

THE NUN.

An Episode of Convent Life.

(Translated from the French by Rev. M. J. F. D'Almeida, S. J.)

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECLUSE.—Continued.

The rest of the letter contained a short and touching recital of the writer's life.

The letter confirmed what Pauline had said already of the family of Clarisse; for the reader has, doubtless, already conjectured that it was the brother of this unhappy young girl who had taken this means of communicating with her.

"We were twins; we slept in the same couch and we resembled each other so fully that a stranger could with difficulty tell us apart. It seemed as though Divine Providence had brought us into the world together to show that the difference in religious belief of the parents ought not to separate us.

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A flash of her natural gaiety crossed her features, where a profound sadness was painted.

"But Clarisse will have her letter," said she, "though I live on water and lentils for a month. Let us place the letter in a recess where, be it one or the other, we may be able to improve the first opportunity; and if we do not find a chance, if we are not able to deceive our Argus, we have not profited anything by our sojourn in this house."

"But, my sister," said I, "who are those whom we plan to deceive except our spiritual guides and superiors? And how will these ruses advance our salvation? If those sins are only venial, to how many years of purgatory will they condemn us! Though they teach us that the Lord, whose spouses we are, will preserve us from hell fire, He will leave us a long time in the flames of purgatory to purge us from venial sins, and deceptions are nothing less."

I described the horrors of purgatory to Pauline, who responded: "Alas! that it should be so!" She sighed deeply "But there remains to us one consolation, our superiors, who by their severity have trained us to acts of deception, incur a great risk of suffering with us; for they ought to know, if their hearts were not stone—which I sometimes doubt—that when they refuse place for natural sentiments, hypocrisy takes possession of us. So be it; poor Clarisse shall have her brother's letter."

It was not in my power to resist my ardent friend, and Pauline would allow nothing to hinder her in her desire to give the letter to Clarisse, though many days must elapse before the propitious moment should arrive.

But one morning, after the midnight service, having observed that Madame had left open the door which led to her apartments, she came into my cell, took the letter and concealed it, saying to me that in the morning she would tell me of her success or defeat. She succeeded; she glided away into the obscurity to the door where she believed Clarisse was imprisoned, and assuring herself, though the enterprise was hazardous, that she was not mistaken, she slipped the letter under the door and returned to her cell.

I was able only to rejoice from the bottom of my heart at her success though I really felt unhappy to deceive thus our superiors. All peace was banished from my heart; I feared that every moment I should be discovered, and the confession that I then considered as a duty was a net spread under my feet. But it was impossible to declare to Father Joachim what I had done for Clarisse, though I was continually apprehensive lest the sacred confessor should discover what I guarded in my heart.

At length, one day, when I was extremely troubled in my heart as to the necessity that I saw of hiding from my confessor the affair of the letter, I took up unintentionally the Theological Catechism of the Jesuits, and I read with pleasure in the chapter on confession the following question and answer:

"Q. Is confession necessary to salvation?" "A. Yes, if the sins are mortal: as to venial sins one is not obliged to confess them."

"Deception," said I to myself, "is not mortal sin; then it is not my duty to confess it! But if I do not confess it," said I, "I will not receive absolution for it and I shall be punished."

So I reasoned to myself, becoming each day more unhappy because the contradictory system upon which I leaned was not able to give me peace.

Though matters followed their ordinary routine in the house after Clarisse had received her letter by the zeal of Pauline, the interest that I had expressed for this poor sister, joined to some rumor of severe treatment which had spread through the house, caused the superiors to judge it necessary to tranquilize the spirit of discontent, because the French were becoming everywhere more violent and the times less sure. Hence, after dinner, at the hour when we were assembled as usual in the large hall to give an account of our readings, we were surprised to find there the confessor with the abbess.

I have not yet described Father Joachim. He was a man of some years, little in stature, red-checked, brown-haired, and grey eyes without a sparkle. He wore a black cowl, and his hands were extraordinarily pale and corpse-like; but he knew his business, and the superior could not have desired any one more adapted to all the political arrangements of the house.

