think that they have made a mistake." I trusted that my religious superiors would probably soon agree with my mother’s experimental knowledge in this matter. I felt sure that all would work out well in due time. And it did! It may be that I actually revealed my ineptitude for things domestic or that certain courses that I took in plant science simultaneously with those in home economics revealed to my teacher and, through her, to my superiors that my natural bent was toward pure science rather than domestic economy. Something, whatever it was, finally terminated my continuance in home economics.

The teacher of botany at the college at that time was Sarah L. Doubt, then very near the completion of her candidacy for the Ph.D. degree in plant physiology at the University of Chicago and now Professor Emeritus of Washburn College, Topeka, Kansas. She remained through the following summer and I continued work in plant science under her tutelage. In due time I was put on the certain road to a career in botany and home economics gracefully dropped out of the picture so far as I was concerned. The environs of Saint Clara are just about ideal for the study of botany and for the study of many branches of zoology as well. I made the most of these advantages and had a lot of real fun doing it.

Right here I should like to correct or convince any misinformed readers who may be harboring misapprehensions about a certain truth: although religious superiors direct and determine all matters of detail in the life of their subjects, that is all that they really do. We ourselves, humanly speaking, make the first and only really major decisions. In my own case, the first of these was the one I made in the dentist’s office in that late Saturday afternoon in the long ago; and the second one on that almost impassable
muddy read on that early Thanksgiving morning now some forty years since.

When anyone makes up her mind to embrace the life to which it seems that God has called her, she, under God, has willed to make the first great step. If she perseveres in her determination and makes her vows she simultaneously accepts all of the minor oblations that she may be called upon to make. The girl who makes her marriage vows—"for better or for worse, through sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, etc." also makes a complete surrender. The great difference, however, must not be overlooked. There is no novitiate in the married state! Nor is there any possible dispensation from valid marriage vows in the sense that one is free to choose any other spouse.

But the young woman who makes final vows in religion and thus completely and deliberately surrenders herself to God’s service does so with a good sampling experience of what it is all about. Even then, the so-called final vows of most orders of religious women are not absolutely irrevocable, if dispensation is sought for some serious reason.

Our religious superiors decide on such details, for example, as whether we shall be teachers of domestic economy or of languages, of the natural sciences, or music, or whatnot; or whether we shall serve as cooks, portresses, or laundresses. All of these assignments are most probably always made first, with consideration for the subject herself and her best religious development and secondly in accordance with her natural aptitudes, tastes, and previous experience. Sometimes there is a try-out or two before the candidate settles down to a definite line of activity. But every care is exercised to keep round pegs out of square holes. My experiences, too, even in home economics, such as training in food chemistry, in dietetics, and the microscopic study and chemistry of textile fibers, were all useful and helpful in my biological career. I learned a lot about vitamins—knowledge
scientifically brand-new at the time as one of the by-products of World War I.

My wrestle with home economics did not terminate with my white-veil-novitiate, however. I had a bout teaching it the following year, to teenagers in the academy. At the same time I was also teaching chemistry at the high school level. The two things went along together quite cooperatively. Indeed, the following summer I went to the University of Wisconsin and took a course in textiles. This included chemistry and biology of textile fibers as well as weaving, and a lot of other processes involved in the manufacture of cloth. Simultaneously, I attended two courses in chemistry--one in the teaching of the subject. The professor, Dr. J.H. Walton, incidentally made remarks about certain classes of students with whom he had had experience. Apparently totally unaware that he then had two students of home economics in his class, he made some disparaging statements about the attitude of girls in home economics toward chemistry. He said, in effect, that what seemed to impress them the most, whether favorably or otherwise, were beautiful colors and bad odors as these were experienced in certain chemical reactions. I agreed with him silently and hoped the more ardently that I would soon be liberated from this class of "scientists." Just then, the course that we were taking in textiles seemed to corroborate his statement. This certainly did little to inflate the ego in me. In all justice, however, I am inclined to believe that the requirements in pure science for students of home economics have increased considerably since then. At any rate, I really wanted to know more about the fundamental principles involved in chemical reactions than what could be noted by any person who had even fairly good sight and a normal olfactory sense. On the other hand, I later found myself, and still am, rather critical of some of the methods employed in the teaching of pure science itself.

I recall a personal experience as a student in elementary
chemistry where we were obliged to determine experimentally the hydrogen equivalent of magnesium. While not directly practical, such an exercise has its place in a chemistry course, I admit; but not alone because it is prescribed unless there is at hand the adequate equipment with which to arrive at results that will be reasonably exact. One of my difficulties was that the balance at my disposal was inadequate. In the first place, it was probably not sufficiently sensitive and secondly, because that particular instrument was not in excellent working order. Probably my greatest difficulty was that I was too much of an amateur to use it successfully. All of these discrepancies I noted and therefore did not hope, unless by some happy accident, to obtain results that would at all coincide with the accepted values. It happened that my mathematical sense was superior to my ability to adjust a delicate balance properly. So I set out to figure just what results I should have obtained with the supposed weight of magnesium that I had used. I also realized from former experiments that a certain reasonable error was acceptable, so I proceeded to juggle, not the apparatus, but my figures of weights and measures, until I had arrived at what I considered respectable results. Furthermore, my right hand neighbor was much worse off than I since her mathematical inclinations were less acute than my own and, of course, the balance we were using in partnership would serve her no better. So I proceeded to give her a lift with her weights and measures. The results were that we both received high grades for our "experiment."

To this day I have no serious regrets for that deception. Whether I would repeat the same kind of thing now were I to find myself in a similar situation is of no concern here. What I mean is that I strongly object to many of the "workbook" and laboratory manual exercises which have been used in many of the courses in the natural sciences. These "experiments" as they are sometimes dignified are often only
"cut-and-dried" directions for repeating processes, the results of which are known or should have been known from the study of the textbook. In the language of the chemistry professor who complained of the attitude of girls in home economics toward chemistry, this kind of laboratory work is of the "cookbook" type. He was all for a more rational tussle with the real problems and an application of the mathematical sense wherever this might be found.

Professor Walton had had European training. He held the doctorate in chemistry from Heidelberg University. His incidental remarks about his experiences there meant much less to me then than after I had had similar experiences myself. I remember that at the time we were impish enough to mimic his New England accent and particularly in his remarks about Heidelberg. Nevertheless, I fully agreed with him in his general professional attitudes and found him a very stimulating teacher.

Like Doctor Walton, I prefer to see many of the phenomena and processes of natural science which have long since been investigated and confirmed demonstrated to the students, rather than to require them to repeat in routine fashion, exercises, the results of which are previously known. A good demonstration before the class should be followed by discussion of the various chemical reactions and analyses of the mathematical computations involved. This applies particularly to the general student. The relatively few who are training for specialties in natural science must of course develop good laboratory techniques.

The demonstration method has always been the method of teaching science in European schools, especially at the lower levels, and it occupies a very important part of every lecture in the universities. The European professors have well-trained technicians who assist with the demonstrations and are responsible for the setup and care of all apparatus. They serve as hands and feet for the professor during the lecture-
demonstration and are altogether indispensable both in the laboratory and in the lecture room. I hope I may be pardoned for this kind of digression, but long periods of teaching have naturally developed some very definite convictions along the way.

There were many amusing incidents in spite of very trying circumstances in my experiences with home economics at Saint Clara College. One instance stands out vividly. The whole class had had the unit in candy-making. There was to be an exhibit of our skill. The whole array of bonbons, fudge, peanut brittle, many-colored mints, etc. were spread out in the laboratory which, by the way, had once been a real kitchen. On this particular day, after the secular members of the college class had gone, the teacher advised that we two novices take all of the candy to the novitiate for "safe keeping" until the next afternoon when the exhibit would be on!

Little did this good woman know our novices! Sister Evangeline, my novice companion in this course, and I looked at each other knowingly, but neither of us thought it prudent to say to this good non-Catholic lady just what we thought—that the candy would be safer just where it was or in any other part of the building than it would be where some thirty young novices might have access to it. And what would the novice mistress say if she saw us come traipsing in to the novitiate with trays and more trays of candy of divers kinds! Might she even propose that it be donated as a treat to her white flock, at least after the exhibit was over! These and other complications came to our minds immediately. No man can serve two masters!

I forget now what exactly we did say to our naive teacher, but somehow we assured her that we would be responsible for the safety of the candy. It was our duty to keep the foods laboratory in order so we always stayed after she left. This time we first sat down to cogitate about our
new problem. And a problem indeed it was as to how and where to hide this candy—as much from the novices as the secular students. Yes, even some of the sisters, too, might somehow feel, in the sight of it, that there was some obligation on their part to test the work of the students in this department!

Finally, the old steel range, one of the left-over white elephants in this improvised laboratory, loomed large and hopeful. We opened its large oven door, after some difficulty. Yes, this was the place. It was clean and spacious and would hardly be suspected as a hiding place for candy! This was the first time in the several months of our course that even we had explored its interior. Up to now the whole hugh mass of iron was just one more thing to dust. No one would look for the candy there, and, with the laboratory door and windows locked, the candy would be safe.

The next morning Sister Evangeline and I were down early and had the candy spread out before the arrival of Miss Hinkson, the teacher. She too was early on account of the exhibit. She never suspected where the candy had had a night’s repose any more than any of the many others who might be more than attracted to our display, had they only known. That was all that mattered to us.

The white-veil novitiate year was very full. Those were the days before Canon Law prohibited study of the secular branches during that year which is now devoted entirely to religious study and development. So we did our best to carry a double program of study with no dearth of domestic duties besides. Of course, like every other novitiate class, we thought that we were the busiest and the happiest to that date.

All novices are a pretty carefree class. They are learning to be docile in a very real sense and to accept or reject whatever obedience may require. All of this, at least for the more experienced, makes for a sense of freedom never
fully appreciated before. Of course there are, at times, little disappointments and trials, but the kind which anyone with a sense of humor can always laugh off.

The day for simple profession was at hand. We had made our canonical retreat earlier in the summer and were nearing the end of a few days' recollection immediately before the great day. All the examinations were passed. In the late afternoon of the day preceding the profession I was summoned to the reception room because of the arrival of my dear mother and sister, Genevieve--my two guests whom the family chose. It was very exciting. I seemed to be torn between the silence of our short retreat and the happy meeting of my dear ones. I remember the novice mistress must have sensed this and, in effect, she told me to forget about the silence when I met my mother, and I certainly did.

The presence of my mother and sister, Genevieve, added much to my great happiness on that ever memorable day. My mother was unable to hear me pronounce the vows because of a defect in her hearing, but they told me afterwards that when my turn came she knew it was I although she could not hear my voice. It is interesting to note that the profession ceremony is quite simple, as it is also very serious. The evangelical counsels--the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience--are all included in the manner of making profession, although no mention is made explicitly of poverty and chastity. All three are included in the phrase "according to the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary." The following is the manner of making profession ad triennium:

To the honor of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Blessed Dominic, I, Sister N., called in the world N.N., make my Profession, and promise obedience to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the Blessed Dominic and to you, Sister N., Mother General of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, of the Third Order of St. Dominic,
according to the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitution of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, that I will be obedient to you and my other Superiors for three years.

Mother and Genevieve stayed until the next day. How well I remember those precious moments when we were walking down the hall together at their leaving. They were speculating on my first visit home. I told them that no visits would be permitted during the three years of professed noviceship unless there should be severe illness or death in the home. We all agreed that at such a price for an earlier visit we would gladly wait the three years. Little did I think then that Geneviere, the youngest of all of us, would be the one to cause this exception. Very soon after she had made her application to join me in the religious life, she fell fatally ill. I was in the early part of the third year of my professed novitiate when I was called to her bedside where I remained for several days. A few weeks later, her death came. I went home again, to her funeral.

