

CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART.

WRITTEN BY HUBERT TUCKER FOR THE PROGRESSIVE THINKER.

CHAPTER XI.

Frantz had no desire to see the superior or to be seen by her. He had every reason not to be observed, for his anger would have exploded and revealed his secret, on the keeping of which life and death depended. He stealthily walked along the passage leading to the rear of the convent, where it sharply turned, passing between what really was a double wall, an outer and an inner, until it came to the corner of the building, when it was continued through the broad wall which surrounded the grounds until it reached the basement of the building occupied by the gardener. This room had a door opening in the usual manner on the street. To this door he carried a private key, as did most of the priests. They were thus enabled to pass through the basement of what appeared to be a private building, into the convent, at all hours without attracting attention or causing remark. Without any purpose before him, or determination of what he would do, he walked out into the street. There were few dwellings at that time in the immediate vicinity, and no passer to observe his rapid gait. His anguish of mind was the more because of the darkness in which he saw no ray of hope. He had promised, pledged his honor and his life to release the two victims. In a moment of desperation when he felt strong enough to wage battle against a thousand; now that he was alone, and the desperate task awaited him, he cried out in utter hopelessness. Still he rapidly walked along the now thronged street. People stared at him, for a hurrying priest was an unusual spectacle. He met acquaintances who bowed, but he did not see them. His whole being was absorbed in the one thought, how a hopeless task could be accomplished. At a corner he dashed against a man coming out of the side street with a force which almost prostrated them both. A brief apology, and the gentleman walked on. A hand touched his shoulder, and Frantz said: "Pardon, sir, but did I not, about a year since, while riding with the bishop, meet you walking with a lady, a Miss Zeldalyn?"

"I cannot say," replied the gentleman, who was the artist Kensett. "I know the lady. I have no recollection of you; the bishop I have cause to remember. He passed us once, when his glance was an insult!"

"The very time! I was with him, and then learned his diabolic scheme." "You are a priest; you have access to the convent; do you know whether—ah, you are a priest, how foolish of me to expect an answer."

"Yes, I am a priest," replied Frantz calmly. "You would ask if I know where Zeldalyn is? You love her; I see it in your eyes, and respect and sympathize with you, for I am in love myself. I will tell you." He bent low and whispered, "She is in the Convent of the Sacred Heart!"

Kensett seized the hand of the priest, "Is this true? You do not deceive me?" "In God's name, it is true; but do not let us stop here; we are observed."

"Come to my studio, then. It is near by, and we can there be assured of privacy." They rapidly walked to the studio, for Kensett was impatient as his companion. "Please look the door," said Frantz. This being done, they sat down near each other. Opposite them on an easel was a half-finished portrait. Frantz gazed on it earnestly, and exclaimed: "This is Sister Zeldalyn, as she was a year ago!" "A year ago, for I paint her from memory." "Your memory serves you well. Her face is stamped thereon ineffaceably. I see it on the canvas." "You say 'as she was.' Has she changed?" The priest drew close; he spoke in a low tone of voice, as though fearing to be overheard. "Changed—have you not seen the nuns, with their black dresses, and their foreheads bound with a bandage symbolizing that they are dead? Are they beautiful?" Kensett started at the words, and with eager haste asked: "A nun; did you say a nun? Has Zeldalyn taken the veil?" "At my hands! God pity me," replied Frantz. "And does she know—does she realize the terrible results of that act? Does she know that her poor father, crushed by the shock, the desertion of his child on whom he had built his hopes, who was his pride, sank into imbecility and into his grave, killed by her ingratitude? Does she know her mother is dying, calling and imploring her to come and receive her last blessing?" "She does not know; if she did her burdens would be more than she could bear. Listen—I will tell you all. I am a priest, habituated to receive confessions. You shall now be the priest and I the culprit. You will needs have faith in me to believe the matters I shall relate." Then the priest told the story of Zeldalyn's wrongs and concluded with a description of the cell in which she was incarcerated. Rage and grief alternately swayed the mind of Kensett as he listened.