"I understood at once, in seeing the confessor with Madame, that he was not there without some motive, and Pauline gave me a glance full of fear. We took our ordinary places; the abbess said a few words, making allusion to that which had occurred at the midnight service when poor Clarisse was taken ill. She spoke to the novices with a gentleness and suavity that impressed me; she said that young and inexperienced as we were, it was very possible that we did not comprehend her manner of action toward her well-beloved and unhappy Clarisse, that even after the sweet and resigned expression of this sister, we might be led to doubt the influence of the demon. She said, that having consulted the

reverend father then present, he had consented to forgive this sister and to bring her into the presence of all the family that she might submit to a proof: if she passed triumphantly through this proof, she will be considered cured; if she does not endure it, this will prove to certain sisters, less submissive than others, that the demon had actually taken hold of the unhappy girl.

The father then spoke; he promised that the proof should be so easy that nobody could disapprove, and that in addition, any of the sisters there might submit to it, in order to render the ceremony less painful to the unfortunate Clarisse.

All this had an open and frank appearance; hence the language was generally approved. Then the abbess ordered the windows closed, lighted candles and placed them on the table, and a cross and a bowl of holy water before them.

Mother Ursula went to find Sister Clarisse; she appeared soon after with the same sweet and firm expression that had always seemed so remarkable in so young a person.

A deathlike silence reigned in the hall; the abbess trembled visibly; the father was equally agitated, for his countenance became corpse-like. Clarisse had entered and advanced toward the table, doubtless forgetting the order which had been given her to approach the abbess; but she was commanded to stop in the center of the room.

All at once the priest showered her with holy water, blowing vehemently against her, he ordered the demon to depart, and exorcised him in the name of the holy virgin, the holy cross and all the saints of Paradise.

It was natural that Clarisse should tremble under the sudden aspersion and the cries of the horrible voice which resounded through the hall. Doubtless they intended and hoped for this result, for they took good care that it should not pass unnoticed. The priest did not fail to indicate it as a sign of the terrible influence of the demon over the unfortunate girl. Then he joined his hands, lifted them toward heaven and gave himself to every form of contortion as he ejaculated an appeal for prayer; instantly each one knelt and prostrated herself upon the floor. Clarisse alone remained standing, her arms crossed upon her breast and her eyes fixed upon the floor. She did not tremble when the aspersion of holy water were administered to her.

Then commenced the vehement prayers and invectives of Father Joachim, accompanied with signs of the cross, salutations and new aspersions. His efforts succeeded, each other with such rapidity that the operator was obliged to stop a moment to recover his breath and wipe away the perspiration from his face.

During this pause the abbess commanded us to arise, and we remained standing while the confessor appeared to be occupied with the cross which he upon the table; for some time he pressed it to his lips, then murmuring a prayer he laid it down; then turned toward the abbess he said:

"My daughter, you are witness before the tribunal of God that I have combated by prayer as one ought on similar occasions, according to the order of the Catholic, apostolic and Roman church, of which Jesus Christ is the invisible head and the pope is the visible head upon earth, and outside of which there is no salvation.

"You have seen how up to this time, I have been deceived in my expectation by the demon who dwells in the heart of our miserable sister; so, for fear that some remain incredulous respecting my words, I desire to submit this soul to a test that every rational mind will consider unobjectionable. This is what I propose:

"That each person present approach the table, and dipping her fingers into the holy water, she touch her lips with a holy adoration for this sacred emblem! If the afflicted sister is able to undergo this test we can have confidence that our prayers have been granted, and that our Mere de Misericorde is ready to receive her child in arms."

The abbess expressed her assent, and descending from her dais, was the first to submit to the test. She was followed by the sisters. When we had all passed, we regarded with anxiety poor Clarisse who remained standing in the same place.

"My daughter," said the priest, "advance; you are invited to turn from death to life; from the dominion of Satan to that of Him whom you have first loved, your Spouse and Redeemer; to the society of your spiritual mother and your unhappy and afflicted sisters. We invite you to turn: from death, from hell, and from despair, and to return to peace, joy, and hope!"

While he spoke our eyes were fixed upon the pale countenance of Clarisse with an interest that I cannot describe. The priest seemed to have exhausted his rhetoric, and he looked at the abbess as if he would ask her what he ought to do; but she remained silent, and a convulsive movement agitated the features of Annunziata.