Both times I had consoling visits with Margaret Mueller, whose brother, Dr. John Mueller, happened to be my sister's physician. Margaret was doing graduate study that year at the University of Iowa and was home for that reason. I remember that she told me that she noticed that I was much more able to accept such a sorrow then than I would have been a few years previous. That was no doubt true. I had learned that crosses and sorrows must come to all--whether in religion or out. The difference is that those of us in religion are constantly reminded that in order to follow Christ we must willingly take up the Cross.

I had experienced much joy in anticipation of Genevieve's entrance into the novitiate and realized that we would then be more than natural sisters. It was indeed, humanly speaking, very hard to say "Thy will be done" to all of this. But I
knew that God must have accepted my dear one’s self-immolation and that her sacrifice was probably complete. I had to accept it in that spirit, and I appreciated, too, that my personal grief was not without great consolations. It was plain that for my dear ones at home this loss was most keen, particularly for my mother. And so I made my most supreme effort to keep up for their sake.

When I returned to St. Clara after the funeral, I more fully appreciated having sisters in religion. The welcome to my second home after so sad a sojourn was full of tenderness. There were those who had experienced similar grief and their understanding and sisterly kindness particularly were most consoling.

The rest of my professed noviceship went on about as usual with study and teaching and the regular routine of religious life. More about it will be told in later chapters.

Now there was Sister Margaret--advanced in age--at least so she seemed to all of us young fry. She had evidently spent her many years of circumscribed service and was at the privileged period where her natural bent and her soul’s generosity allowed for a more personal choice of activities. She was the bee keeper for one thing and many a comb of delicious honey she robbed from her numerous healthy hives with which to embellish the tasty pancakes and hot biscuits that were regularly served from the one-time three distinct kitchens at St. Clara.

Sister Margaret also kept a jealous eye on the strawberry patch--one of great dimensions. Neither weed nor rude human footprint would diminish the usual high yield of this luscious fruit under Sister Margaret’s watchful care. This, I learned in my early years as a professed sister when one night I ventured into the strawberry patch by moonlight. Having been born and reared where strawberries grew in great abundance and
where I had figured as the champion picker in my father's well-tended patch, I was certain that even in such reduced light I would do no injury to the plants. I knew, too, that I could carefully choose and pick only the large, ripe fruits by the feel.

My companion in this pilfering project, being city-bred, was put on guard while I did the actual work. She would give me the alarm, if necessary. "There is someone at the fourth story window," she stage-whispered to me excitedly, as she moved as close as possible without putting foot into the actual patch. Ah, yes, it was Sister Margaret's unmistakable voice calling, "Get out of that strawberry patch; you'll ruin the vines," and then I could almost hear her add, "Those city girls have no sense of nature's ways." That would let me out! My farm affiliation, I knew, had been much to my credit with Sister Margaret.

I picked my way out as carefully as I could, feeling like a gangster pursued by police. I must leave no traces of vine injury and Sister Margaret, finding none, would forget all about this escapade in due time, I hoped. And evidently she did.

I warned my accomplice, a professed novice, to keep out of the main halls the next day and thus avoid any searching looks or pertinent questioning. I had no fears of the superiors as I trusted in their good sense of humor, but I certainly did not want to lose caste with Sister Margaret. By this time, I had been at St. Clara for probably six or seven years, and I knew that she had a certain respect for my sense of growing things and of natural phenomena generally. I knew her well enough, too, and the whole situation by then, to be doubly confident that she was very unofficial in what most of the younger neophytes had seemed to consider as one of her roles--that of testing our religious vocations. However confident I was of this, there were always among them those who feared she might report them. For what? I do not know.
Strangely enough, this is one of the chief worries for many young candidates for religious affiliation—the fear that they might be sent home. Personally, being not of too tender years even at my entrance, I do not remember ever being much troubled on that score, and much less did I even fear any intervention on the part of Sister Margaret that might terminate my candidacy. I only remember many times resolving to do my best and if and when my superiors found me unfit for the final step I would go "back to the world" and would not even consider trying any other religious congregation. I believed I was as certain, under God, as any one could be, that my life was to be that of a Dominican religious since all the signs that I could distinguish pointed that way. Therefore I would leave all in the hands of God and there I have been, thanks to His Goodness and Mercy, for over forty years! And so I never worried about such trifles as Sister Margaret's tactics at testing. I did realize, nevertheless, that she had a good sense of humor and a lot of other good-sense qualities as well.

One little instance was not long ago related to me by a sister only a little older in religion than I. As a young sister, she was in charge of the dishwashing where considerable machinery was in use. She told me that Sister Margaret came along one day and pointed out some slight flaw in her work. This Sister-of-the-dish-machine, as we shall refer to her here, said that Sister Margaret's remark so irked her that she immediately gave her a little back talk. Later in the day, however, this good young sister repented of her discourtesy and disrespect toward another sister—and a much older one at that. Her first opportunity to make amends, she said, soon presented itself and so she proceeded to tell Sister Margaret how sorry she was for having been so rude; how she knew, too, that charity and even good manners forbade such behavior. Of course, she fully appreciated the fact that our religious rule and constitutions would require an apology for
any offense of this kind if it were at all serious.

This same young sister, however, had then as now a very strict sense of justice, and this extended to all persons concerned—not excluding herself. Thus when she considered she had made sufficient amends and Sister Margaret had not yet made any reply she finished her apology by adding: "But, Sister, maybe the next time you'll mind your own business and such things will then not happen." Sister Margaret, who also had great respect for justice as well as a very keen sense of humor still made no reply; she simply walked away chuckling to herself.

Sister Margaret included among her very special projects the raising of popcorn, and this with her own hands. Thus during the winter months she made large delicious popcorn balls as special treats for all the sisters on festive occasions. Her recipe for the adhesive syrup was something individual; for one thing, she added honey to the other usual ingredients. Sister Margaret’s popcorn balls were certainly "tops" and would have taken the prize at any good county fair, but Sister Margaret never went in for prizes or praises.

Another one of Sister Margaret’s free-lance activities was the blackberry patch. She pruned and tended the vines with all the skill of a professional horticulturist. Thus they produced delicious berries in great abundance and of jumbo size. The overseer of the pickings made by the "young fry" of the community was, of course, Sister Margaret herself. Here, even more than elsewhere, was the occasion for what appeared to be "vocation testing."

In reminiscing with a sister slightly younger than myself not long ago, I remarked that I had had great respect for Sister Margaret. Her reply was, "I had great fear of her." One difference was that I remained at Saint Clara for some five or six years after my probation period. That gave me greater opportunity to really become acquainted with Sister Margaret. And because my chief interests as a student of
secular subjects was in the field of biology, I naturally learned a great deal from Sister Margaret. She seemed to find me a congenial companion--one who knew something about things as God made them. She taught me more about bees, for example, than I could have learned in libraries or lecture halls.

Sister Margaret told me when to expect the Cicada septemdecim, that is, the so-called seventeen-year-locust, but which is really not a locust at all. There is only one brood of this insect in the Sinsinawa area and so it could be expected only once in seventeen years. As I now recall it, they came in 1922. But whether it was 1922 or earlier, they certainly came on-the-dot, according to Sister Margaret's prediction. It was during a rainy period such as often occurs during the month of May. This was unfortunate for them, because the birds gobbled them up before their wings had a chance to dry. If Sister Margaret had not advised me beforehand, I would most probably have missed them completely; I would never have realized that the sudden influx of grackles, blue-jays, and all kinds of insect-peckers was owing to this rising bird banquet. The weather, too, was so rainy that I might have stayed indoors during this whole period. As it was, I was out, notwithstanding the rain. I got my quota of cicadas for class use and made some first-hand observations of this bug (and it is really a bug and not a grasshopper as the true locust is). The adult life in this cicada species is at most a few weeks above ground in contrast with sixteen years of larval life underground.

Thus there was many a good lesson that I received from the store of Sister Margaret's knowledge--knowledge she had gained far less from books than from her own keen observations and the harmonious cooperation of an active mind. Like many others, she was for me a real teacher--the others, most of them, holders of various academic degrees. But Sister Margaret, totally without any special scholastic attainments, was almost scornful of any degree. Intellectually, Sister
Margaret might well be called a diamond in the rough, for her wisdom was truly genuine. That she was deeply spiritual, too, there could be no doubt, although she made no attempt to impress anyone with her really deep piety. One of the older sisters, who has long since survived her, told me that Sister Margaret died the death of a saint.

The conclusion of the three years of professed noviceship points to the most acute and profound step in a religious career. The expiration of the full term of probation is on one side of the balance and the taking of the final step is on the other.

The temporary vows are no longer binding at the expiration of their particular time period, and thus the professed novice at the end of this time is free, so far as vows are concerned, without further ado, to go back to the world or to make her final vows. That is to say, she is free to follow her conscience in this matter. If and when, after seeking the proper direction and advice, her conscience agrees that she is unfitted for the religious life and that she will most probably serve God better in the world, she should indeed leave the convent. This is, of course, only logical because the probation period is provided precisely as much to prove the fitness of the individual for the religious life as to train her in the manner of living it, according to the rule and constitutions of the institute. The training is, indeed, a lifetime job and no one of us will ever consider herself fully proficient.

The departure of an individual severs the mutual obligations and responsibilities of the religious organization and the departing member. It gives perfect freedom to the religious organization; but the moral freedom of the departing member is conditioned by her own conscience in the matter.

For most religious, there is no question of doubt or
indecision at the time of final profession. It is "final" in our congregation and for the sisters of the Third Order of Saint Dominic generally, inasmuch as these last vows are irrevocable unless by dispensation from the Holy See, unless the particular institute is only diocesan.

The following is the manner of making Final Profession:

To the honor of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Blessed Dominic, I Sister N., called in the world N.N., make my Profession and promise obedience to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the Blessed Dominic, and to you, Sister N., Mother General of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, according to the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, that I will be obedient to you and my other Superiors even unto death.
Chapter IV: FERNS FOR GRADUATION

Most of the readers of this book, if not all of them, will have had firsthand acquaintance with a graduation exercise which typifies this epoch of American education. Whether as an active participant or as a fond parent, or other admirer of a graduate, nearly all will have attended a commencement program. This is a convocation in which often hundreds of high school or college graduates line up in cap and gown, each to receive a formal document. Anyone of these pieces of parchment is flattering to read even if its Latin context, at times, must elude the recipient himself. Such a situation is less disconcerting, perhaps, than the example that was recently detailed to me of a mother whose boy was graduating from the eighth grade (these grammar school functions are now considerably played up at their level also). The poor mother wept when the big show was all over to find that her good boy was unable to read his diploma, although written in his mother tongue. Consequently, she had to read to him the fine things that were said about the graduates, himself included. He may have had some real classmates, too, in this respect for all that one might guess.

Be all of that as it may, in recent years the scrolls of "sheepskin"—those awarded to collegians, at least, are neatly bound in black and are dealt out with as much dispatch as the dignity of the occasion will allow. These are sometimes received with only a nod of the head from the alumnus or alumna, unless such diplomas pass through the hands of an ecclesiastical dignitary who may offer an episcopal ring to be venerated. In the event of this greater solemnity, the newly-made alumnus makes a quick flexion of the knee (the left one, usually) and in spite of the need for haste, normally kisses, but, perchance, sometimes misses, this symbol of episcopal dignity and authority.

With a firm grasp on the certificate of his high
scholarship, he rises from his position (one of great prominence at the moment) and with as much ease and grace as he can muster continues on his way across the stage. If happily he is a collegian, he will bring the tassel of his cap from the right to the left side as he speeds along. Thus does he demonstrate to the world that he is now and forevermore a bachelor of something or other. Whether of art, or of science or of music or whatnot, the color of the tassel and/or the border of his hood will indicate this detail, at least to the initiated. Otherwise, all candidates for honors go through the same run-of-the-mill on this great day. After the last one has received the coveted diploma, the official testimonial of his scholastic attainments, there is almost a thunder of applause. Yes, there is lightning, too. In fact, there were electric flashes all through the long, unbroken line of seniors as they passed strategic points; for the photographers from all the local papers and delegates from the various hometown weeklies, as well as amateur cameramen, kept up a heavy fire with an almost constant explosion of good electric bulbs. This can happen with but the minimum amount of disturbance and without loss of time; but the announcement of the presiding officer or sometimes a reminder on the programs themselves is needed to restrain the enthusiasm and pentup pride in many of the spectators until this long-looked-for moment.