"Be self-controlled, my dear brother; for I have more cause of complaint than you. My Eudocia has a cell by the side of Zeldalyn's. I have a blasted life; you have freedom. Look at me, nobly born, reared with all the care wealth could bestow; sent to a theological school and made a priest because my mother willed that should be. In my youth I loved a maiden of equal degree; beautiful and graceful as the flowers. I tore her image from me, because I thought Jesus demanded it. I accepted religion as taught by the church, in full measure of ideal purity and perfection. I expected self-denial and sacrifice even as Jesus met mortal pain. I put all earthly hopes, pleasures and anticipations under my feet and gave myself unreservedly to the work of an apostle. It was a painful struggle with what I then regarded as the promptings of Satan, to overcome my love for the one who had been my companion from childhood, and the love of her was my enduring, continual sin. You will understand me now when I tell you the reaction which took place in my mind, on better acquaintance with the priesthood and the Holy Church, when instead of my ideal purity, self-sacrifice, unworldliness, and devotion to acts of righteousness, I found from the most obscure priest to the bishop, even to the holy father, the pope, selfishness, ambition for place and power, debauchery of grossest form, and unmentionable indulgences and crimes. When my weakened faith was known to the authorities, I was assigned to a mission in America. I presume it was thought that on this coast I would be brought in contact with savages and the border people, and with a field for my zeal, and away from the corruptions of the church, I would give no more trouble. For two years or more this was the result, for I took hold bravely and zealously of the work of converting the Indians and leading the mixed population to a higher view of life. But there came a rush of people here, the church extended its operations, as it always does, with a vigilance that is marvelous; a convent, cathedral and schools were founded, and I again found the same corruption which had at first disquieted me. Attending the convent one day as father confessor, a nun whispered her little failures in keeping the inconsequential ceremonies; a word in a prayer omitted, a genuflection more or less, an idle thought. According to the rules she was veiled, and I, sitting below the latticed screen, as was my custom, for I did not wish to embarrass the penitents, which most priests delight in as amusement—was concealed from her. Her voice was familiar, and thrilled me, recalling memories of my youth. 'And this is not all holy father,' she continued. 'Know I loved—when I was a girl, and my father's chateau on the lower Alps was a paradise. My lover became a priest, and I, because he forsook me, a nun.' The confessors often request their fair supplicants to remove their veils, but I had never before had occasion or desire to see the face of a penitent. The face behind the veil I must see, and I expressed my wish. She hesitated. 'You are not like the others, are you?' she asked, plaintively. 'In the name of the mother of holy purity, I have no such purpose,' I replied. Then reluctantly she drew aside the veil. Her face was waxen pale, and changed by years and penances, yet it was hers. 'Eudocia!' I cried, arising from my seat, 'Eudocia, my heart's dearest treasure, do we meet again?' 'Who speaks?' she exclaimed, starting back from the lattice dividing us. 'Do you not know? Do you not remember? Frantz, your own, your despicable Frantz?' 'Why have we met?' she cried in anguish. 'Why have the old wounds been torn afresh? And how dare you speak as you do, of the past? It is past and can never be ours. We have chosen. The love we should have given each other must now be given to the church. It might have been better—for me—for this life—she bowed her face on her hands and sobbed uncontrollably. 'Yes, dear Eudocia, a thousand times better for me, for us both. We will bear it—unless—unless the burden becomes too grievous.' That was a happy hour; a happy hour, yet one of the saddest of my life. Let me hurry on. You know the story, and here I am, with this dear one dying in a cell, and I who have been the means of bringing her there unable to free her from the infamous tyranny which holds her."

"Hope, hope, have courage, for if every brick of that convent has to be leveled, they shall be free!" exclaimed Kensett, with fiery passion. "I am ready for any scheme, however desperate. I have not had time to reflect, or plan. Together we may come to a conclusion. The greatest difficulty lies after escape. Where are we to go? What are we to do? Not a dollar to help us, not a friend on whom to rely! We cannot return to our native country, for a renegade from the church will be scorned even by those nearest of kin. Wherever we go here, we shall be dogged by the spies of the church, and every means employed to ruin us. Oh! Mr. Kensett, you have little idea of the abyss over which I stand when I cut myself loose from the church; of the obloquy, scorn, abuse and lies I shall have to meet, whichever way I turn."

"I will assist you to the full extent of my power," replied Kensett. "Zeldalyn is an heiress, and from gratitude will assist you. I will arrange to have you go direct to her home. Once out of the convent, I will do the outside work, and you, having the freedom of the convent, must carry out that part."

"I will go to the convent tonight, and trust Providence may thrust some means in my way."

"Do not trust in Providence, my friend. She is well enough if you rely on yourself, but a poor stick to lean heavily on."

"I will come at this time tomorrow; until then, adieu."

Kensett sat looking intently at the face of Zeldalyn on the canvas. "I am in no mood to paint today," he said, and continued gazing. The eyes returned his glances, and the lips seemingly moved as though they would speak. "Yes, yes, dear child," he said, "I will free you, and being free, you shall not know whom your deliverer is—no—not until I hear from those lips the words which will make my life bright or shadowed." He arose and kissed the white forehead on the canvas.

CHAPTER XII.

The following day Frantz visited the convent. The superior opened the door of her apartment when he gave the signal, and bade him cordially welcome. "Has Sister Eudocia yet finished her meditations?" inquired Frantz. "I regret, Father, that she has not. On the contrary, she has determined to prolong them the entire week. I attempted to persuade her from it, but she was firm, as she said her sins grew on her as she counted them over. A purer sister is not in this convent, or one needing penance less."