"Ought I to pronounce the anathema maramatha of the church?" angrily cried the priest.

"No, no," cried Pauline, "no, no, my father! Listen yet a moment!" And she pushed to the front, drawing me with her, and we both knelt down before him.

"Oh! spare this unhappy girl! Pray again! Who knows if pity will not be given her?"

This scene moved many of us, and the poor girl let fall her tears.

(To be Continued.)

Traitor at Sidney.

SIDNEY, Neb., April 11, 1894.—EDITOR AMERICAN: W. J. H. Traynor, of Detroit, Mich., gave an address here last night on the general subject, "Romanism vs. Americanism."

He spoke for more than two hours to as thoughtful, intelligent an audience as ever assembled in this town.

Only members of the American Protective Association and their invited American protestant guests were admitted to the hall. Perfect order prevailed throughout the evening and frequent applause greeted the speaker.

Many members of the Independent Order of Good Templars were present, they having given up the use of their hall for the evening that the patriotic address might be given.

The address throughout was thoughtful and logical, and intended for those who do their own thinking, and who are susceptible to conviction through argument. No Romanists were invited to attend the meeting.

The speaker quoted frequently from various members of the Roman hierarchy, the canon law and encyclicals of the pope, and proved conclusively that a good Romanist is a Romanist first, and an American citizen second. This he proved to be true of Romanists should they believe only in the spiritual power of the pope, leaving out of question the temporal.

He referred to John Wesley as having held the same views, and these I find he has expressed in the following convincing language: "With persecution I have nothing to do. Let there be as boundless a freedom in religion as any man can conceive. But this does not touch the point; I will set religion, true or false, utterly out of the question. Suppose the Bible, if you please, to be a fable, and the Koran to be the word of God. I consider not whether the Romish religion be true or false; I build nothing on the one or the other supposition. Therefore, away with all your common-places declamations about intolerance and persecution in religion. Suppose every word of Pope Pius's creed to be true; suppose the council of Trent to have been infallible; yet I insist upon it, that no government, not Roman Catholic, ought to tolerate men of the Roman Catholic persuasion.

I prove this by a plain argument; let him answer it who can. That no Roman Catholic does or can give security for his allegiance or peaceable behavior I prove thus: It is a Roman Catholic maxim, established, not by private men, but by a council, that no faith is to be kept with heretics. This has been openly avowed by the council of Constance; but it was never openly disclaimed. Whether private persons avow or disavow it, it is a fixed maxim of the Church of Rome. But as long as it is so, it is plain that the members of that church can give no reasonable security to any government of their allegiance or peaceable behavior. Therefore, they ought not to be tolerated by any government, Protestant, Mohammedan or Pagan. You may say, Nay, but they will take an oath of allegiance. True, five hundred oaths; but the maxim, "no faith to be kept with the heretics," sweeps them all away as a spider's web. So that still, no governments that are not Roman Catholics can have any security of their allegiance.

Again, those who acknowledge the spiritual power of the pope can give no security of their allegiance to any government; but all Roman Catholics acknowledge this; therefore they can give no security for their allegiance.

The power of granting pardons for all sins, past, present, and to come, is, and has been for many centuries, one branch of his spiritual power. But those who acknowledge him to have this spiritual power, can give no security for their allegiance, since they believe the pope can pardon rebellion, high treason, and all other sins whatsoever.

The power of dispensing with any promise, oath, or vow, is another branch of the spiritual power of the pope, and all who acknowledge his spiritual power must acknowledge this. But whoever acknowledges the dispensing power of the pope can give no security of his allegiance to any government. Oaths and promises are none; they are light as air; a dispensation makes them all null and void.

Nay, not only the pope, but even a priest has power to pardon sins. This is an essential doctrine of the church of Rome. But they that acknowledge this cannot possibly give any security for their allegiance to any government; oaths are no security at all; for the priest can pardon both perjury and high treason.

Setting, then, religion aside, it is plain that upon principles of reason, no government ought to tolerate men who cannot give any security to that government for their allegiance and

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