

IN THE Clutch of Rome.

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CHAPTER V.—Continued. A PRIESTLY GAME.

Left alone, Miss Agness Allison drew aside the silken folds of a curtain, which concealed her oratory, and passed a quarter of an hour in prayer.

A dinner given by Mayor Allison and his vivacious, handsome wife, was always a "thing of beauty and a joy" while it endured.

Once, and once only, the priest of Rome who officiated at the church where the Allison family worshipped, at the suggestion of a married sister of the expectant groom (for the Allison family were bitterly opposed to the non-Catholic girl) had some times more than hinted that the prospective union would be of a kind not to be named in polite society.

The priest in his handsome robes, and the acolytes with the swinging censers, had all appealed to her inherent love of the theatrical, an attribute which all mankind share in common.

Miss Dillon with fine subtlety always took her to mass with her immediately after leaving the Presbyterian church, where she often accompanied the child to Sunday school, and often insisting on her remaining to service.

"But the doctrines of our holy church, your reverence; surely—"

"The church," interrupted the bishop, "like a wise physician, studies the idiosyncrasies of humanity—as I trust you will learn in the future—(Father Golden was yet young in the service) and dispenses her medicine accordingly. However, we will lose no time in smoothing over this flaw."

"To revert to the Allison matter, your reverence, Albert Allison has high political aspirations, and the same to be applied to the wound, I so recklessly inflicted, must be our strongest support in all his undertakings."

"Just so," said the bishop, lifting another brimming glass to his lips. "You are confessor, I believe, to the family? I mean to the ladies—I do not suppose Albert ever enters the confessional."

"Well, make the most of what you learn from the ladies. Only, I charge you, improve every opportunity to instill into the young, impressionable Agness, that all flesh is grass, that the devil is omnipresent, that the pomps and vanities of the world are all a fleeting show; in short—but you understand, my friend."

"Yes," said Father Golden, smiling;

"I understand. The calm, blue sea of a conventional life is the only safe sailing for this delicate little ship of ours, with her silken sails, jeweled masts and treasure laden hold."

"Very prettily expressed," said the archbishop; "very prettily, indeed."

Albert Allison was mayor of New York City. Agness was about to renounce the world, and Archbishop Dooley was the honored guest at the table of her brother.

Like her husband, she loved power, and the Catholic vote, for or against, was a power in the land. So she smiled coldly bright on the archbishop, who sat at her table very much at home among the glittering crystal, the gleam of gold and silver plate, the sensuous perfume of flowers, and the viands so artistically prepared that eating became a luxurious indulgence to the senses; and one lost sight of the fact that it was a common function necessary to life.

Many creeds diametrically opposed to each other were represented, but all had met around the festal board of equal society footing. Refined flashes of wit and repartee were thrown and caught, and made to rebound against the thrower like brilliant balls from one end of the table to the other.

A week from the date of the dinner given by the mayor of the city, his sister Agness publicly renounced the world, and became the bride of Heaven.

CHAPTER VI. A ROMISH ADDER.

Dora Dillon had been governess to the children of Senator Maxwell, of California, for two months. Apparently, little change had taken place in the household since her advent. Still she ever dropped little seeds along her pathway, in the hope that some of them would germinate.

Of his child's growing dislike to the Protestant form of worship and proportionate love of the pomp and show attending the Catholic service, Senator Maxwell knew nothing. His wife took charge of the education of the children, who were still too young to come under his jurisdiction.

Educated in the Presbyterian faith, he occasionally attended church. Giving little time to religion, he led an upright, moral and worldly life. Marrying a Catholic girl, and one, too, who had made her escape from a convent to his eager arms, he had little love for what he thought to be an arbitrary and cruel sect.

Mr. Maxwell had been called away from the city. It was early afternoon of a cold, lowering Sunday in the last week of November. Mrs. Maxwell laid the book she had been reading on a table, clasped her hands over her head and said:

"I am dying, positively dying of ennui."