"A dark frown gathered on the brow of the priest, but he gained self-control, feeling the necessity of well acting his part. If successful he would be avenged. "A good sister truly she is," replied the priest, "and one whose confessions are of such small sins I say to her: 'Do not afflict them on me.'"

"Ah! you are partial to the sister," exclaimed the superior gaily. "You need not blush; I have seen it, and you have not treated me well! You have left me with the bishop, whom you well know I detest, and have been cold and heartless to me!"

"I regret if I have offended," suavely replied Frantz, still acting his part. "I will atone in the future. When I find the bishop here I will remain until he goes."

"You mock me. You arrogate superior zeal over us all, and you are an example; you are what the priests ought to be, but are not."

The superior was summoned. A visitor—someone, I presume, wishing to see a daughter; I must wait on them, and frame an excuse why they cannot see her. Wait, and I will soon return."

She remained a long time, and Frantz grew restless. This interview was only for an excuse for being there, and he desired it over. He arose and began walking round and round the room. Then his eyes glanced along the walls. A small bunch of keys hung on a hook by the side of the dressing-case. He saw them every time he passed them, but their significance did not dawn on him, until at last he stopped short before them. "Keys," he said to himself. "The cells have keys—perhaps these are the ones!" The thought flashed upon his mind, and as quickly he transferred them to his pocket. If they opened the cell doors, then a grave difficulty was overcome, for how he should open the doors had sorely troubled him.

The result of the interview between Frantz and Kensett may be briefly stated. The former was to liberate the sisters, and conduct them to the street where Kensett was to have a carriage in readiness. Just beyond the gardener's house, before mentioned, were several vacant lots, and an enormous bill-board stretched in front of one of them. The streets were poorly lighted, and a carriage drawn up behind this would be well concealed from a passer-by. Here was to be the rendezvous. The hour fixed was eleven, or as near as practical. Frantz explained that it was to be a gala night for the sisters and the priests. He would be compelled to await the hour when he could best carry out his enterprise.

"You cannot assist me within; rather you would surely bring detection. There is a secret signal to the police, and there is not a policeman in the city that is not a Catholic. I, as a priest, might escape, but you would be certain of detection. You will be of more valuable service outside. Have everything certain, and do not go away, even till morning. This promise me," and he took hold of Kensett's hand, and his eyes moistened: "I may fail. If I do, you will probably never hear of me. I shall be blotted out, and the lime-vault under the convent will receive me, as it has so many others. Promise me that you will immediately attempt that in which I have failed."

"You have no occasion to exact the promise, for I will do it. If I resort to my earlier scheme of riot, and then I will make a clean sweep, not leave one brick in those accursed walls!"

Thus was it arranged, and the two departed to their respective tasks. Frantz repaired at one o'clock to the convent, and as he passed the entrance

CHAPTER XIII.

"The same to you, Father, though your face shows unrest like all of us."

"I am walking it off," he replied. "Come, we will walk together." Taking her arm they walked several times up and down, when the nun declared herself completely wearied, and sat down on a stool. "Now rest you, sister," said Frantz. "I bid you good-by."

He went again down the passage, which made a turn before reaching the stairway, usually taken by the priests in going and coming. When he came to the stairway he paused, glanced around him and seeing no one rapidly descended. Again scrutinizing the far-reaching expanses of the cellar and listening, he again proceeded with cautious steps. He had nearly gained the cells when a sound reached his ears. It was a sister after a basket of vegetables stored there. She was stooping over filling her basket when full she would turn and come directly toward him. There was not a crevice in the wall to conceal him, and retreat was impossible. He threw himself on the ground, and his dark robes and the shadow in that dim light well concealed him, and the sister passed by. He arose and crept to the cells. The first was Zeldalyn's. He tried one of the keys. It would not turn the bolt. He tried another and another. He trembled as he selected the fourth. There were only two more. If it did not unlock the door, could he force it open? The jambs were solid blocks of stone, the doors of iron, opening inward, shutting against the stone casing, so that there were no crevices for the insertion of wedge, lever or saw. To force open the doors could not be done without discovery. He tried the next key. It was easily inserted. It turned the bolt; he could open the door! He turned back the bolt and removed the key. He must speak to her, but the risk was too great if the door was unfastened. He moved to Eudocia's door and tried the keys again. "Oh! my time has come," exclaimed the prisoner, "I am ready."

"Eudocia!" called Frantz in a low voice. "Who speaks?" she cried eagerly. "I, Frantz; my darling, I have come at last."

"Am I to go now?" "Not now, not until tomorrow night. Have good heart, and be ready to do absolutely as I tell you. Dare you trust me?"

"Dare? Yes, to the end of the world!" "I must not tarry. Should I be seen here it would be ruin."

He tried another key, it fitted well; the bolt turned, but he did not open the door. "Good-by, dear one," he said. "Be patient, and hopeful!"

