

FOR THE AMERICAN

THE NUN.

An Episode of Convent Life.

(Translated from the French by Rev. M. J. P. Thibault, A. M.)

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECLUSE.—Continued.

It was a part of the role of the superior to show compassion. I did not know her then, and may God forgive me, if I calumniate her! But she pleaded the cause that Pauline had sustained. Therefore, Father Joachim renewed his violent orisons until the arches resounded anew with his cries; then checking himself, all bathed in perspiration, he seemed to have suddenly discovered a new expedient: taking the sacred symbol, he approached Clarisse and offered it to her with prayers, but he arranged in such a way that the cross fell as from the sister's hand and was broken in pieces on the floor.

I shall never forget the impression that the falling cross produced, nor the horror manifested by many of the sisters. They were as desirous of crying "anathema" as the priest himself. He did not fail to improve the opportunity; after having pronounced the terrible sentence which devoted poor Clarisse to eternal damnation, he commanded the abbess to remove the sacrilegious person to a secret place until it should be known what was the pleasure of the ecclesiastical authorities. Mother Ursula received the order to remove her and we were called to vespers. The evil one triumphed; the enemies of Clarisse rejoiced. Many of the eyes that looked upon her that night never looked upon her again, and they never will until that solemn and inevitable hour when the secrets of all will be revealed.

The scene which I have described filled our minds with terror. All the terrors of superstition were let loose among us. Clarisse had disappeared; if they had permitted her to live in the midst of the family we would have shunned her as a pestilence. One heart only seemed to sympathize with her; one only tried to pierce the mystery which seemed to envelope her. I am sorry to say that it was not my heart nor myself. On the contrary, that which I considered an impley in the young nun filled me with such a horror that I did not try to reason upon the subject, or that they might have acted falsely toward the poor creature. It was my ardent friend Pauline who, alone in the house, pitied Clarisse. I confess with sadness, that when she suggested the idea that there had been something ambiguous in the falling of the cross, I rejected the thought as an abominable impley. Although during the time I did not participate in these conjectures, I was far from betraying my friend. She trusted me and told me her apprehensions. After a while she scattered my prejudices and led me to adopt her views. We both recognized that they had deceived us in respect to Clarisse, and that the truth differed completely from what they had led us to think. But this conviction came upon us only by degrees.

But the fright caused by the anathema was quieted, and the sad uniformity of our life had recovered its course, when one night, a sister, returning from the midnight service and crossing the gallery to return to her cell whose door was next to a window which opened upon the cemetery, saw a white figure seated at the foot of the cross that was placed among the tombs. She thought her eyes had deceived her but she looked again, and she solemnly declared that she had seen the figure run among the tombs and vanish like a mist.

The sister who had this adventure was one of the least intelligent of the community, but she was neither slow nor gentle in communicating to us her fright. Her cries drew all of us into the gallery, and here the abbess profited by the incident to give us her opinion: "I blame myself severely," said she, "that I have not sooner appointed a day of fasting to expiate the terrible sin of dropping the cross. Until that shall be done," said she, "how can we hope that this holy house may be delivered from evil spirits and demons of hell, and that our lady will smile again upon us?"

Saying these words, she took the arm of the assistant mother and departed—after having given orders that each of us retire to our cell and there meditate upon our miserable condition. As we believed that evil spirit had much power upon earth, it was not very agreeable for us to think that because of Clarisse, the evil spirits were loosed in our midst and able to torment us at their pleasure, and still less, that no means could be found to appease those invisible powers we had offended.

CHAPTER V.

THE VISIT OF THE BISHOP.

The next morning we learned that our bishop was on his way to St. Siffren. It was decided to ask him to exercise the house and to preside at a solemn ceremony which was fixed for the day of his arrival. They displayed much zeal and activity in the preparations, and it was then that I learned

for the first time of the subterranean part of the convent which in the ancient buildings of this class was often more extensive and complicated than the exterior building.

But why were these obscure chambers constructed, if it was not to hide some things too evil for the light? And further, how comes it that the workmen were ignorant of their existence?

To this question it has been replied that the Free Masons have been obliged in the beginning to build these secret chambers under the fortresses and convents that they might serve as places of refuge to members of their order who were the objects of persecution; soon after, superstition made them dens of cruelty.