Dora Dillon dropped her book in her lap, glanced at her girlish-looking employer, whose round, white arms were exposed nearly to the shoulder, as their position caused the wide, loose sleeves of her robe to fall away from them, and said:

"I, also, suffer from the complaint," with her yellowish eyes which showed no trace of weariness fastened on the woman, she was sworn to subjugate, and who was gazing abstractedly into the fire, she continued slowly, "I believe—Yes, I will go to vespers. Vesper music at St. Mary's is divine."

Little Jean, who was with the other children in the recess of a window playing at some child's game of chance, now came forward and said:

"I, too, will go to vespers. I, also, am tired."

"If your mamma will permit, Jean, I will be pleased to take you."

"I will accompany you. Sunday without your papa, Jean, is a very undesirable day to me. A diversion will be welcome. Call nurse to the children."

Soon afterward, clothed in cashmere, silk and softest fur, they left the house and in less than a quarter of an hour were ascending the broad stone steps of St. Mary's cathedral; Dora Dillon with the exultation of one who had gained a point in some undertaking, and Mrs. Maxwell with a little flutter of excitement like one who is about to enter upon some novel or unfamiliar scene.

For over ten years, she who had drank in Romanism with her infant milk and lived with it, till, in her seventeenth year she had escaped it all by marrying her American lover and leaving the shores of Spain, had not seen the inside of a Catholic church. In the vestibule, she involuntarily followed the example of Miss Dillon, and drew off her glove and dipped her finger in the font of holy water, her little girl looking on wonderingly.

The priest, clad in richly embroidered vestments, preceded and followed by the acolytes, glided noiselessly into the chancel and knelt at the altar. The familiar ceremonies, the grand music of the mass, the image of the virgin mother looking benignly down upon her from her altar, the incense-laden air she breathed, filled her with a religious ecstasy not known to her since her early childhood.

The soft-voiced priest at the altar appealing to the court of Heaven in behalf of his flock, knew that Dora Dillon and the straying one she was commissioned to bring back into the fold, were before him. He felt no surprise. He had waited patiently and with confidence for their coming. Dora Dillon had never failed him.

"It is emblematical of the warmth and comfort to be found in the sheltering arms of the church when one is chilled and wearied by the cold breath of the world."

Mrs. Maxwell made no reply, and soon the massive doors of the Maxwell residence had opened to admit them into its warm, artistic rooms. The servant who admitted them informed Mrs. Maxwell that her husband's sister (a lady not expected for several days to come) had, by some miscalculation of time, arrived during her absence.

"However," she added with that pretty though stereotyped Spanish welcome, "the house is yours."

Martha Maxwell on being left alone in the suite of rooms assigned her, took a minute survey of her surroundings and of the many elegant articles in her sleeping-room, the majority of which she knew neither the name nor the use of.

Martha and her brother were the survivors of a large family of children, and when the death of the father occurred, (the mother had preceded him several years) James Maxwell, a youth of twenty years, now Senator Maxwell,

of California, had given the homestead to his sister, then taking a portion of the small portion left them, he settled himself in California. In response to numerous invitations given during the last ten years, Martha, to the surprise of her neighbors, had suddenly rented her home and crossed the continent to visit her brother.

When James Maxwell had written that he had brought a wife from Spain, the greatest consternation had prevailed among his friends. The majority of the residents of the remote little town had vague ideas of Spanish women, thinking of them as they were pictured on the inside of a maison-box, as red bodiced, short-skirted maidens, with castanets, flying feet and a great exposure of stocking.

"Miss Maxwell's high-toned brother had taken to himself a Catholic Spanish woman for a wife; the family such rigid Presbyterians, too."

Martha Maxwell, intelligent and well read and better informed than most of her neighbors, had not such crude ideas as they, regarding Spanish women; still, she was filled with surprise at the elegantly dressed woman who welcomed her as her brother's wife; and, who, instead of being the swarthy person her fancy had seen, had a complexion of the hue and smoothness of rich cream, and eyes as blue and limpid as pools of blue sea water warmed by a tropical sun.