It might seem, too, that the last alumnus to leave the stage receives all of the applause, but attention now is dispersed and, moreover, he can find his place with greater ease, for there is no follower to step on his heels. Soon the vigorous clap of hands ceases and almost breathless silence prevails.

Next comes the speaker of the occasion. It is the ambition of the administrations of Catholic educational institutions to have a bishop, if possible, an archbishop, to grace this—almost the greatest of all academic functions. But as circumstances differ, a layman, one of dignity and
reputation in some of the honored secular professions, perhaps, will give this special address. Whoever he may be, he will address the graduates particularly, but the faculty, too, and, of course, the parents also will have their small share in the discourse. These unusually well-thought-out and possibly oft-adapted speeches are, as a rule, fine examples and expositions of the ideals and good principles which are the concomitants of the cultured and well-educated. Some of these speakers are called upon to make several such addresses during the commencement season--even within a single week. Naturally, there is always something good to say of the many distinguished alumni who have preceded the group of incumbents and, as statistics go, there is no good reason to doubt the accomplishments and the virtues of the present class. Besides there is an orchestra and a glee club or perhaps a concert of college choristers, some such band of singers, to give credence to the high musical standards of the school, even though this selected group may represent less than a tenth of the total.

The stimulating and impressive procession which precedes such a function is almost eclipsed by the one which now brings it to a close. Music, even livelier in character, thus quickens the step in the recessional. And as the recessionists speed along there are brilliant flashes of brightly colored satin and velvet from the great variety of gowns and hoods, particularly those worn by the faculties. All of this adds a lyric note of splendor to the scene. As the music dies away, the great auditorium is cleared. Thus the convocation comes to an end.

Congratulations and felicitations are now in order. Gifts of orchids and roses, perhaps even diamonds and pearls are showered upon the graduates. The members of such a class will then go out to swell the ranks of the alumni of a high school or college or university located somewhere in the United States of America.
All of this may be considered academic and proper. And it is certainly modern (and if the latter, it must be correct) as compared with the commencements of several decades ago. Then the graduates were relatively few in number and so the closing exercises included the conferring of diplomas as merely a part, however prominent a part, of what made up an exhibition. This included the best accomplishments of all the pupils and students from the youngest to the oldest and whether they happened to be graduating or not. Such entertainments gave the parents and other interested relatives and friends their money’s worth by lasting two, three and, even four hours! Exhibitions they were indeed—where the youthful seekers of wisdom and skills gave actual evidence of the results of their long, laborious quest. This was accomplished by orations or through the reading of essays and poems of their own composition; also by singing songs and the skillful rendering of musical numbers on many and various instruments.

But the title of this chapter is "Ferns for Graduation" precisely because it was one of these exhibitions (although it might be truly said that this one was at least on the fringe of modernity in these matters) to which I am going to refer. This particular exhibition was in the last stages of preparation. Here was where ferns figured foremost in my own personal role in it.

At Saint Clara, the exhibition hall, as it was still called, was a large, rambling, old frame building of venerable standing. It was but little used in my day except for an exclusive court in which the younger members of the faculty played basketball (the author was one of the centers of the two full teams at that time). It was also a place to store fruits and vegetables temporarily during the summer, but commencement time was the season in which its function was sacrosanct. Then it was cleaned with meticulous care, not even the least stray cobweb escaping the process. Furnishings
were temporarily surrendered by other parts of the institution, including carpets, rugs, chairs, drapes, and last, but by no means least, several pianos, a harp or two, music racks, jardinieres for the flowers, and later, the last decorative touches.

As my memory serves me now, more than thirty-five years since, I was probably somewhere within the three years of my temporary vows. At any rate, I was continuing my studies and doing some teaching in the academic department which means I was probably teaching chemistry and botany at the high school level. Apparently, too, I had reached the stage in my secular studies which had singled me out as one whose specialty would be the study of plants. The career of a botanist was thus a probable adjunct to my career as a religious in the great Dominican Order.

Just at this moment, ferns, plenty of them, were needed, banks of them if possible, decorations indeed that would also fill up awkward spaces in this ramshackle exhibition building. They would harmonize, too, with the festooning of daisy chains and the large white and gold banner of silk emblazoning the words "Religion and Science," that found their proper places on the stage. These finer and more special articles of decoration were carefully packed away from year to year and brought out only for this annual exhibition. To meet the immediate need for ferns, who, more than I, was better equipped both from the physical and the intellectual points of view? A virgin woods not far away abounded in various kinds of ferns, so Sister Margaret advised. It was not far, as the crow flies, but rather round-about when reached by any kind of horsedrawn vehicle. But the exhibition was still two or three days off. The ferns that would fill our need must be large and lush and at least temporary transplants to hold up against the loss of water by evaporation. In other words, I knew my ferns well enough to know that a man's muscle was needed to dig them up, roots and all, and to place them in waterproof
containers which might later be camouflaged so as to resemble real jardinieres of major size.

Almost immediately plans were laid for the following morning. John Carey, the faithful man-of-all-work, who for many years had served the sisters at St. Clara, was delegated to hitch one of the farm teams to a lumber wagon and drive Sister Margaret and me to these wonderful woods. My memory fails me now as to whether before this experience or probably later that summer I accepted a problem as a piece of research from the Department of Botany at the University of Wisconsin. It was to be done in absentia. The problem was to include the collection, identification, and classification of the fern species in the Sinsinawa area.

As a budding botanist, I recognized that this conducted tour into virgin woods would be greatly to my advantage. I had a test to give, or was it papers to be graded? But I would make the most of this opportunity. And if not that day, certainly in the days ahead and continuously over the lapse of several seasons, I combed those woods, first for ferns and incidentally for wild flowers; then later for fungi--another similar problem which was suggested and accepted as research. Both of these studies would be applied as part fulfillment for the degree of master of science in the Department of Botany of the University of Wisconsin. That day I was content to satisfy the immediate pressing need and to take only a bird’s eye view of other prospects of singular advantage to the botanist.

The trip to the woods was an adventure. First Sister Margaret, enveloped in a large dark blue apron, offered a similar one to me. This I graciously accepted, at least apparently so, tying it securely, although loosely enough to prevent too much wrinkling of the scapular of my white habit. I knew well that if there was anything Sister Margaret could not abide it was prudishness of any kind or anything which savored of snobbery. To refuse taking her apron of whatever
sort in such a situation would be worse than tactless.

Without any assistance we both climbed into the lumber wagon (fortunately it had no sideboards) and then mounted the spring seat which John had provided for our comfort, leaving room enough for him to stand up in front of us like a coachman. We had previously secured numerous large cans of from five to ten-gallon capacities which had been put into the wagon. At last we were on the road. Sinsinawa roads were not too smooth either in those days, but the longest-way-‘round was the shortest for our kind of equipage. Nevertheless, in due time we were there.

Once out of the wagon we were but a few steps from the deep woods. Here grasses and weeds, thick undergrowth, some of it covering dead branches of trees, made progress slow and not a little precarious. Soon the ferns were everywhere, particularly the large clumps of Clayton’s fern, sometimes called the interrupted fern, for reasons which we shall dispense with here. The long green, quite sturdy-looking fronds in graceful whorls were three or sometimes almost four feet in height. What city florist could furnish anything quite so green and fresh and flourishing? And what would be his price if he could?

As John energetically plied his spade, the dark, moist, virgin soil, probably never before disturbed by human skill, emitted a delicious woodsy odor, as some of the underground parts of these unequaled ferns were severed or broken in their uprooting. What precious decorations for the old exhibition hall! Already I began to see a live, green embankment all along the carpeted and appropriately furnished stage! Sister Margaret and I handed John the cans which were to receive each of these precious donations, as he dexterously unearthed them. After all, this was a small bit of cooperation with his most essential strong, muscular service. Soon there were a good many of these loaded cans and more and even lovelier fern specimens were looming up further in, on every side. Here,
too, were hugh bunches of the graceful, lacy, maiden-hair. Never before had I seen such massive clumps and with leaves of such dimensions!

Luckily we had not crippled our project by stinting in the supply of receptacles--lard cans, milk cans, coffee cans galore. But I had a test, or was it only the grading of papers? I could not wait to see these beauties in the only place they should be now--the exhibition hall. We must have several cans of the maidenhair. I knew just the place which its more delicate texture would grace. But I must not stay in the woods past noon. I knew what! I would carry the ferns myself to the wagon and thus give John more time for the digging! This I proposed, a little timidly at first: "John," I said, "if you fill every can left now with these maidenhairs, I'll carry the cans over to the wagon myself because I must be home by noon, at the latest."

Sister Margaret, I knew, would spot the finest specimens and so with these two kinds we would have variety enough. Presently I sighted some of the large, much-branched fronds of the fern commonly called "the brake." But, after all, we couldn't dig up the whole woods!

And what did John say to my proposal? He would have none of it. Being the type of Irish gentleman that I already knew him to be, I knew that some more persuasion would be needed if I won this time.

John would not hear of my trudging through this thick undergrowth of most uncertain footing to do such menial work. His respect for the religious dress was too profound; although at the moment, thanks to Sister Margaret's billowy blue apron, my habit was pretty well disguised. John was unwilling to permit such drudgery if he could prevent it. Thus he continued to dig with greater zeal protesting that he would carry the cans over himself as his part of the day's work.

Secretly I began to count the cans--those that were
already filled and those yet to receive the kind of commencement decorations the sight of which was known to few! It was plain, too, that some of the lovelier clumps were still farther away from the wagon than those already nicely reposing--each in its respective molasses can or whatever it originally held. "We must have these ferns aplenty," I thought, "papers or no papers." But I was standing around almost idle. "John," I said again, this time with marked determination, "you must let me at least help to carry the cans, only to the clearance, if you will, and then you can pick them up there and put them into the wagon. Besides," I pleaded, "I must be back for my school work."

By this time I was really more concerned about the time it would take to unload at the other end and the need of my overseeing the placing of these ferns--the like of which I judged had never yet been seen even in this old, time-honored hall, especially built for exhibitions. I seemed to sense, too, Sister Margaret's sisterly pride in me. "Here," I thought she must be thinking, "is a young sister after my own heart--one who is not afraid to use her muscle, at least in such an emergency." I knew, too, that she would have helped even more than she really did, if she were then as physically able as once she had been. As I took hold of one of the less generously filled cans, I said this time rather coaxingly, "John, please let me at least try!!" As he vigorously plied his right foot to the spade, John shook his head, saying quite reluctantly, if a bit petulantly this time, "Well, if ye must have yer way, ye can try, but ye'll have a hell-of-a-time."

That was enough for me! I started out and really carried a good number of those cans to the edge of the woods. John was most certainly right! But all the time I was thinking how glad the other sisters would be that a botanist was in their midst (or at the lowest estimate, one well on the way) who had the pep and the energy, the knowledge and good taste to provide such natural beauty as would be fully commensurate
with all the other intellectual and artistic aspects of this whole important affair. How insignificant were a few brier scratches and narrow escapes from a sprained ankle or worse, as I trudged with each precious load over ups-and-downs and straggling branches.

At last we were on our homeward way—one of us, at least, really rejoicing. John, it seemed, would try to take the keen edge off my enthusiasm. "I remember," he said, "when I was in Ireland, we had a lot of ferruns there; but we called them weeds and tried to banish them wherever they grew." If I made any reply to this remark, it was probably some such academic response as the definition of a weed—"a plant for which man has not yet found use." At any rate, it was plain that John was not convinced, but I was radiantly happy.