Be that as it may, the subterranean passages of our house were very extensive. The principal entrance—there were many secret entrances—was by an iron grate, concealed by a wooden door. A narrow staircase by many turned led to a circular chamber on a level with the foundation; from there another stairway ended in the subterranean chambers.

At the foot of this last flight was a large chapel, paved with flag-stones; at the end of which was a sort of screen of Carrara marble, perfectly white and transparent, and arranged in such a way that everything that took place on the other side could be seen by those behind the screen. Beyond this was the special chapel of Notre Dame de Misericorde, and its altar was entirely covered with relics and offerings of immense value. This sanctuary was made wholly of that yellow marble which is called Spanish brocatelle. The roof of the chapel formed a dome encrusted with a glass mosaic representing Him of whom we are forbidden to make any image.

When the chapel was illuminated it was impossible almost to describe its brilliancy. The altar was made of lapis-lazuli with cornishes of gold; upon it was a statue of the virgin, and at her feet an image of our patroness, kneeling, in the uniform of our order, presenting a burning heart to the Beau seigneur. Upon the heart were engraved these words: "Given to Thee." We were not able to see this splendid sanctuary through the screen. We were employed in making artificial flowers to ornament the altar and finish a footstool that must be presented to the bishop.

But I must yet describe the subterranean chambers—these sad and somber regions that never saw the light of day. Many doors opened into the chapel; from it a narrow corridor led to other chambers, apparently very extensive.

The day before the arrival of the bishop, Pauline and I having been sent with some flowers to the sacristy who prepared the altar, we succeeded in escaping all observation and commenced the exploration of the long subterranean galleries. They were vaulted; their walls dripped with moisture. The corridor had many side doors, but all were closed and had the appearance of not having been opened for many years. We noticed many narrow staircases which led from the corridor; near one of these we found a little piece of black serge having the appearance of having been torn violently away from another piece by being stepped upon.

Pauline picked it up; it was a bit of a nun's veil. She looked at it attentively, and it seemed to be to us a warning not to advance farther into these mysterious abodes. We made haste to retrace our steps, but our hearts were full of anguish.

Arriving at a recess where no one could hear us, Pauline said to me: "You have turned a deaf ear, Angelique, whenever I have expressed my fears concerning the treatment that has been visited upon Clarisse; you will hear me now, if I tell you that they treat her with barbarity? What has she done to incur their hatred? Oh! Angelique, Angelique! What would I not give to be able to speak with her, if not for more than five minutes! Oh, the poor unhappy creature! This bit belonged, I am sure, to her veil. By what violence was it torn away? In what dungeon is she enclosed? I have heard tell of nuns buried alive and walled into their cells, and I know that Rome is not so far distant, that a person, accused of any offence, may not be taken to the inquisition secretly and surely."

"Hush!" I cried with a shudder. "Pauline, do not speak of such horrors! But if Clarisse is truly impious?"

"If," responded Pauline, "if alas! were she still worse, is torture able to change her?"

"You talk in enigmas," I replied, "what do you wish to say?"

"Nothing," she responded, "but in every way she is worthy of compassion. In the bottom of my heart, I believe that Father Joachim had a larger part in the dropping of the cross than poor Clarisse herself."

"Mere de Misericorde," I exclaimed. "Do you believe it?"

She suddenly placed her hand upon my lips, and said: "I tell you they are pure green; if you say to the contrary, I will say that you have gone with your eyes closed since you were born. I refer to Sister Annunziata."

I understood who was behind me. "The olive leaves, are they not clear green?" said she. "Angelique wishes to maintain that they have an extraordinary tint."

Hearing Annunziata's name I turned suddenly, but I continued the discussion commenced by Pauline, and for that time, I believe we succeeded in completely deceiving the sister.