Miss Martha exchanged her traveling dress for a neutral tinted merino, innocent of all superfluous drapery, twisted her iron grey hair into a rigid knot at the back of her head, and passed into her sitting-room, to await the summons to dinner. It soon came from Mrs. Maxwell in person, accompanied by the three children, who, after shyly kissing their strange aunt, led the way to the dining-room.

The steel blue eyes of the uncompromising Presbyterian, and the soft yellowish orbs of the papist, looked straight into each other, and either woman saw that fierce antagonism could float securely in soft yellow mists, or shine out clear and bright like a star in a cold, blue sky on a frosty night.

That night, alone in her luxurious room, Mrs. Maxwell thought of her afternoon visit to the church of her early youth.

"Was she doing right, after all, by living entirely in the present? Her children, too, was she not neglecting her duty to them, in not teaching them, young though they were, that there was a life to come, when they should be through with this? What if by reason of her neglect, the beings to whom she had given life, should be lost through all eternity? Horrible thought! Why had these duties and responsibilities lain dormant so long in her heart? Had the virgin—most blessed of mothers—awakened them to life, when in an idle hour, she strayed into her sanctuary?"

As a lover of wine long deprived, by a chance glass feels again its fascinating influence stealing over his senses, and craves a deeper draught, so this casual sip of a once familiar spiritual wine, rose-tinted, perfumed, and seductive, was casting a glamor over its one-time votary, and gently stimulating a thirst for more.

CHAPTER VII. WISE, YET BLINDED.

Senator Maxwell, a handsome, blonde man approaching his fortieth year, was on the eve of departure for the national capital. His wife was to remain at home with her children during the coming session of congress. She had passed several winters in Washington, and the graceful Spanish wife of the Pacific Coast Senator had been much admired, and had more than held her own. It was with mutual regret that this separation was to take place, but Mrs. Maxwell was not in a fit state of health to warrant the fatigue of travel, nor the performance of duties incumbent on the wife of a prominent politi-

cian. She had told her husband of her visit to the church, and he laughed and made light of it, saying:

"They can't get you away from me again, Carmelita, and shut you behind their saintly gratings, so if you find any consolation in going to church occasionally, why go. I am fast losing faith in creeds though, and I like the Roman church least of all, and I do not wish the children's minds trained in that direction. I scorn bigoted prejudices, however, or I should object to a Catholic governess. From my observations of her, I should judge her religion does not intrude itself in her daily life, and she is so companionable in every respect, that I am glad to have her with you."

Ere taking leave of his home, Senator Maxwell said to his sister:

"Have an eye over my wife and babies, Martha, and stand by them should any trouble, real or imaginary, assail my loved ones. My wife and I have never been apart for many days at a time, since our marriage. She may need cheering up a bit."

Miss Martha, sitting straight up in her chair, as if the back was a thing to avoid contact with, said:

"I always try to do my duty, James, wherever I may be placed, but the truth compels me to say that I feel like a brown ground bird might be supposed to feel, who has wandered into a golden cage filled with birds of paradise; and, excuse my passing judgment on a member of your household, James, which my short sojourn, perhaps, makes in bad taste, but I mistrust—and I can hardly tell why—that governess of yours. There is something about her that our Scotch ancestry would have called uncanny."

"Really, Martha, you have known Miss Dillon so short a time, or rather you do not know her, that I think, you have let some feminine crochet get in the way of your sense of justice."

"There is something about the color of a fabric, by which a woman judges the practicability of washing it. Now, I judge by the shade and tone of Miss Dillon's eyes, that she won't wash. However, time proves all things, so we will leave all things to him," said the spinster, grimly, as she rose to go, musing as she went, on the mental color

blindness of men in general as regarded womankind.

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