Whatever I did about the school work and whatever it was has been totally erased from my memory. There was no real need of my services in the placing of the ferns after I had made a few suggestions. The chairman of decorations, Sister Lucina, had a reputation for her artistic skill and still greater ingenuity for camouflage. As if by magic she turned the cans into jardinieres which would rival any potter's skill. The effect, as I surveyed it, was indeed superb. Moreover, the same delicious odor of the spring woods pervaded the atmosphere of the exhibition hall, giving it an almost indefinable charm.

It had been a great adventure. I knew, too, that this trip was only the first one of many that would have to follow. Of course, probably for each one of the subsequent commencements during the several years that the college department still remained, there was this special annual wagon trip—always with the same objective. Each time, one of the younger sisters was appointed my companion. As the years passed I knew more and more of the innermost secrets of that patch of virgin forest. I made many a jaunt to that natural botanical laboratory as each season changed or advanced, often
with only a single available student as my collaborator. These trips, of course, were made on foot, crosscutting fields, jumping brooks and climbing fences, over hill and dale. Each time, too, I added some of the best specimens of fungi to my collection which I made along with the ferns. At the end of that academic year I was able to submit a sizable collection of each to the Department of Botany at the State University. Something about the graduate credits for these I shall tell in a later chapter. But my first trip to these woods is still the most vivid in my mind and I shall always have good Sister Margaret and faithful John Carey to thank for so memorable an initiation.

The graduating exercises proper were becoming more the essential function in that particular period of exhibitions. All closing exercises of the various types of American schools had begun to go modern. At Saint Clara there was still enough of entertainment which was not substantially pertinent to the conferring of degrees and other less venerated diplomas to warrant a kind of preview, a dress rehearsal, if you will. And so the Sunday afternoon immediately preceding the great event itself gave opportunity to the countryside to attend a fine program "for free" and also without breaking into any of the very important farm work at that busy season. Moreover, as spacious as the exhibition hall was, there was a limit to the number of unattached chairs of which Saint Clara could boast and not all of these, by any means, could be moved without fear of damage. So, this extra program proved a very satisfactory arrangement. At that time, there were relatively few students at Saint Clara who came from the country round about. At the present time, however, the academy which still remains at Saint Clara draws a fair fraction of its students from the rural population within a considerable radius. All of this, of course, is owing primarily to the fine roads, the bus service, the common use of the automobile and modern conveniences generally. Who knows, too, but that the
reputation for scholarship and the splendid spiritual
development of her graduates which the school has so long
enjoyed is not beholden in some degree to these, shall I say--
dress rehearsals of her exhibition days. These continued
through the years when the ancestors of the present incumbents
were growing up and were privileged to observe at these
exhibitions something of the fine results of such schooling.

Even very soon after my arrival there was, on occasion at
St. Clara, an imported speaker--sometimes a layman--who was an
important feature of this program. This necessitated a
proportionate reduction of the oratorical and musical numbers
offered by the alumnae and students. Of the latter, only the
best had a place--college graduates or near graduates and a
few others who were of superior ability and talent. The old
exhibition hall which at one time--under stress of
incapacity--had served St. Clara even as a chapel, was fast
becoming a white elephant. The latest contingent of the
several additions to the original stone building was also
dangerously near this rambling, old, frame structure--a
veritable fire-trap.

What with the college department moved to the Chicago
area, the academy took on an air of self-importance although
never great enough to fill the exhibition hall! Consequently,
the old building was completely demolished. Not even a good
picture of it seems to remain. It is now only a memory in its
surviving contemporaries.

An example of the transition from the old-time exhibition
to a more modern convocation will help to corroborate some of
the above statements. I recall most vividly the commencement
exercises which closed the first academic year of my simple
profession, that is to say the end of the first academic year
in which I was privileged to wear the black veil. In the eyes
of the youthful academics whom I taught, I was a full-fledged
religious; because, unlike many other religious, including
some congregations of Dominicans, we do not wear a ring to
signify our final status as professed sisters. And so there was nothing very tangible at least to indicate to them that I would have two more years of probation and training before the eventful day when, God willing, I would pronounce my final vows.

I was to go into Chicago immediately after this commencement program as chaperon to some of the departing students, but more especially to remain there to take over the eighth grade in one of the parochial schools until the end of their school year. Then, as now, this hung on until the latter part of June in all of the Chicago schools. This appointment gave me a very considerable sense of importance. I had had the same kind of commission during the previous Christmas holiday recess, our vacation again having begun several days previous to that of the Chicago schools. I knew all about it this time and liked the idea very much. It meant extra work, but of a somewhat different kind. And the sightseeing trips that I knew would be provided more than compensated. The fact that I was regarded more or less as a guest in the convent and that they wanted my services a second time somewhat inflated the ego. I was more than happy over the prospects.

I was just beginning to appreciate a little more the real meaning of religious obedience as it was taught us during the canonical year. Here was an assignment which from all natural and material aspects was most agreeable. But because it came from a religious superior its excellence was in the fact that it carried the merit of obedience. That is to say, with all that this commission had to recommend it from the purely human point of view, it was incomparably superior because of its meritorious character. This is true of every action which is performed in accordance with religious obedience, however trifling and insignificant any particular act may seem in itself. This is precisely because such service is, in the first place, consecrated to God by the Vow of Obedience.
It happened that for this particular closing, the administration at Saint Clara had engaged a speaker of great reputation—not an ecclesiastic this time, but a professional man noted for his oratory. Moreover, he represented my home state. I felt a personal sense of pride in this arrangement and waited expectantly for the outcome. I was ready, too, to make the first train Chicago-bound after a commencement program of reasonable length. There were on this program only a relatively few numbers by the graduates, although the whole student body (both college and academy students) were on parade and most probably sang together for a greeting number.

The great attraction of that day was the speaker of the occasion. My pride in the orator chosen and my plans for the Chicago trip were undisturbed for say about twenty minutes after this peer speaker was introduced. And then I seemed to sense that only the preliminaries of what promised to be an unduly prolonged discourse had been laid down. My conjecture proved only too true. The orator launched forth again and again with ever-increasing vehemence and with a voluminous flow of language always precisely when I had just noted a good stopping place.

I was beginning to be regretful of the way I had heralded this hero to my immediate confreres and ardently wished that the administration had made a different choice. I was evidently in for a good razzing from the other younger sisters. Next time I would be more prudent and conservative. Then I thought of my sudden leaving. I would keep out of their way. They would be busy, too; some of them were chaperons also, in other directions; at least they would be busy with guests, goodbyes to the students, and what not. I would be in Chicago for at least two weeks and by the time of my return most of them would have been detailed to their respective summer assignments. I was assigned here to continue my study of botany. By September, all would be forgotten; at any rate, the keen edge would be worn off. Then
I looked at my watch and horror of horrors!—He might make us miss the train! Thus I began to agonize while the speaker kept up an inexhaustible flow of eloquence which threatened to be almost interminable.

I do not remember but I should have prayed for something to stop him. He must have wanted to give us the full value of his honorarium, whatever that may have been. Personally, at the moment, I could have exacted a return of it with a good rate of interest for every minute that he talked overtime. I had judged from his introduction that his address was a good one, but I lost all interest long before the close because of its length and my preoccupations. At last, like everything else in this world, whether good or bad, the speech finally came to an end. Our lunch was probably a little fore-shortened, but what was really critical, we made our train. And so ended one commencement, more memorable that any of the many I have witnessed since.

And now to return to the ferns. Anyone who may be as much interested in the decorations as in the graduating exercises themselves, I refer to Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, vol. XXI, p. 249 (1924). Here under the title: "Some Ferns of Southwestern Wisconsin," is a short paper which was submitted to the University with the plant specimens themselves. Such fern species as are said to be found in "moist woods" were probably all growing in Rollings Woods at that time. This botanist's paradise is now long extinct, having yielded to the devastating woodman's axe and the stump-grubbing machine. The rich virgin soil has long been covered with farm crops of corn or small grain according to the agronomist's rules of rotation and rehabilitation. These rolling fertile fields of golden grain and green meadows have a beauty all their own; but for one who knows the whole story there are mixed sentiments of present admiration and past recollections. As I look toward the northeastern horizon a feeling of nostalgia seizes me and I think of the many times
I entered that once forest-laden spot on quests which now it could never satisfy. This is one of the changes which nature suffers but which time alone could never bring to pass.
Chapter V: RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

I wonder if there are many of my contemporaries among those who have reached the milestone of three-score-and-ten who can vividly recall their first day of school. There are always some firsts in a lifetime that seem to be indelibly stamped on our memories. Some of these are events of our impressionable youth; others later, and all along the line from the dawn of memory through boyhood and girlhood to adult life.

My first day at school stands out in unusual clarity and apparent nearness. As my present memory serves me, I was just five and one-half years old. My fifth birthday had been on November fifth and my first day of school was early the following April. I was the fifth of a family of what was then six children, my youngest sister, the seventh, not having arrived until nearly two years later. On that far-off day I was to have my first glimpse of the inside of a school building. We lived on a farm at the very outermost point of our own district school. Thus the O'Hanlon children, up to and until a little after that time, attended another district school in the adjoining township. It, too, was quite distant; but by cutting through pastures, fields, and meadows, the distance was greatly reduced. Also, the crossing of fences was much facilitated by means of stiles, thus simplifying another difficulty. For the creek we had to cross there was a foot bridge. The neighbors, too, who lived just across the meadow from our home had a large family of, by that time, almost all grown-up children. They had piloted my two older sisters in their tenderest school years. Now we were five on our way this morning and not in need of any special pilot. My oldest sister, Mary Ellen, then fourteen, and soon to leave the country school for a city high school, was with us. She was almost the same age as the youngest in this neighboring family, a boy who was also planning to leave the country.
school in the near future.

The morning of this first of my school days was a bit exciting for the whole O'Hanlon household. Katie was starting to school! The lunch was packed as usual by the two oldest, both girls, and just then even the two brothers who had been from my earliest recollections my worst teasers, my only real difficulties in life, in fact, were giving evidence of their personal interest. They were ready and waiting patiently for the last touches before our departure. We must not be late and the walking speed would have to be slackened to correspond with the shorter steps of their rather chubby, young sister. Everything was ready but my hair. The older girls had not yet acquired the knack with which my mother made the curls. This was a technique seemingly all her own. A few dips of the comb followed by quick, smooth twists around her deft fingers, and this "naturally curly" hair soon covered my neck and shoulders with a mass of dangling ringlets. My oldest sister had probably previously tied the big butterfly bow which the sashlike strings of my box-plaited sack apron supported. April mornings were often very chilly in Iowa. So, carefully, in order not to wrinkle my spotless apron, I was put into the red woolen jacket which Grandma O'Hanlon had recently bought for me in Canada when on a recent visit to her first home on this side of the Atlantic.

I would carry my copy of McGuffey's primer myself. This, somehow, but just exactly how I do not remember, I had already learned to read from cover to cover. Perhaps it was through the help of the two brothers just older, maybe the oldest sister, maybe the whole four of them. Although my mother had herself been a teacher, I cannot now see how she could have found time to help me. But possibly she did.

At length we were off and in a short time, Johnny, the neighbor boy whose house we passed, joined us. The older O'Hanlons were all a little excited; but the girls, at twelve and fourteen respectively, were more reserved. My brothers,
aged ten and eight, soon gave evidence of real pride in their young sister, such as hitherto she had never known existed. The younger, Eugene Francis, soon announced that Katie could already read. The teacher happened to be a man, a young fellow who made his temporary home with his aunt who lived in the opposite far corner of the district. He was an ambitious student in the State University, who had interrupted his candidacy for the degree (a rare and probably well-earned document in those days) by teaching this country school in order to earn the necessary cash that would carry him through the next period of his college course. Self-help in connection with the universities of that day was not much in vogue. Certainly I knew nothing of these details, but I did know that I was not going to be afraid of this man teacher.

