

THE DEVIL and Ethan Allen's Daughter

By J. DANIELS

Ethan Allen once roared into Montreal to capture the city, only to be deported to England a reluctant prisoner. Fanny Allen, beautiful daughter of the "Great Infidel," rode weekly into Montreal and gave herself up a prisoner of God—the first woman of New England to become a nun.

TOURISTS AND skiers who invade Vermont's peaceful valleys, filling their eyes in summer with the Green Mountains' lush grandeur, and in winter exulting in the white brilliance of glazed slopes, are well versed in the history of Ethan Allen, the doughty "Boy of the North." Fort Ticonderoga, commonly known as the "Great Infidel," is the name of the Great Infidel and the Continental Congress. They may be so well informed of the circumstances attending the life of the celebrated leader's daughter, Fanny Allen, after whom the Catholic hospital at Whitehall, Vermont, is named.

Certainly, she was not born to parents who held the God of Christianity in as loving esteem as she came to embrace Him in

(God) in whatever company he was found.

WHETHER ALL these charges were true or not, it is certain that his work, "Reason, the only Oracle of Man," a system of "natural" religion, known also as "The Oracles of Reason," or Ethan Allen's Bible, was the original book published in America contrary to the doctrines of revealed religion.

That he influenced his second wife to his independent views is not known, but there is evidence, if he spoke her opinions correctly, that the bride and groom (widow and widower) were entering the marriage state with similar non-conformist ideas.

His announcement of their intention to marry caused astonishment for their courtship, if there was one, was known to have been brief. Tradition has it that earlier the tavern keeper at Westminster, who prided himself that he knew everything that went on, said to Fanny Buchanan, "Fanny, if you marry General Allen, you will be queen of a new state." Her retort was quick, "Yes, and if I married the Devil I would be queen of Hell!"

When asking Judge Robinson to marry them in February, 1784, Ethan said, "As for myself, I have no great opinion of such formality; and, from what I can discover, she thinks as little of the formality as I do. But as a decent respect for the opinions of mankind seems to require it, you will proceed."

When the judge came to the question, "Do you, Ethan Allen, promise to live with Fanny Buchanan agreeable to the laws of God?" the great leader boomed out in the quiet room, "Hold on! Hold on! Which God are you talking about? If you mean the laws of God as written in the great book of Nature, pray go on. My team is at the door."

These, then, were the father and the mother of Fanny Allen, born in November 1784, child of free-thinkers, whose male parent was positive of one thing: that he was no Christian. Except mere infant baptism make one a Christian? No one in his time in New England labeled him the Horned Devil of Vermont.

FANNY BEGAN life in a home where the idea of a personal God was scoffed at, where prayer was thought to have no relation to a rational religion and in which the concept of anything supernatural as learned through divine revelation is contradictory and impossible.

Still, there is the story, though somewhat discounted, concerning the deathbed scene of Lorraine Allen, one of Ethan's three children by his first wife, which, if true, manifests something more deeply felt than Ethan Allen's Bible would seem to indicate.

"My dear father," said Lorraine, "I am about to die; shall I die believing with you that there is no Jesus, no future life, or shall I believe what my mother and her Bible have taught me?" Allen, he said to have shed tears as he replied, "My child, believe what your mother has taught you."

However true the story may be, he left Fanny a heathen and a semi-orphan when he died in 1789. Four years later her mother remarried, taking as her third husband Dr. Jabez Pennington, who, although he was not an "Infidel" like her father, did nothing to demonstrate his willingness that she should learn the truths of Christianity. In fact, he did all he could to exclude every thought of religion from Fanny's mind.

In her twelfth year, something happened to her which she never forgot, and the education to which she did not find until twelve years later. The something was, in fact, on a farm near the Connecticut

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River outside Westminster on the Vermont-New Hampshire border.

HER ACCOUNT of the incident appears in the Annals of the Hospital of Hotel Dieu, Montreal:

"I was walking one day on the banks of the river which flowed not very far from our house. The water, although very clear, rolled by in torrents. Suddenly, I beheld emerging from the river an animal more resembling a monster than a fish, for it was of extraordinary size and horrid shape. It was coming directly towards me. What a frightful sight! I could not turn from this monster."

"While I was in this terrifying situation I saw advancing towards me a man of venerable and striking countenance, wearing a brown cloak and carrying a staff in his hand. He took me gently by the arm and gave me strength to move while he said most kindly to me: 'My child, what are you doing here? Hasten away! I then ran as fast as I could.'"

"When I was some distance off, I turned to look at this venerable man but I could see him nowhere. As soon as I reached home . . . I told my mother the cause of my fright and how an elderly man with a most benevolent countenance had come to my rescue . . ."

In spite of a diligent search to thank the man for his kindness, none of the family could find any sign of him. For years after Fanny, whose young life was full of gay social rounds, searched the faces of men, hoping to find her benefactor. She eventually found him in a place she never thought to find herself.

In the light of subsequent events, Bishop Louis de Goetsch, first bishop of Burlington, Vermont, commemorated this occurrence as "the only accepted and well-authenticated miracle ever wrought within the limits of Vermont." (His words.)

Fanny's parents gave her, besides deep affection, the best kind of education for those times and in a semi-wilderness country. Well educated and talented, they saw to it that her training rested in the hands of the best-known private teachers.

She had inherited many of Ethan's qualities, including gentleness and an independent inquiring mind. Ironically, while the big man's thinking had led him to rebel against the Christian Church, Fanny's fancy was taken by the plight of the "papist" or "Romanist" Catholic Church, reduced in Vermont to a sad state of disrepute. Bigotry was rampant.

