

FOR THE AMERICAN:

## THE NUN.

## An Episode of Convent Life.

Translated from the French by Rev. M. J. P. Thing, A. M.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SUFFERINGS OF CLARISSA.

"Our time was like one long night, interrupted only by the noise of the door when Mother Ursula came to bring our food. But though I was not able to distinguish between day and night, I could see all that poor Agnes did, always occupied with caring for me with trembling hands, during which she employed all the arguments, as she believed, to convince me. I also saw her pale face, so emaciated by her suffering, and her look so sweet which would never see the light of the sun again! Ah! how my heart became attached to her! I gave her my entire confidence; I even went so far as to avow the possession of a Bible; and when I was sufficiently recovered, I took upon myself the task of showing her the truths of the precious volume, which I read to her for hours at a time. With what joy we drank together at the source of living waters! I did not know then how short a time the poor woman had to live, but I was possessed to tell her all that I had in my heart. And how promptly God blessed my efforts! Poor Agnes had never before seen a Bible. Not one drop of the pure water of heaven had moistened her lips. But though she was so ignorant, her soul was like a fertile garden, ready to receive all the seed, and from which the Word would bring forth an hundred-fold.

"It is true that, carried away by fear, she had done some years previously all that her spiritual tyrants had wished; but this poor creature was none the less an example of the power of grace, who had been regenerated and sanctified, even before my feeble instructions had come to her. In a short time she became able to reject again all the false doctrines with which Father Joachim had imbued her, and to fix her hope upon Jesus, and upon Jesus alone. She saw that her salvation was accomplished, and that hell had no longer any dominion over her. The peace of God penetrated her heart; so, in spite of her many sufferings, many a time have I heard her repeat these words: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men!'

"But in proportion as the peace of heaven entered her soul, her poor body weakened. In a short time she was unable to leave her couch. But these times were not unhappy, for her sufferings were not to be compared with the joy which possessed her soul. Dear old lady! Many times I seated myself by her side, now to read the word to her by the feeble light of the lamp, then to talk intimately and pray with her. I saw death approaching her with gentle and measured steps but robbed of all his terrors. Yes, I shall always give thanks to the Lord for all my sufferings [if I dare thus designate my light affliction—] if I have been able to serve to the good of that sweet and patient creature. Ah! in these things the ways of God have been marvelous! In allowing me to be bruised by iniquities, He had in view the deliverance of one of His dear children.

"Yet my poor heart could not surmount all her fears; it was for me a terrible thought that I should soon be entirely alone, and at the same time to be a witness of the agony of the poor nun. I feared also that I should be a long time shut up with her remains. Ah! how feeble was my faith! But God pardoned me. He is full of compassion and I thank Him for enabling me to conceal my fears from Agnes, and leading me always to be a tender daughter to such a mother, who often blessed God for having given her such a friend in her moments of need.

"And so passed—I do not know how many days, without any interruption save the daily visits of Mother Ursula. Our prison was far remote from the subterranean chapel, and yet we could hear the service that they held there when the bishop made his visit. The singing of the litanies aroused Agnes, who cried:

"Are we already in glory? Is it not the voice of angels? Is the bitterness of death already past?"

"At these questions I burst into tears, and embracing her prayed her to be quiet. What tenderness I felt for her! But they came to conduct me to the bishop, and all my fear returned then lest they should not return me to Agnes. But when the bishop ordered them to conduct me back to my prison, I was scarcely able to contain the joy of my heart.

"It seemed that they had not yet come to any decision with respect to me, for they left me several days with Agnes. Then they placed me in a cell under the porch where many of the sisters could see me, but without my daring to speak to them. There I had many interviews with the priest Joachim and the Inquisitor.

"These murderers would have been pleased to make an end of me by violence; but they did not dare to do it, though it was impossible, said the In-

quisitor at one time, to let me go after having allowed me to know Agnes. My recantation was not then the object of their desire, but it was made the beginning. But still I do not know to what extremities they would have gone if certain circumstances had not provoked the people against the convents.

