

**LIFE OF THE REV. FRANCIS
A. BAKER: PRIEST
OF THE CONGREGATION
OF ST. PAUL, PP. 1-203**

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A. F. HEWIT

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REV. FRANCIS A. BAKER,^{oe}

PRIEST OF THE CONGREGATION OF ST. PAUL.

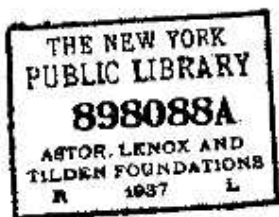
BY

REV. A. F. HEWIT.^{oe}

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By A. M. HEWITT,

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PREFACE.

IN offering the Memoir and Sermons of this volume to the friends of F. Baker, and to the public, propriety requires of me a few words of explanation. The number of those who have been more or less interested in the events touched upon in the sketch of his life and labors is very great, and composed of many different classes of persons in various places, and of more than one religious communion. I cannot suppose that all of them will read these pages, but it is likely that many will; and therefore a word is due to those who are more particularly interested, as well as to the general class of readers.

I have to ask the indulgence of all my readers for having interwoven so much of my own history and my own reflections on the topics and events of the period included within the limits of the narrative. They have woven themselves in spontaneously, without any intention on my part, and on account of the close connexion between myself and the one whose career I have been describing; and I have been unable to unravel them from the texture of the narrative without breaking its threads.

I have simply transferred to paper that picture of the past, long forgotten amid the occupations of an active

life, which came up again, unbidden and with great vividness, before the eye of memory, during the hours while the remains of my brother and dearest friend lay robed in violet, waiting for the last solemn rites of the requiem to be fulfilled. If I have succeeded, I cannot but think that the picture will have something of the same interest for others that it has for myself. Those who knew and loved the original, will, I hope, prize it for his sake ; and their own recollections will diffuse the coloring and animation of life over that which in itself is but a pale and indistinct sketch. For their sakes chiefly I have prepared it, so far as the mere personal motive of perpetuating the memory of a revered and beloved individual is concerned. But I have had a higher motive as my chief reason for undertaking the task : a desire to promote the glory of God, by preserving and extending the memory of the graces and virtues with which He adorned one of His most faithful children. I have wished to place before the world the example of one of the most signal conversions to the Catholic faith which has taken place in our country, as a lesson to all to imitate the pure and disinterested devotion to truth and conscience which it presents to them.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not present the example of his conversion, or that of the great number of persons of similar character who have embraced the Catholic religion, as a proof sufficient by itself of the truth of that religion. I propose it as a specimen of many instances in which the power of the Catholic religion to draw intelligent minds and upright hearts to

itself, and to inspire them with a pure and noble spirit of self-sacrifice in the cause of God and humanity, is exhibited. This is surely a sufficient motive for examining carefully the reasons and evidences on which their submission to the Church was grounded ; and an incentive to seek for the truth, with an equally sincere intention to embrace it, at whatever cost or struggle it may demand.

It may appear to the casual reader that I have drawn in this narrative an ideal portrait which exaggerates the reality. I do not think I have done so ; and I believe the most competent judges will attest my strict fidelity to the truth of nature. If I have represented my subject as a most perfect and beautiful character, the model of a man, a Christian, and a priest of God, I have not exceeded the sober judgment of the most impartial witnesses. A Protestant Episcopal clergyman, of remarkable honesty and generosity of nature, said of him to a Catholic friend : " You have one perfect man among your converts." Another, a Catholic clergyman, whose coolness of judgment and reticence of praise are remarkable traits in his character, said, on hearing of his decease : " The best priest in New York is dead." I have no doubt that more than one would have been willing to give their own lives in place of his, if he could have been saved by the sacrifice.

In narrating events connected with F. Baker's varied career, I have simply related those things of which I have had either personal knowledge, or the evidence furnished by his own correspondence with a very dear

friend, aided by the information which that friend has furnished me. I have to thank this very kind and valued friend, the Rev. Dwight E. Lyman, for the aid he has given me in this way, which has increased so much the completeness and interest of the Memoir. I am also indebted to another, still dearer to the departed, for information concerning his early history and family.

I trust that those readers who are not members of the Catholic communion, especially such as have been the friends of the subject and the author of this memoir, will find nothing here to jar unnecessarily upon their sentiments and feelings. Fidelity to the deceased has required me not to conceal his conviction of the exclusive truth and authority of the doctrine and communion of the holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. The same fidelity would prevent me, if my own principles did not do so, from mixing up with religious questions any thing savoring of personal arrogance, or directed to the vindication of private feelings, and retaliation upon individuals with whom religious conflicts have brought us into collision. I wish those who still retain their friendship for the dead, and whose minds will recur with interest to scenes of this narrative, in which they were concerned with him, to be assured of that lasting sentiment of regard which he carried with him to the grave, and which survives in the heart of the writer of these lines.

In the history of F. Baker's missionary career, I have endeavored to select from the materials on hand such portions of the details of particular missions as would