Our neighbor boy, Johnny, was a kind of doubter and so, as he thought perhaps to take the wind out of my brother’s sails, he said: "I bet Katie will be afraid to read before the whole school." My two brothers, this time, to my greater surprise at their sudden championing of my cause, were both on the defensive and almost scoffingly told this big fellow, in no uncertain terms, that he’d soon see that I would not be afraid of anything. In perfect silence and feigned indifference, I deeply appreciated their confidence in me as I also sensed the impolite attitude of this much bigger fellow. None of the O’Hanlon girls said a word. But the least one among them was doing a good deal of thinking. I was determined that I would not let the O’Hanlons down. I’d show this fellow what I could do and prove my brothers’ pride as soon as the opportunity came.

The inside of this district school was, of course, altogether strange to me (I was the teacher there myself about twelve years later). There were some steps or some kind of porch at the entrance. As we got inside, the teacher’s desk could be seen at the opposite end; and at either side--at his right as he faced it--was a row of desks for the boys, and at
his left, a row of desks for the girls. Of course, these
desks were double and graduated in size, the smallest being in
the front.

Soon the teacher walked toward the door. Then he took
hold of a rope which was dangling from what looked like a hole
in the ceiling. Then he pulled at this rope and I knew that
there must be a bell somewhere at the other end of it.
Everybody took his place and settled down at once.

My oldest sister was the largest girl in the school. She
therefore occupied the last seat on the girls' side. I
preferred to sit with her although the desk was much too high
and so my small feet dangled somewhere, probably midway
between the seat and the floor. Nobody seemed to notice that.
Personally, I was much intrigued with everything else—the ink
wells, the pencil boxes of the different children, the large
"cupboards," one on each side, in the back of the room. Their
purpose was to enclose the wraps and lunch baskets. Then
there were the blackboards, the erasers, and a lot of other
things to be explored later perhaps but which must now be
admired only at a distance.

The day was chuck full of interest for me and, as I think
back, I wonder why my short, chubby limbs were not paralyzed
from hanging in midair. I waited anxiously for the time when
the teacher, who seemed very far away, would call me up to
read. Meanwhile I clutched my little yellow paper-covered
primer holding it in readiness for my turn to "recite." This
was part of my "reading readiness." Finally, at long last,
and after fearing that maybe I would after all be denied the
opportunity to give evidence of my brothers' confidence, and
my own prowess, I heard in the teacher's gentle voice: "Come,
Katie." I got down from the seat and started up the aisle
next to the window side and reached the teacher's desk as
promptly as I thought consistent with the occasion. I remember
most distinctly something which time will probably never
efface. While the teacher selected one of the real gems such
as characterize the McGuffey's readers, I took a good look toward the last seat on the right to be sure that Johnny was alert. Then I started to read in a voice as clear and loud and defiant as seemed necessary to prove my accomplishment. The teacher, when I had finished, made some nice little remarks, the exact words of which I do not remember. The important thing was that I knew I had won my triumph over this fellow who needed such a lesson. This teacher afterwards gave me lessons in elocution and not "yellowcution" either, and, under his tutelage at a little more than seven, I won a medal at a "declamatory" contest.

The lunch container the O'Hanlons used was what was commonly called a market basket. It was usually carried jointly by the boys. Its capacity was approximately a half-bushel. But with two rapidly growing boys in the crowd this was no more than adequate for its purpose. When there was pie, a whole one, pan and all, was supplied through the full hands of my good mother. At lunch time the cutting and sharing of this devolved upon the dexterity and good mathematical sense of my oldest sister. She served all of us, giving first very generous portions of everything to the boys. When their hands were filled they, in order not to be "sissies," could take their lunch out-of-doors, or, when the weather was inclement, they could go to the boys' side of the room there to make the proper disposition of their food.

I remained in that school for the greater part of the next two years, that is, until I was about seven and one-half years old. Certainly I could not be in school during much of the winter season, particularly when the weather was very cold as it often was in those Iowa winters. At any rate, it seems I had finished McGuffey's first and second readers during that time.

My next school experience happened to be with the same teacher that I had my first term. For this spring term, he was the teacher of the district school to which we rightly
belonged. He made the daily trips by horse and cart. The latter was a two-wheeled vehicle designed more for convenience than comfort. With our parents’ consent to his request, my second older sister and I were permitted to ride back and forth with him for the last term through which that old school house functioned. A new school house was in the building and on a site more central in the district and therefore closer to our home. This meant goodbye to the McGuffey readers although many of the gems that we memorized then when our minds were plastic have left indelible impressions that time cannot erase. Also there had been copies of the more advanced numbers in the family which means that my McGuffey education was not necessarily confined to the limits of the second reader.

In this new school at the age of eight I found myself well adjusted. I was in the third reader, Swinton’s, a red-covered book, which I liked very much. Soon, however, uniform textbooks were required throughout Johnson County of which Iowa City is the county seat. My Swinton’s third was traded in, like all of the books that we then were using, and at the teacher’s advice, I was supplied with a Harper’s fourth, a rather ponderous book, suitable for our present sixth or seventh graders. This together with the Harper’s fifth completed the reading material which was covered before the completion of the eighth grade. These readers, too, included some of the best of the classics. Actually, much of the contents of the Harper’s fifth reader would give the average collegian of today something to do. At that, little was known or said about "reading readiness," and certainly there was no course in "remedial reading" anywhere! It seemed to be the general conviction then that reading was an essential and fundamental accomplishment. It was the necessary channel as always through which the knowledge of the other subjects, such as geography, arithmetic, history, etc. was conveyed. No doubt these more modern reading texts were
compiled by authors who were more or less influenced by the McGuffey tradition.

Therefore reading was the basis, the real *sine qua non* of our education. It made possible our knowledge of "orthography, etymology, syntax and prosody" through our study of grammar in close conjunction with it. According as we advanced in the art and science of reading we had as companion books of our reader either a "little" or "big" grammar (the "little" book usually being called a language book), a "little" or "big" geography, and of course, a "little" or "big" arithmetic. The spellers usually were graded so as to cover the gamut of our course. By the time a pupil finished Harper’s fourth reader, he was ready for all of the "big" books including the fifth reader, especially if he could grapple with a "big" arithmetic, such as Ray’s or Fish’s or White’s or Molne’s. And by the time you had finished with one of these you really could "figure" and what with the supplementary work in mental arithmetic, square root and cube root, and some of their geometrical applications, you knew some mathematics, and consequently, had some regard for dimensions and proportions wherever the sense of these terms might apply.

We papered walls, carpeted rooms, measured wood by the cord and lumber by the board foot, we bought and sold wheat and oats and potatoes by the peck and the bushel. If necessary, we could have bought ribbon by the meter to be sold by the yard. After we had thoroughly mastered common fractions, decimals and percentage, we were ready for some of their applications: *Profit and Loss, Commission and Brokerage, Customs and Duties, Taxes and Insurance, Stocks and Bonds, Interest* (simple and compound) and *Partial Payments*.

Impractical? From some points of view, yes. But the principles involved have not changed and never will change any more than truth itself will change. Standards of time and
length and weight and volume, for example, remain. For this reason our Country's Capital maintains a Bureau of Standards which is well worth a visit. The abstractions with which our young minds took hold and applied these principles gave us real mental exercise and discipline. Let him who substitutes "activities," more purely physical, say that our mental gymnastics were useless as classroom exercises. In doing so he would only exemplify the Irish Bull, "A man is usually down on what he isn't up on."

One thing is certain. The present steady increase of delinquency among teen-agers could hardly have been predicted then as even a possibility. Human nature has not changed, and children were children and not angels then, as now. But their minds were so fully occupied with study and its immediate applications in the class room or in one of these one-room country schools that there was little time for real mischief or any of the dangerous associations that might subsequently lead to crime.

The Catholic children, of course, had their Baltimore catechism to memorize--the thirty-seven chapters from cover to cover. The edition we used included a vocabulary of the more difficult words with their definitions. Our work in reading was a great help. These lessons were taught in the home, of course. Everyone who was able to take a turn gave out the questions. We were not long either in detecting discrepancies in the way we interpreted certain words of the prayers we learned at our mother's knee. I recall when I used to say, "Hello Ed be thy name." My young mind did see something strange in this over-familiar salutation to an otherwise unknown celestial personage. But I still kept on saying it until I was able to read the Our Father myself. It was then I had a real surprise!

There were many outlets for pent-up physical energy in the various school yard sports. Both boys and girls, maybe not alike but at least together, played blackman, blind man's
buff, prisoners' base, baseball, creep-away, antie-over, and even shinney, not to mention skating and coasting, the building of snowmen and snow forts during the then real winter months.

It was considered a special privilege, too, if some two of us were allowed to fetch the drinking water from the school house pump which often had to be "primed" before it would respond to any number of vigorous strokes with four hands applied to the handle. That sometimes entailed a trip to the nearest farm well--a further diversion. The older boys, too, took turns in stoking the fire in the cold days and these were numerous and quite severe in the Iowa winters of the 90's. If wood was the fuel, a supply of long cord wood sticks was piled in a big box for the purpose; if coal was used, the hod was not allowed to be left empty. We had no modern conveniences and little of the equipment that is now considered essential. Besides our textbooks, we had a few maps and charts, some of our own making, or those made by the teacher, or "reserves" on the not too spacious blackboards. The library equipment was most meager, if at all, but there was always a good dictionary which was well patronized.

Besides the outdoor games and sports, we had other, shall I say, extra-curricular activities. Among these were: composition-writing, letter-writing, and "speaking." Periodically, Friday afternoon, or at least a part of it, was devoted to some one of the above or similar exercises. When "speaking" time came, everyone had to be prepared to "speak a piece." Usually this was a selection taken from a "speaker"--probably a book, only paperbound. But such a book included some of the best in poetry and other literary gems. The "pieces" had to be memorized. It was considered no less than a disgrace to get up on the floor when your turn came and forget your "piece." I do not remember ever suffering such an embarrassment myself. I memorized my selections with great care. Best of all, whatever we really memorized in our early
impressionable years has for the most part "stuck." Even now, in the autumn of our lives, we do not have to "remember" them. We can just say them, almost completely with only the spinal cord.

In the early springtime there was an Arbor Day Program. I remember quite distinctly the first one in which I participated. Because I was the youngest pupil in the school, I was given the honor of contributing the first shovelful of earth to the tree that was being rather ritualistically planted on the school ground. Almost always, one Friday afternoon in May was devoted to a hunt for wild flowers. I am afraid that the rules for wild flower conservation were greatly ignored or more probably did not even exist at that time. Nevertheless, on these "wild" trips I learned the common names for a lot of them. Such experiences, as well as many of those one living on a farm just could not miss, were more than basic to a later botanical career. Moreover, with two older brothers who got around, we found the best haunts in the summer for all kinds of wild berries, plums and wild crabapples.

My first contact with the science and art of fruit grafting was along a creek near our farm. The former owner of the property, then sometime deceased, had grafted apple scions to the wild crabapple stocks. The property later came into the hands of the O'Hanlons and we went each season, before as well as after, at the appropriate time in the late mid-summer to make our harvest of luscious eating apples.

In the autumn, there were nutting parties. Quantities of hazelnuts, hickory nuts, walnuts, butternuts, and even chestnuts in a planted grove were garnered in. At the same time we learned a lot about nature, just naturally.

Spelling schools were one of the evening entertainments. In these the adults of the neighborhood took part with the school children. I was no near genius but I remember distinctly the night when, certainly not more that nine years
old, I spelled the whole school down, adult men and women included. I stood alone after spelling the word *seine*, a fishing net, as the pronouncer dictated it. There was a tremendous clapping of hands and cheering generally. But young as I was, I realized that they were giving me too much applause. Perhaps I thought I deserved some acclaim for keeping my feet as long as I did, but when the last word came I knew that I spelled it correctly only because I noted the mistakes of the others who had missed it. I knew that if that word had struck me first I would most probably have missed it also. I simply took my aim in this game of trial and error at another possible way that had not yet been tried and hit the bull’s eye. I said nothing but really took small satisfaction in the great to-do that was made over me. Children are sometimes much wiser than some of us oldsters give them credit for being.