Her extensive reading in her stepfather's plentifully stocked library had developed her into an avowed unbeliever, like her father. But the searching nature of her mind caused her to ponder why, of all the sects, the Roman Catholic Church was, oppressed by the state laws. (Vermont was then an independent republic.)

Why could not Romanists hold public office, receive public education? Why were they condemned as disloyal, their

The dramatic role of Fanny Allen, convert daughter of agnostic Ethan Allen, is told in this article from COLUMBIA, national publication of the Knights of Columbus.

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taxes unwarranted, their property confiscated?

Her new reading now taught her that the Catholic Church would always be persecuted, even to the end of time. She observed concretely as she had never before that no one she knew in Vermont had any interest in the abuse of Catholics; that indeed her own family tried to discourage her from pursuing the matter.

AT THE AGE of twenty-three, engaged to a student at the infant University of Vermont, the son of a wealthy Boston merchant, Fanny suddenly announced a keen desire to round out her education by studying French in Montreal. She and her fiancé planned after marriage to travel abroad. French would be necessary. Was this the real reason?

Or did she in reality use this excuse as an expedient to learn at first hand, and in a Catholic convent school, the beliefs and practices of Catholics? She finally won the Penningtons' consent, but not before they insisted that she be baptized by the Rev. Daniel Barber, Presbyterian minister, to strengthen her against undue influence.

At the Notre Dame Academy, in Montreal, the Sisters found Fanny quick and observing. Moreover, she acquired knowledge of the religious exercises of the Sisters, their teaching methods and tender care of the pupils, as well as of their piety, gentle manners and refinement. She admired and respected them.

But, because she made no secret of her unbelief, even making fun of religious services, the nuns feared for the faith of the school's young pupils, and were about to send her home. A young nun to whom she had become attached won a reprieve for her.

Still Fanny continued difficult and insulting in her remarks; until one day, the feast of the Blessed Mother's birth, day, the two were arranging flowers for the chapel altar. The Sister asked her to place a vase near the altar. "Be sure," she said, "you adorn our Sacred Mother's day." Old Ethan's daughter tilted and at once decided not to make any act of "etiquette" before the altar. Why should she, since she did not believe in the "Presence?"

When Fanny tripped out of the sacristy with the flower vase, the Imp of Ethan's perverseness working within her, she could not have known she was taking her first steps on a new road.

Once at the center of the altar, directly before the tabernacle, she stopped dead. Not that she didn't try to move; she simply couldn't move. She just stood there unable to budge. Suddenly she felt on her knees, murmuring, "My God! My God." It was her first act of faith.

SHE WAS received into the Church and while preparing for first Holy Communion, wrote home the good news. Her parents, of course, removed her from the academy at once; but now they were to hear the worst: Fanny wanted to join a Sisterhood! In the ignorance of that time such a wanton wish was branded "voluntary suicide of a human soul."

Her mother tried vainly to distract her from the thought; she took her into the fashionable society of eastern cities after Fanny promised to wait a year. After six months, however, the Penningtons had to let her go when her health suffered. She had become despondent and melancholy. Her heart was elsewhere.

Back in Montreal, visiting convents in quest of an order to join, she and her mother went to the Chapel of the Hotel Dieu, operated by a nursing and contemplative group of nuns.

There she identified St. Joseph in a painting of The Holy Family as the man in the brown robe who had saved her, when a child, from the river monster. Her decision was made.

She joined the Religious Hospitalliers of St. Joseph, was first professed in 1808 and spent the rest of her life at the Hotel Dieu in the sick wards and in prayer, beloved by all who knew her.

The fruits of Sister Frances Allen's life work were abundant. The doctor who attended her at her death became a convert and a Carthusian monk. Her fiancé gave up his riches to the poor and joined the Society of the Sacred Heart. Sister Barber, who had baptized her a Presbyterian, became a convert at the age of thirty-two, two years after Fanny's death, as did her wife. Fanny's virtues, they said, led them to study the religion that had influenced her.



Vermont State officials visit burial place of Sister Frances Allen in crypt of Hotel-Dieu in Montreal where she died December 10, 1819.

Then followed their dergyman son, Virgil Barber, who studied in Rome and was ordained a Jesuit; in 1823 he built the first Catholic church in New Hampshire. At the time of his ordination his wife entered the Visitation Order.

Nearly all of Virgil Barber's former congregation followed him into the Roman Catholic Church, among them a military officer who examined into the narrow laws biased against Romanists.

The Virgil Barber's five children later in life became Catholics; one daughter joined the Visitation nuns; the other three girls became Ursulines; and Samuel, their young brother, was ordained a Jesuit.

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"No Room In The Inn" California School Board Votes Nativity Play Ban

Sierra Madre, Calif. (RNS)—The school board here voted, 3-1, to bar traditional Nativity plays from all the community schools.

The ban was immediately protested by the Parent-Teacher Association of this Los Angeles suburb of 8,000 residents. Members of the Ministerial Association called for a transcript of the school board meeting before deciding upon action.

who voted to bar Christmas plays said they had no objection to Christmas carols because they were "cultural."

Bishops Ask Tito To Free Cardinal

Trieste, Italy — (NCI)—Nineteen bishops in Yugoslavia have asked the communist government of Marshal Tito to return Cardinal Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb, to his See, according to reports reaching here.

The request was said to have been made after a conference of Yugoslav bishops, reportedly held in Zagreb early in January.

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