The next day was a fast day; we were allowed to take no food until noon. They gave us then a soup of beans, and we were obliged to fast until after the ceremony which would be held at sunset. The subterranean chapel was illuminated. The bishop was introduced with his vicar and Father Joachim, and we filed into the unique chapel singing one of our most solemn litanies. To describe again the ceremonies would be a tedious repetition. It is necessary to take part to know how empty they are and void of interest. It was only in the subterranean chapel that the service differed from others. What Pauline had said of Clarisse weighed heavily upon my heart; and when the bishop told us that the horrible offence of which the apostate sister was guilty, would cause the destruction of the house, and bring centuries of torment upon each one of us, unless we were delivered by prayer and fasting from all participation in this great fault, I was seized with such a lively feeling of his falsehood that if I had dared, I would have torn off my veil and returned into the world, at the risk of undergoing a punishment still more severe than the one he threatened us. I began to doubt the justice of my spiritual guides, and to have, though still dim, a feeble ray of light penetrating my deep darkness.

When the ceremony was terminated, we left the subterranean chapel and went to the refectory where we had a light lunch; after that they sent us to our cells. I was not yet undressed when a light rap upon my door caused me to tremble. Having gently opened the door I saw Pauline. She beckoned me and preceded me to the end of the gallery. She stopped at the subterranean gallery; the iron door had been unbarred since the ceremony and the interior was opened. Pauline told me that she had seen Sister Annunziata enter there some moments previously and that she had heard the sliding of a bolt but did not assure herself that the door had been closed. Pointing with her finger to the door she said:

"Would you like to follow Annunziata and see what she does? It is now or never that we shall be able to find out what they have done with Clarisse; if they see us we will say that, having seen the open door, we had formed the resolution of passing the night at the foot of the altar of Notre Dame de Misericorde."

I did not fail to offer objections; but the courageous Pauline destroyed them one after another, and I accompanied her to the bottom of the staircase. We had scarcely reached the bottom when the brilliant lights of the sanctuary shone in our eyes. But there was outside the screen sufficient obscurity to prevent our being seen. Hearing many voices in the interior, we came as near as possible and concealed ourselves in an obscure niche where we were able to hear and see everything.

I have often asked myself since how two young girls had the courage to venture in this manner, but we were possessed by a feeling of curiosity relative to the fate of Clarisse of whom we were sure they were talking in council. The persons who composed it were the bishop, seated at the left of the altar and apparently absorbed in his reflections; the bishop's vicar, a member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), the mother superior, Mother Ursula and Sister Annunziata. The bishop spoke first.

"It is a difficult affair," said he; "I ought to have been told of this at my last visit."

"We hoped," replied Madame, "that she would repent; we hesitated to resort to extreme measures."

"When a member is infected with gangrene, my daughter," responded the bishop, "no idea of false compassion should prevent us from amputating it. You have seriously sinned against our holy mother church. But bring the accused hither; I wish to speak with her myself."

He returned to his meditations. At a sigh from the abbess, Annunziata and Mother Ursula left the chapel; we saw them depart without hearing the sound of any door.

The bishop's vicar began to talk. I learned his history some time later. He was a Jesuit of Livourne and confessor of the bishop's household. He also occupied a position in the inquisition. He was a terrible man to look at, though his features were remarkably handsome; his face calm and cultured, and his voice sonorous and melodious. I called him the inquisitor because I was then ignorant of his name. It appeared that the bishop had asked his advice, for he responded:

"I would counsel her transportation to Rome, where the affair would be promptly arranged, if I did not fear that during her journey she might be rescued. The popular passions are so excited against all arbitrary methods. The thing ought then, if possible, to end in this house. The matter could

be settled for her here; these walls are sufficiently thick."

Saying these words he walked around with a scrutinizing look which made us draw farther into our somber hiding place.

(To be Continued.)

ONLY THE STARS AND STRIPES.

Mayor Stuart of Philadelphia Refuses to Allow any Other Flag to Float Over Independence Hall.

Mayor Edwin S. Stuart declined to permit the Universal Peace Union to float its flag over Independence hall in place of the stars and stripes, when it held a celebration to commemorate the signing of the arbitration treaty at Washington April 15, 1890. Mayor Stuart said, "I have always refused to allow any flag other than the American flag to be raised over Independence hall, and must decline to grant your request. No flag, excepting our national ensign, has ever been permitted to fly over that building, and I feel that you and your union, upon reflection, can but agree with me that under no circumstance whatever should the American flag, which floats there throughout the entire year, be permitted to be hauled down to be replaced by any other, no matter what that other may be or represents."