Nevertheless we really did learn to read and write in those days, which of course, must include spelling--words had to be properly syllabicated whether written or vocally spelled; and when there was time for a written test, the words had also to be properly accented. We learned to distinguish the root word from its prefixes and suffixes and the meaning of these latter were not ignored. In connection with the reading lesson, the "new words" had to be defined, too. Even our small language books taught us to distinguish rules for the correct formation of plurals, to distinguish parts of speech, particularly in those words that sounded alike but were of different spelling and meaning; thus such words as to, two, too, meant more that a whistle to us. When we were promoted to the "big" grammar as we called it, we were in for a lot of diagramming and analysis of sentences as well as the parsing of the words in their contents. This had to be done, and we did it!

At that time in our young lives we knew almost nothing about academic degrees; but we knew quite a lot about degrees
of latitude and longitude, degrees of time and of temperature. This we learned both from our geographies and our arithmetics. Human physiology, too, was included in our course. There was even a "little" physiology and a "big" physiology, the former probably under a title something like "Lessons in Hygiene." True it was, that the authors of these books in those days did put over-emphasis on the use of "narcotics" to the neglect of some of the really important topics in the field of health education. But, by the same token, at that time much of such knowledge was still in the mind of God alone.

Some very exaggerated and even ridiculous devices were conjured up to make children believe that any kind of beverage which contained ever so small an amount of one of the products of yeast fermentation was intrinsically evil. On the other hand, drinking, even smoking, among boys, not to say anything about girls, whether young or old, were only very rarely a problem because these, as a rule, just did not exist. Your father smoked his cigars, or when he wanted to be more economical or abstemious, he smoked a pipe. Perhaps some grandmothers also privately enjoyed a pipe. This was endured or tolerated in the home. It was not something to be imitated, and even young growing boys knew that. My brothers never smoked as boys and very little afterwards. One of them was a teetotaler all his lifetime of seventy-four years. The other, though less radical, is in practice about the same.

I completed the course required for the eighth grade graduate somewhere between my twelfth and thirteenth birthdays and was one of the first to acquire this label from the rural schools of Johnson County, Iowa. At that time there were no eighth grade graduating exercises--no "exhibition" of any kind. We got our diplomas by having them mailed to us from the county superintendent's office or by calling there in person for them in case one happened to live near enough to the county seat, as was my own privilege. This was, of course, after passing examinations in all of the "common
branches." The questions were sent out by the superintendent and the papers were sent in by the teachers for his inspection. In the initial examination for this honor the questions were of those given to applicants for the teacher's certificate--a document which entitled one to teach in the rural schools of a given county, or even in the town schools, if the holder could find an opening. I remember well that certain questions and topics for discussion which popped up here and there in the printed lists were obviously of a pedagogical nature. These we were instructed were to be ignored by us. If we were in doubt as to what might not apply to us, we might consult the teacher in charge. This use of the teacher's examination questions was, of course, a matter of expediency and soon--perhaps the second year, they had printed lists of special questions for the candidates for the eighth grade diploma. Soon, too, they introduced the graduation exercises in the "Opera House" at Iowa City. This gave the eighth grade graduates, some of them at that time, their first glimpse of the county seat, indeed the "Athens of Iowa" and a really beautiful little city on the banks of the Iowa River.

To make a long story short, to graduate from a district school in those days, one was supposed to know what the teacher taught. Many did. I remember, years afterward, of hearing a professor of English--and a good one, too--say to me with not a little irritation in her voice and mien: "I have to teach these college students some of the things that I had to know before I could get out of the country school." I fully appreciated her predicament and sympathized with her. I was from Iowa, she from Kansas; we were both just then in Illinois. Only the times had changed!
For a veteran in the field of education, this chapter is a challenge indeed. The real number of personalities involved must be shrunken almost to extinction in order to include only a few of the exceptional and most memorable examples. Among the many teachers whom I can readily recall, only those whose influence commands an ever-abiding place can be mentioned here.

Certainly, the greatest influence for character formation is in the home. No other teacher can compete with good parents, or those who may replace them in our lives. Those of us who were so blessed as to have a normal home life had come a long way even before we were introduced to formal school experience. No school, however, no novitiate, no outside-the-home influence whatsoever can equal or greatly change the principles and practices which are acquired so naturally from a good mother. These are forever with us and not distance, not death, nor long duration can erase from our memory all that we learned, much less, too, by precept than by example.

In almost every critical situation one finds herself asking: "What would my mother say? What would she have me do?" Thus my good mother's judgments, teaching and example have permeated my whole life. Anything not in accord with what I know would meet her standard of conduct is, consequently, out of harmony with a deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong. For example, some of women's modern dress and their lack of correct decorum often offend my sense of propriety; and I cannot accept these modern licenses even though at times I am helpless in avoiding or preventing them. This attitude does not stem from any sentimental source but rather from a deep ethical conviction borne of early training. In other words, the present Holy Father would not be obliged to plead for modesty of attire if all women were influenced by right standards in these important matters.
And so my deepest personal regrets are associated with their causes--most often deviations from my mother’s teaching and standards of conduct.

In a more formal way, perhaps, I learned much from my paternal grandmother. A few instances stand out clearly. When I was probably not more than eight years old, I stayed after Mass one Sunday to spend my first week with Grandma at her home in Iowa City. It was midsummer, and an apple tree laden with ripening fruit was very close to the large brick house in which she lived during the summer--alone except for one unmarried son, my uncle, Charles.

I do not remember of asking her any question that might have led up to what may well be called my first formal lesson in biology. She explained to me why some apples have "worms" in them. She did this in such clear, simple language that I really had to learn it, and could never forget the story of the life cycle of the codling moth. Years after when I met this problem in biology, it was just another one that had been already solved for me through outside-school experience, including the kind that every child who is fortunate enough to be brought up away from the city pavement learns almost without effort.

This same grandmother, when she was well over eighty years old, lived entirely alone during the summers, although in a much smaller house than formerly. I spent parts of these vacations with her. During one of the summers when I studied at the university, I followed a course in Shakespeare. We were doing intensive work on one tragedy, Othello; one comedy, Midsummer Night’s Dream; and perhaps a satire. The Merchant of Venice seems to step into the picture now, at least some forty-five years later.

Among my books that I set on the table as I came from school was a copy of Othello, a classic of the series. When Grandma saw it, she picked it up and said, "Oh, yes, Othello; your Grandpa and I saw that play in Buffalo just fifty years
ago." Then she went on to tell me about the presentation of it that she had witnessed so long before. She began with the opening scene, something which had evidently been prefaced to the body of the play itself by way of captivating dramatic interest. She said that Desdemona, at the rise of the curtain, was seated on a balcony playing on a zither. This type of ancient musical instrument she then described to me as one somewhat similar to the more modern mandolin. She went on from there and her rendition of the drama meant more to me in my subsequent study of it than almost any other source to which I had access at the time. I marvelled, of course, at her memory, although I realized that she most probably had read a good deal of Shakespeare in the intervening time. She was not a college graduate--far from it--but she knew how to read and loved to read good literature.

Grandma O'Hanlon was a native of Ireland who migrated to Canada with her family when she was only nine years old. Her school experiences began in Tipperary and were finished in Peterboro, Canada. Somewhere she had gotten the rudiments for a liberal education acquired chiefly through reading and other informal intellectual experiences. Her marriage to my grandfather, who was a native of Canada, brought her to the States. Here my father was born in Rochester, New York, where my grandfather was a contractor and bridge builder. For this reason the family later migrated to Iowa City. Here my mother, born of Irish parents in Concord, New Hampshire, had lived since her early childhood. In the providence of events, here my parents were married in the parish which was founded by our revered Father Mazzuchelli.

I was already twelve years of age before I received my First Holy Communion. Remember, dear readers, that this was the pre-Pope Pius X period. We children from the public schools--this meant one-room country schools--for most of us--spent the days during a six-week period (the lenten season to be exact) just studying the Baltimore Catechism--the girls at
St. Agatha Seminary and the boys at St. Patrick’s parish school for boys. We recited it to each other, and, periodically, to some one of the good B.V.M. Sisters, who found time to hear us.

In the afternoons, about three o’clock, as I remember, we all filed out and, taking the back streets, all went down, processionally, to the boys’ school—just across from the parish house. Here we had instructions from the parish priest, Reverend John O’Farrell. There were probably forty-eight to fifty in the group—boys and girls ranging from a minimum of ten years to a maximum of about sixteen. Father O’Farrell had been educated and ordained in Ireland, and I believe he taught in a seminary there before he came to our shores. He was a real teacher. His method was something like this. First, he got you up on your feet, and then he asked you a question from the book. If you could answer it correctly, you were then in for a lot of questions of his making—all around the text. This, you realized, was a test of your reasoning powers, as applied to what you had recited from memory. He presented hypothetical cases in moral theology which you were expected to resolve while on your feet. Some of these are today as vivid as ever, particularly if they were the cases he presented to me individually.

The application of right principles in specific problems—all of which were quite probable in our young lives—were splendid exercises of the judgment—if one happened to have this species of faculty. Father O’Farrell was possessed of a charming personality and a good sense of humor; he was patient, particularly with all who had memorized the answers from the book. He was tolerant with them, even if they could not reason out the answers to his test questions which followed. To those who did not memorize the lessons well, he still was patient, but handled them, in such a way that, if they had at all what it takes, they naturally buckled down.

Father O’Farrell’s method of teaching was new to me at
the time, and, as a matter of fact, even after long years, with a few outstanding exceptions, I have since experienced all too little of this kind of teaching.

Nevertheless, according to authentic biographers, Bishop James Healy of Portland, Maine, also insisted upon a similar method. He received his training in theology in Canada and in Paris. Our revered Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, who was Italian trained, was also an excellent teacher who used this method.

Soon after I left the country school as a teenager, I had one of the best of my classroom teachers during my early youth. Incidentally, during this period, too, we had weekly instructions in Christian doctrine, again from Father O'Farrell. Saint Agatha Seminary was a girls' private school, long since defunct. Sister Mary Hortense, B.V.M., the principal teacher, might well have been called a one-room teacher because she taught nearly all of the "solid subjects" to about sixteen of us at various levels of the secondary school program. There were no credits. We just studied --and learned, consequently. This kind of program, however, did not provide one with a "complimentary" ticket for entrance to a college or university; but, what was more to the point, it did prepare one to do the kind of thing that was expected in such institutions, at least during that period. And, when this could be done, academic credits seemed to lose the significance which has accrued to them in recent years.

Sister Mary Hortense, B.V.M. was the first woman religious to take a degree from the University of Iowa. As I remember, I would call her a liberally educated woman. Her outstanding quality as a teacher was in the know-how to get work out of her students--the kind that fitted them for future study and the independent solution of life's problems. In handling us, she wore no gloves. You knew what she thought of you and your work, if you could understand good clear English. Your classmates knew, too, whether you liked it or not.
As I mentioned in the first chapter of this book, Sister Mary Hortense was the first person to suggest the religious life for me. Evidently, she knew much more about me then than I did myself. This power of discernment was just another of the many gifts of her great soul. RIP

The old saying—that experience keeps a dear school—may be quite true, but sometimes experience introduces problems the solutions of which are not found elsewhere. This was demonstrated to me particularly by an incident in a district school in which I was the teacher. It was a bright spring morning when a pair of twins joined the ranks of my little one-room flock. These were Doris and Iris, aged five. They were as like as two peas in a pod and, educationally, they were starting from scratch. Of course, they were identical twins—about which distinction in multiple births I knew absolutely nothing at the time. In fact, such information was not available in the ordinary scientific literature of that day. Mendelian heredity and some of the principles of embryology did not become practical until some time after the turn of the century. Thus genetics was just in its swaddling clothes at the time to which I refer. Nevertheless, anyone could see that these two little girls were unusually alike.

It was my duty to teach these twins to read and to write and, among other things, to acquire some sense of numbers. I proceeded to start them and very soon learned that one was definitely left-handed.