He called at the aperture in Zeldalyn's door. She answered as one awaking from a dream: "Father, yes, dear Father, I am coming." She was dreaming that she was a child and her father had called her from her couch at the breakfast hour.

He called again. "Oh God! It was a dream," she moaned. "And now they come not with my loathsome bread, but to lead me out to that threatened punishment!"

"Zeldalyn, it is Frantz, your friend, who comes to tell you that tomorrow you and Eudocia will be delivered."

"Before God, do you speak the truth? Are we to be free?" "Believe me. Be prepared and pray for strength."

He waited not for reply but walked across to the stairway, down the passage and out into the street, meeting no one. He must inform Kensett of what he had done, and perfect their plans.

CHAPTER XIV.

"The superior returned as they jingled into the depths of his pocket. Did she hear? If so, she well concealed the fact, for she said with a smile: 'Ah! ha! Talk of woman's vanity, when you are admiring yourself before the mirror!'"

"There might be worse occupation." "That is true as the word of a priest," was the happy reply. "You must excuse me today; I have much work on my hands, the sick to visit, and my lecture to prepare. I will come again tomorrow."

"And stay until the evening, for all the priests, even the bishop will be here, and a supper is to be furnished, a real supper of the world. For the good bishop says it is unjust for the devil to have all the good things of life and the saints none at all."

Disgust came over the face of Frantz. It was then for this he had sacrificed all he held dear, all that is valuable to a right-thinking human being. For this Eudocia had suffered!

Bear up, brave heart, a little longer—you will go down to the depths, or to the heights, sooner than you anticipate. He went to the sitting-room, and bowing to the sisters, gave them pleasant words, which from him were as gleams of sunshine. He wished to appear on a tour of general supervision, that no one would suspect his purpose. Passing out again into the hall, he walked down the passage leading to the cellar. "I must try these keys, and know if they fit the locks. I will steal to the door so noiselessly that not even Eudocia or Zeldalyn shall hear. I will not disturb them." As he came to the stairway he met an old nun on guard. "May the saints preserve you sister," he said.

"The same to you, Father, though your face shows unrest like all of us."

"I am walking it off," he replied. "Come, we will walk together." Taking her arm they walked several times up and down, when the nun declared herself completely wearied, and sat down on a stool. "Now rest you, sister," said Frantz. "I bid you good-by."

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Twenty-Four Years Ago.

In the course of an interesting sketch, Bishop Newman gives the following striking picture of early days: "From the general conference of 1868, held in Chicago, fifty of us came to Omaha for an excursion on the Union Pacific rail road to Laramie, as far as the road was then completed. Onward we went; day after day we rode along the Platte over the virgin prairies. Indians and immigrants, antelopes and buffaloes, prairie dogs and prairie chickens attracted our attention. At nightfall we reached Laramie, a cluster of tents. The next morning, Laramie was not; during the night the tents were folded and moved five miles beyond to the end of a new section just completed." The great Overland Road stands in its completeness today the most delightful route for tourists in this country.

Sensational Scene in a Church.

PHILADELPHIA, Pa., May 1.—The congregation of St. Paul's Roman Catholic church Burlington, N. J., was greatly excited this morning when Rev. Father Treacy read one of his parishioners from the edifice at the point of a revolver. The cause which led to the remarkable and almost tragic scene was the attention being paid by Chas. Massey, a Protestant, to pretty Nellie Gaynor, 18 years old and a daughter of Mathew Gaynor, a member of Father Treacy's church. The Gaynor residence being near the priest's house, the Rev. Father Treacy noted with displeasure the intimacy of the couple. The priest finally interviewed the father of the girl and told him that Massey's visits should cease or he must consider his church relations severed. This morning when Mr. Gaynor entered the church he found his pew locked against him. While in the act of prayer Father Treacy rushed down the aisle and ordered Gaynor from the church. The latter refused to leave the building, and the priest, now thoroughly infuriated, hastened to the chancel and grasping a revolver threatened his life unless he left the church at once. Gaynor fearing he would be killed beat a retreat, closely followed by the angry priest.—Globe-Democrat.

Have You Read

Sights and scenes in Colorado, Sights and scenes in Idaho and Montana, Sights and scenes in Utah, Sights and scenes in California, Sights and scenes in Oregon and Washington, Sights and scenes in Alaska? This is a set of six books, beautifully illustrated, full of story and legend, and as valuable information for the tourist, and are given away to all members of the conference. They may be procured at the Union Pacific Bureau of Information at the Millard hotel, and McCague Building, or at the city ticket office, 1802 Farnam St., Harry P. Deuel, agent. You should take your watch for repairs to John Rudd, 305 N. 16th St. All work guaranteed. Do you want to borrow money? Apply to the Mutual Investment Co., 1604 Farnam St.