The Canada Revue has denounced in most vigorous language the attempts of the Roman clergy to crush that journal into silence. It says of the recent address presented by the clergy to Archbishop Fabre:

"The revolt of the clergy against civil institutions is becoming accentuated. There was, the other day, at the Archbishop's palace, a real council of war under pretence of the feast of Archbishop Fabre. Our poor clergy, who cannot pay taxes, presented His Grace with a fine purse containing five hundred fine gold pounds in order to allow them to fight the just demands of the Canada Revue, deprived of its property through an inquisition and arbitrary measure. The occasion was a good one to give full vent to all the rancor and hatred of those holy souls against the audacious people who claim the liberty of speaking freely." As to the charge that it was the enemy of the Catholic faith, the Revue says: "Thus it is well understood. The parts are changed. We are the enemy, the tormentor, the rapine commenced. Ravening wolves penetrated into our houses and soiled our homes; monstrous beings perverted not only the mind, but also the bodies of our children; rapacious beings snatch away the bread from our mouths to satisfy their hunger for gold and silver; ferocious dominators put their foot on our throat to gratify their appetite for domination and authority. We protest and raise our head. Then we are called enemies. Yes, we are the enemies of adultery, of crime, of robbery, of autocracy; but remember that we are not alone. Our followers are legion, and we will disarm only when the honor of our families is secure, the virtue of our children safe, our daily bread protected, our liberty guaranteed. Until then, no truce!"

BUTTE CITY, Mont., April 10, 1894.—Editor THE AMERICAN: Hurrah for the A. P. A. I am pleased to inform you of our glorious sweeping victory here for school trustees. Three friends of our noble order, the A. P. A., were elected without any opposition, as the pope's minions did not dare to put up any of their kind against them, so our three men each polled 5,136 good, loyal and true votes. In yesterday's city election our noble American boys elected six out of eight men, and every one of the six are true and loyal Americans, and not a blow was struck. The pope and his slaves were put on the back seats, and there to stay until called upon, on the day when the American people will order them to make a move.

This is all for this time. I close hoping you will be pleased to hear such a favorable report. Yours, A. P. A.

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During March, windiest and wettest of months, the Burlington "Denver Limited" reached Denver on time to the second, 28 out of 31 times.

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The members of the A. P. A. charged with being engaged in the election day affray in Kansas City are in jail. They were attacked by thugs because they belonged to that association. The trial will demonstrate whether or not it is an offense punishable with death for men to belong to an organization which claims that its only purpose is to uphold American principles.—N. Y. Mail and Express, April 6.

BUSINESS men will find THE AMERICAN to be among the best advertising mediums. Thousands are sold on the streets every week.

Advertisement for an ORGAN for \$43. It features an image of an upright piano and text describing its quality and price. The text says: 'You can buy this beautiful ORGAN for \$43. If you buy it now.' It also mentions 'The Old Reliable Marchal & Smith Piano Co., ESTABLISHED 1858, 235 EAST 21ST STREET, NEW YORK.'

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MONTREAL, April 12.—The hearing of the famous case of the Canada Revue against Archbishop Fabre, which has been proceeding for several days, was concluded before Judge Doherty in the supreme court today. Mr. Filiatrault, the proprietor of the paper, was examined and submitted a comparative statement of the financial position of the Canada Revue, before and after the interdiction. At the time of the interdiction the circulation varied from 3,000 to 4,000. The cost per week was \$152; the sale in Montreal was about \$115, besides about six or seven hundred city subscribers at \$5 a year; an average of four hundred papers was sold weekly in Quebec, about 50 in Ottawa, 75 in St. Hyacinthe, and about 20 in Sorol; the net revenue on sales was about \$10,000 or \$11,000 a year. Then the advertisements were worth \$2,000, less commissions. The result of the interdiction was complete ruin to such an extent as to be reduced now to a circulation of 900 or 1,000, and for eighteen months they had been forced to beg to keep up the work. The decrease had been greater at certain periods, according to the influences used. The wives of some of the subscribers had returned their husband's papers, and postmasters had taken upon themselves to return it without being authorized to do so. At the time of the interdiction witness said the members of the clergy had taken vigorous measures to prevent the circulation of the paper, going from house to house and persuading people to return the paper. Witness' two little sons were now employed in delivering the paper at the few stores which receive it. Attempts had been made to prevent them, but they had not been successful. Judgement in the case was reserved in deliberation.

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