But as soon as my back was turned, she was at it again. Try as I would, I could not keep the pencil in that child’s right hand. I was almost desperate. Finally, I just sat at my desk and watched her for a few moments. For some reason she dropped her pencil and it rolled under her desk on the floor. She had to get down, practically on all fours, to pick it up. In spite of her position which would more than ordinarily favor the use of the right hand, with her left hand she reached for and picked up the pencil, apparently with
natural ease. That set me to thinking. As I said before, I
knew nothing about identical twins; and certainly much less
did I know that one of each such pair normally may be expected
to be left-handed.

Without this now probably universally accepted scientific
testory, I seemed to realize that for this child, twin or no
twin, her left hand did naturally what for most other people,
the right hand would be the regular one. I resolved to leave
her in peace thereafter, and with the natural freedom of which
I had tried so hard to rob her, Iris learned to write with her
left hand!

I do not know the parents' reaction. Perhaps they
accepted her lefthandedness more or less as I did. Neither do
I know what the next teacher did the following year to try to
upset this child's natural bent. All I do know is, that in
this experience, I learned a very important lesson myself—a
lesson, too, which at that time it seemed was one which had to
be learned by experience and through the application of
"common sense" principles.

It seems to be common knowledge nowadays that frequently
the ordinary classroom teacher, whether at the elementary or
secondary level, is sometimes not permitted to fail a pupil
even though he has not made the grade. Is it any wonder that
teachers, particularly those of superior character and
judgment, are dropping out of the ranks and taking up other
employment! Often the latter is less challenging to their
type of minds and training, and probably less satisfying to
their individual tastes. But no really good teacher could be
willing to forfeit her professional judgment, much less her
personal integrity, for the sake of holding a position,
however agreeable otherwise. This situation only reminds me
of a somewhat difficult experience I had as a teacher in
preparing report cards. It involved a rather difficult
problem, largely because it was a case of meeting authority
and at the same time maintaining one's own sense of justice
and integrity; but it did teach me something about the utter futility of judging abilities on the basis of grades alone.

This happened when I transferred from the eighth grade of the Coon Rapids public schools to Des Moines, Iowa. A brand new grade school building, just completed, was opening on April 11th on Des Moines' East Side. It was to accommodate the overflow from several surrounding schools. Temporarily, I was assigned to one of the lower rooms in this beautiful new building. Although I was a qualified eighth grade teacher I would have to wait until the beginning of the next school year for that appointment. I forget exactly, but I know that on that April morning I had two grades--most probably third and fourth. At any rate, I remember the pupils were doing "guzinta" which means in children's language, division, in arithmetic. I really do not know now offhand what grade begins with the study of division, but I do know that we had both short and long "guzinta" in that room.

I had pupils from several schools, probably representing a still greater number of teachers, since I had two grades. As time progressed, I was naturally attracted to some of the brighter children and noted their superiority. These came from a class which had been taught by a certain Miss King. Among the children, there were some who were quite ordinary; but I do not recall any who were really poor or of the near-failing kind.

Time came for me to give my grades to each child of the group. With their report cards from the various schools and teachers and my own grade book before me, as well as my recent experiences with these children uppermost in my mind, I recognized a difficult problem to be solved. I had certainly realized previously that there is often a very wide difference in teachers in the matter of grading. But here I found a demonstration of real clashes between objectivity and subjectivity.

Miss King's pupils, for example, who were the best in the
room, had only good grades from her—no excellent marks. There were others, who could not compete with Miss King’s pupils, who had excellent grades. Certainly, I would have to mark all of them just as I had found them—probably after four weeks or so of teaching and testing. It had already become abundantly clear to me that Miss King was a splendid teacher, but not a "high marker," as good teachers usually are not. Doubtless, too, she had other children in her class who exceeded those she sent to me and, of course, the excellent grades went to them. My problem at that precise moment was how to be just without giving some of the pupils radically different grades from those already registered on their respective report cards. It was probably the middle of May or later when I had to place my grades on report cards that were already almost filled. These gave abundant evidence of various judgments as expressed by the several other teachers’ grades—now all placed against my own single judgment.

I had to respect my experience with these children and my own judgment, first of all. Therefore I would have to give excellent grades to Miss King’s pupils—alongside the merely good ones she had given them consistently throughout the year. On the other hand, and what disturbed me more, I would have to give considerably lower grades to some of the other children whose entire reports otherwise ran high. Nevertheless, each of these things I did—no matter what their fond papas and mamas would think of it.

Now enter Miss________. We’ll call her "Harriette Howard" here. She was the big principal come to examine the reports before they were given out. I handed her the cards. Almost immediately she struck high "C"; and, holding the report of one of Miss King’s pupils in her hand she said quite witheringly: "You can’t raise a child’s grade like that."

Whether I expected this reaction or not, my own deliberation on the problem and the only reasonable solution of it prepared me for this head-on. So, gently, but with firm
conviction of my own justification in the matter, with somewhat ostensible patience, too, I explained the situation to her, much as I have stated it here. The mercury consistently fell several degrees, while I disclosed these unusual circumstances. "Harriette" was by nature high and mighty but, to her credit, I must say that she was also reasonable and just. The reports, therefore, were distributed just as I had made them.

Notwithstanding all these facts, I transferred to the Francis E. Willard School the next year. Here I did departmental work in the grammar grades during my last and only full year in the public schools of Des Moines, Iowa.

When I entered the St. Clara Novitiate, Sister Mary George Adamson was director of studies in the college and also in the novitiate. I remember the time I visited St. Clara on my prospecting tour, that she then asked me something about my academic status. It was she, I believe, who recommended that I be put into home economics. As the novitiate year progressed she asked to see my examination papers that had accumulated during the course. She read them and handed them back to me with a comment which was typical of her humility and magnanimity. She said, "I read them all and I learned a great deal." No doubt that was true. She was a classicist and linguist and could well afford to admit ignorance of a lot of other things. Sister George had evidently at least two motives in reading those papers. One, I think, was to check on the teacher who had been employed, probably as much as to find out what kind of work I was doing.

Sister Mary George continued to direct my studies at Saint Clara College until I entered candidacy for the master's degree in the University of Wisconsin. Subsequently, I was left more or less on my own, academically speaking, as we shall see in the next chapter. Sister Mary George was a great school woman; I will not say educator, simply because I do not believe there is such a one unless it be the person himself
who is being educated. Too much depends upon the efforts of
the one to be educated to apply this word to any outsider. So
much for semantics! Sister Mary George was not just an
educationist, either; she was a leader and a director. Above
all, she was a scholar and always an eager student herself.
She was a charming person, one who could stoop or reach to any
level in order to fraternize with or be of assistance to
anyone in need.

Her sense of humor was unusual and it seemed that she
always enjoyed a good joke and no less either if it happened
to be at her own expense. She had a great fund of stories
always on tap to fit any occasion. I recall one of her
stories which I heard her tell, probably several times. She
said that one time she was preparing for the sacrament of
pentence where there was a choice between two confessors. One
of them she knew to be a great psychologist, the other one
being a rather elderly, good, Irish priest who would have laid
no claim to any special academic honors. Sister said that
there was quite a long line of penitents who evidently had the
same idea that she had, that is to say, they preferred to
receive the sacrament from this eminent psychologist.

Finally, tired of waiting too near the end of a line that
was only very slowly diminishing, she decided to forego this
psychological ambition. She went over to the shorter line
and, finally, into the confessional of the good old priest who
had no special academic attainments, so far as she knew. She
made it evident in the story that she had confessed some idle
gossip which she thus considered at least unkind. The good
old confessor, without any extra comments, assigned her a
penance and gave her absolution. Then, she said that as she
was rising from her knees to leave the confessional, he
dismissed her with the usual final words: "Go in peace and
God bless you," adding in a distinct, good Irish accent, "and
hold on to your tongue."

She used to tell this story with much merriment,
particularly because of the final admonition which she said she regarded as the best lesson in psychology she had ever received.

Another of Sister Mary George’s personal experiences which I remember hearing her relate with much glee occurred soon after her appointment as prioress of Saint Clara Convent. At the time, a very elderly sister had been taken into the infirmary, not because of any physical ailment but rather because of evidences of the onset of senility. Another sister had been assigned as guardian to her, but not being a young person herself, this sister found it hardly possible to compete with her charge, we shall call her "Sr. Senilita" here. For example, when the good, old sister was taken out for a walk in the fresh air and sunshine, she sometimes seemed to acquire a second agility and would perk up on her speed so much that her guardian was run ragged trying to keep up with her.

At length these circumstances got to the new prioress, and so she, Sister George, thought she had better take a hand. She said that she made a special trip to the infirmary in order to have a talk with "Sister Senilita." With as much gentleness as would correspond with firmness she admonished this good old sister never to leave the infirmary without her sister companion and never to leave her when they went for their outdoor recreation.

Sister George said that it was quite evident that her remarks were not making any noticeable impression on the good, old sister, so she thought it might be well to inform her that it was authority that was speaking, Then she said: "You know, Sister, that I am in Mother Reginald’s place now" (Mother Reginald was Sr. George’s immediate predecessor in the office of prioress). To this tactic, "Sister Senilita" reacted with a half-amused facial expression as she responded: "Nothing else would do you."

And so it was always. Whenever Sister George experienced
any amusing or humorous situation, she not only thoroughly enjoyed it herself but was never satisfied until she had shared it with others. Sister Mary George was my prioress for three years--two of which were during the time of my professed novitiate. As a superior, she had a way of making you think that you really naturally would like to do whatever she asked of you. Sometimes you knew that this wasn’t really so. But if you were a little inclined to be irked about it, it was simply because you could not dislike her if you really tried; although sometimes you could not really see anything in her tactics which could make you accept and like them. In other words, you seemed helpless to do anything but just the right thing in her hands. Of course, as one grows a bit in religious life, the personality of the superior becomes less and less an influence on one’s life. The habit of obedience should be formed early and I mean the only really intelligent kind, that is to say, "obedience is to God and not to man." I probably needed a prop, such as dear Sister George was during my early years in the practice of religious obedience.

The year immediately preceding her term as prioress of Saint Clara, Sister George spent in Europe. She came back an enthusiast of foreign study and diffused her great interest in European culture and the establishment of a European branch in Switzerland throughout the congregation. It all looked very far away and out of reach for me at that time. But later I was to be one of those who would profit directly through the efforts of Sister George. That came long after her passing when I was given a sabbatical leave in 1934-35. Then I came to realize the deep debt of gratitude that was mine, not only to my immediate superiors, but also to Sr. George who had been the chief pioneer in pursuing this splendid project.

At the end of three years as prioress of Saint Clara, Sister George was delegated to Fribourg, Switzerland, to open Villa des Fougeres; and, subsequently, she died there after her objective was completely accomplished. A little more will
be said of this valiant woman in a later chapter.

Sister Imelda Therese, formerly Miss Susie Swift, prior to her Catholic baptism, in 1897, was Brigadier Swift in the Salvation Army. She had been graduated from Vassar College and was, indeed, a person of rare intellectual gifts and executive ability. She was considered one of the most brilliant writers on the staff of the War Cry. Susie Swift entered the Catholic Church in 1897, having been baptized by Father Alexander Doyle, C.S.P. Not long after, Miss Swift entered the Dominican Order and subsequently, had a wide and varied experience in Havana, Cuba, Newport, Rhode Island, and in Albany, New York. Later she transferred to Saint Clara. This gave me the privilege of knowing her quite intimately because, as a newcomer, and for reasons of our particular duties, she and I were closely associated and became very dear friends. Although a woman of unique experiences in study, almost world travel, authorship and in religious life, she never once made me feel her true superiority. She always seemed willing and apparently glad to consort with one such as myself—youthful, by comparison, and only a neophyte in religion. Her superior education seems to rival any I have encountered since, in spite of my relatively wide experience and contacts with the intellectually elite. Of course, as human standards go, only a truly great person, such as she was, can afford to be as simple in manner as Sister Imelda Theresa. The less great must persuade others of their importance by a designed aloofness and assumed dignity. This usually turns the trick with the generality. Only the keen observer is aware of this strategy.

Sister Imelda Theresa was one who had suffered much because of the many perplexing circumstances in her life, and, more especially, because of her delicate, sensitive nature, which was easily disturbed by whatever she encountered that was petty, false, or ignoble.

Also an acute eye malady, near-sightedness, which often
made her fail to recognize a nod or a smile from a passer-by, could be misunderstood at times. I am happy to say that as one of her confidants, I seemed to recognize her great soul at least as well as my own was capable of appreciating it.

After her sudden death (or what it seemed to be to us), I recalled some of the apparently casual remarks she made to me which indicate a premonition of her untimely passing (she was only 52). For example, the sister’s funeral which immediately preceded that of Sister Imelda Theresa’s occurred on an early April day. I had taken an umbrella with me to the cemetery because the weather was threatening. By the time we reached the open grave there was a flurry of snow. Immediately, it was up to me, I felt, to hand over my umbrella which I trusted would be held over the chaplain as he read the last prayers beside the grave.

Well, the good man whom I expected to use the umbrella to protect the priest and his book, evidently thought my arm was tired and, unused to such feats of gallantry, simply held the umbrella over himself instead. This struck me as extremely funny, in spite of the fact that the joke was definitely on me. I thought: "Here I took the precaution to bring my umbrella for a grave digger to hold over himself!" And so, when it was all over, I told Sister Imelda Theresa the joke.

I remember she laughed merrily and said, "Sister Ellen, I believe you will find something funny to laugh about at my funeral and I hope you will." Less than two weeks later, however, the next funeral was the most solemn one for me that I had yet attended at St. Clara.

In another conversation I recall her saying: "All that I hope for in this world is a little corner in that cemetery out there."

Sister Imelda Theresa had no fears and no morbid thoughts about death. She had lived her life conscientiously and dying for her was simply going home to God. Her death came as a shock to the rest of us. It was for her the end of a period
of preparation for heaven.

In my long and varied experiences in teaching, I naturally encountered some of the extremes in intellectual endowments. Some of the near geniuses stand out in my memory and are still giving evidence of their God-given talents. More recent years have brought a decline in proper preparation for college programs. This became more and more evident. The willingness, too, to make real sacrifices for high academic achievement also waned notably. One effect of these conditions was the almost automatic relaxation of the ambitious teacher.

My best college students probably went through my hands before 1935. I remember a question asked me some time after this by one of my religious superiors. She wanted to know whether I had any "outstanding students" among my classes at that particular time. I do not know how I answered her exactly; but in repeating the incident to one of my colleagues, I remember saying that the answer which came to my mind was: "Yes, if I stood them all outside, they would all be "outstanding."

Here I am going to make only one notable exception among several others of my more recent students. This girl, Winifred Kuhn, had been deprived of bodily sight since her babyhood. She entered my botany class as a college freshman and later followed a more advanced course. It seemed certain that she acquired a much better knowledge of the subject matter than any of her classmates. This was, of course, because she made better and fuller use of her strictly human faculties, that is to say, the intellect and the will.

Winifred, or Winnie, as we generally called her, had a large seeing-eye dog that made all the botany trips with the class. He was very attentive to one particular and that was that I never got too close to Winnie. Once when I was explaining something I got between him and Winnie. I never did this again; because "Barry" (that was his name) with his
strong, tall body most vigorously pushed me away.

It struck me also most forcibly during one of the out-of-door laboratory periods that we had there some real extremes in the use of faculties. And, probably because some of the other students showed no particular interest in what I was trying to demonstrate, it brought forth a very frank evaluation of the whole class, Barry and all. And so I said: "Here it is. Barry sees everything, but really sees nothing; Winnie sees nothing, but really sees everything; and the rest of you? Well, you are all just somewhere in between."

My experience in teaching this girl deprived of bodily sight demonstrated for me something of the superiority of the distinctly human faculties—their great difference in kind as compared with our five senses and the other faculties, memory and imagination, that we share with lower creatures, such as the dog; and also how the higher human faculties can compensate for the complete absence of sense faculty. Probably that was what afterwards made me caution students against the neglect of the full use of their higher human faculties—the intellect and the will. This, I insisted, happens to some persons who depend almost entirely on the five senses, the memory and the imagination—all faculties we share with the animals. I even went so far as to point out to them that the person who is guilty of such neglect of the faculties which distinguish him as a human being is attempting to live a "dog's life" in very truth.

Miss Kuhn graduated with honors from Rosary College in 1947; and later took a master's degree in social work at Loyola University. After that she worked for four years at the Hadley School for the Blind. She was instructor in English and Latin, and taught Braille, reading, writing and shorthand. She also helped to publicize the work of the school, and, by giving several hundred lectures, she raised funds for it.

It was in May, 1951 that Winnie sponsored a discussion
meeting in the interest of minority groups in Chicago. I received at the time a type-written letter from Winnie (she uses the typewriter almost like a professional) asking me to be one of the panelists. I was, of course, very happy to cooperate in such a worthy project. As chairman of the program, Winnie had asked Mr. John Meany, instructor at Mundelein College and Shiel School of Social Studies, to introduce the speakers. These included Mr. Charles Stone, first Negro to be placed in an administrative position by Carson, Pirie, Scott and Co., who presented some of his very interesting experiences as an official employer; and Miss Sylvia Fleis of Northwestern University who pointed out some of the evils of race segregation. My own topic of discussion was housing problems of the Negro. Winnie planned and conducted that meeting with all of the skill, the tact, and the poise of the most experienced of sighted persons. Long before that time, too, she had parted company with Barry and, so far as I know, has learned since to travel everywhere without any such help.

Miss Kuhn has lived a perfectly normal life in every way and in conversation with her, one simply forgets that she does not see material things. For the last several years she has lived in San Francisco. She went there, traveling alone (by air) to take a position in Oakland. She lived in an apartment, cooked her own meals, and traveled daily across the bay bridge. Since then, Miss Kuhn is happily married and is the mother of a child. I am personally grateful for the experience afforded me in having Winnie Kuhn as a student.

It seems that, as a general rule, any person whose ideas are out of accord with those of the generality, is considered a radical, sometimes even an eccentric. Particularly is this true if such a one advocates a regime or a system different from a generally established line of procedure. The person who detects serious defects and predicts even disastrous results of such a generally accepted regime is counted as
queer, odd, an innovator, or whatever you like. At any rate, he is not taken seriously by the rank and file.

When one examines the pages of history, it is quite evident that many of the great contributors to modern science, such as Harvey, Pasteur, Mendel, had serious difficulties or even failed within a lifetime to persuade a doubtful public of the true worth of their discoveries. These great men, like others of the natural scientists, were finally approved and honored by the adoption of their methods.

In the realm of the purely intellectual, advocates of certain principles and prophets of future dilemmas, if these principles are neglected, are probably less likely ever to be recognized.

I am thinking of one among the greatest teachers I have ever known, Sister Mary Leo Tierney, O.P., teacher of speech and drama. Sister Leo was certainly at least a half century ahead of her time. I knew her for about a score of years previous to her death, now over twenty years ago. It was my good fortune to have her as a classroom teacher during my novitiate period, and later as a private instructor in speech and interpretative reading for two years. I appreciated her methods in developing one’s power of getting and giving the thought from the pages of great authors. Nevertheless, I know now that I did not fully appreciate her almost constant lament relative to some of the trends and the decline in educational methods and, basically, the neglect of proper training in oral reading. But it seems clear to me now that if the methods employed by Sister Leo and certain others had not been discarded, we would not now be faced with a general breakdown in the acquisition of the fundamentals necessary for an education as a whole. That this is in large measure owing to greatly depressed ability to read the printed page is now fairly well conceded.

One of the worst blows to correct educational procedure during Sister Leo’s time was the experiment called “silent
reading." It was mainly on the results of this experiment that Sister Leo seemed to base her predictions of what has since happened. Then came the misuse of otherwise great and valuable inventions, such as the radio and television, which seems to have given the coup de grace to real study in all too many instances. Sister Leo saw in "silent reading" alone the death blow to proper mental development. And, as a matter of fact, the breakdown was under way long before the radio was in common use and very long before the perfection of the cinema and the television.

Recently I made a review study of the McGuffey readers. It is very clear to me that Sister Leo’s method of teaching reading was rooted in the McGuffey tradition. I do not remember, however, whether she ever mentioned the McGuffey in her class work. Perhaps the correct methods of teaching oral reading in their era were more generally employed and that these were only more ostensibly applied in the McGuffey readers.

During the two years that I was one of Sister Leo’s private pupils, she saw that I needed special training in voice placement. Like every wise person, Sister Leo knew her own limitations and, therefore, told me that the kind of help I most needed then should come from a specialist in voice training. And so she recommended that Sister David, then professor of voice at Rosary College, would give me this instruction. Thanks to Sister David’s generosity, I had a full year of regular lessons in voice placement. For Sister David, I had to speak on tone, that is, as she sat at the piano, she changed the pitch at strategic points in my reading or speaking until flexibility of the voice came at will. This was substantially the method employed by the McGuffey’s. Without this ability to modulate the voice, it is impossible to make the necessary transitions, to reach climaxes, to distinguish subordinations and principalities, etc.—all of which are essential factors in good speech or oral reading.
What must not be forgotten is that oral reading, like oratory, is an art. It is necessary, therefore, that the human instrument, that is to say, all of the organs involved in the speaking voice be trained to act in harmony with the intellect, the imagination and the emotions, if reading or oratory is to be effective. When one must listen to poor reading or speaking by a person whose mind is otherwise trained, one must not judge that his mental interpretation is as faulty as his oral expression of it. The faults here most often flow from lack of the proper use of the instrument and inadvertence to the laws which govern the correct oral rendition of a good literary composition.

Like natural musicians who play or sing pleasingly well by rote, there are some adults who read fairly well without the knowledge of or advertence to the laws which govern this art. But these are not numerous and they are greatly limited as artists, just as the untrained musician is. The point is that good reading is something that does not ordinarily just happen. It results from careful study and practice exactly as does a good musical performance and with no less serious and constant effort on the part of the reader.

Under the title "Elocution and Reading" (p. 57), in McGuffey's Sixth reader (revised edition, 1921), is a summary paragraph of what the McGuffey's thought of reading:

Reading is, indeed, a most intellectual accomplishment. So is music, too, in its perfection. We do by no means undervalue this noble and most delightful art, to which Socrates applied himself even in his old age. But one recommendation of the art of reading is that it requires a constant exercise of the mind. It involves, in its perfection, the whole art of criticism of language. A man may possess a fine genius without being a good reader; but he can not be a perfect reader without genius.

It seems that our present generation of teachers and pupils have a long way to go before they catch up with the
McGuffey's. By that I mean not only the textbook makers themselves, but all of their faithful followers--most of whom are now beyond the necessity of reading books. What seems to have been forgotten is that oral reading is an art, with laws as scientific and compelling as those which govern work on canvas or in any of the musical arts. Therefore only a good piece of literature is worthy the efforts that are necessary to attain any degree of perfection in reading or oratory. Inferior literary composition, just as with music, is written without the necessary regard for the laws of form and expression and is therefore unsuitable matter for study or practice.

But I was writing of Sister Leo, of memory, and seemed to have forgotten that I was not in a classroom. Nothing but the best in literature was acceptable to Sister Leo. Shakespeare, Tennyson Browning, Longfellow, Francis Thompson, from these she chose literary gems for her pupils to memorize. And we did it, too. Sister Leo loved her subject; she lived it; she taught it; she preached it. But she recognized in the latter part of her life a period of increasing depression in these neglected arts. She seemed to predict and feared our present educational dilemma. For we have strayed a long way from the days of readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic. May God be with them and bring them back to us. For the student who has them has all; or, at least, he has the equipment to acquire all.

Two of the priests, among a considerable number of university professors, were outstanding in my adult educational experiences. Something will be said of them in the next chapter.