"The plague had appeared, and it was during its ravages that Agnes died. For three days it was evident to me that she was approaching her end, but her last hour was hastened by her formal refusal to receive the last sacraments that Priest Joachim offered her, as also the energy with which she told the confessor that she placed her faith in the merits of Christ alone. God sustained her to the end, in spite of the anathema pronounced against her by the priest, who, in departing from the dungeon, shook the dust from his feet.

"What a moment was that of the departure of the priest, of the abbess, of Mother Ursula, and of Annunziata, who accompanied him! The door of iron closed, and I found myself alone with the dying. I seated myself by her pillow, I took her in my arms, and I allowed my tears to fall upon her pale face. I heard her say to me in a husky voice:

"Happy child, fear nothing. A little while and all will be well. I bless God for thee, Clarissa, my child!"

"She slept; but little by little her head became heavier, and as I did not hear her respiration I believed that she had passed away.

"From that moment I am ignorant of what passed. I do not know whether the terrible visions that I had then were those of my own brain or the iniquitous work of my persecutors. I think rather, since my arrival in this house of peace where I am now, that my reason wandered.

"I cannot say at what time they bore poor Agnes away and placed her in the cell under the porch. The fresh air having revived her, the abbess pressed her again to receive the sacraments. She refused them, and her death was a faithful seal of her life, to the great horror of the abbess. In spite of all this they buried her with all the idolatrous ceremonies of the house. I learned all these details from Mother Genefrido, who told me of them under the seal of secrecy.

"I was allowed to see the funeral of Agnes through a grated window. It was held in the night with torches, and they told me that it was I that was buried, and that I was dead to the world; that Pauline and Angelique thought that I was buried, and that they had told Mme. Verani not to trouble herself any farther concerning me (for they had learned that my two friends had had some communications with that lady). They said that all my friends believed me dead; 'yes,' said they, 'your mother and your brother believe it also.'

"I cannot say how I passed my time up to the hour of deliverance. I was in the shadows and not able to compute the time; as to the rest, I was almost undisturbed. I slept; if I was hungry I ate a little food and lay down again. But my God did not abandon me. No desire of revenge entered my heart. I thought myself in the home and park of my father, admiring the hills, the brooks and the smiling landscapes. Sometimes everything was covered with horrible visions and clouds which surrounded me; at other times I imagined that since the death of Agnes I was in a long night whose morning would scatter the shadows, and then I confounded the sweet image of my father with that which my heart formed of my glorious Saviour, or it was that of Agnes which was mixed with that of my grandfather of whom I have scarcely any remembrance.

"It was after a succession of frightful visions that all at once a great noise made me tremble. I raised myself upon my bed; the door of the prison opened, a ray of light penetrated and two men appeared—they were the priests Julian and Joachim. The latter seized me by the sleeve and drew me through many corridors whose doors were closed and bolted behind us. I do not know all that the men spoke about during this long passage, only I heard the words 'Inquisition,' 'auto-da-fe.'

"Finally we came to a narrow, winding staircase which led up to the surface of the earth. Then I wrenched myself from the grasp of the priest, and falling at his feet I implored his pity, not knowing that there is no pity in the breast of a servant of the papal and antichristian church. He repulsed me with his foot, when I seized the hem of his robe; then seizing me again, he mounted the stairway, followed by the Jesuit who carried a torch.

"It is here, my friends, that the pity of my heavenly Father showed itself in all His glory. May every mouth praise and magnify His grace!"

## CHAPTER XI.

## CONCLUSION.

Such was the recital of our dear Clarissa to whom I give her true name, Emily. One is able to comprehend that in hearing such a history, Pauline and I resolved to quit a church which for so many centuries has maintained its authority by the use of such means.

In commencing this recital, I had thought to terminate it in a few pages, but I see that I have enlarged considerably. I ought to give a few words rela-

tive to the persons who have figured in it. Many years have rolled away since then; the days of our youth have fled, and we have left the amiable families who had received us.

But I must say a word concerning the alliance between M. Beaumont and William d'Ivanhois. It commenced at Geneva, where Edward was on his journey to St. Siffren to see his sister. William decided to accompany him. Arriving at St. Siffren, they learned that a cousin of Mme. Verani had entered a convent. All three felt themselves united by the same cause; each of them had a friend bound by the same vows under the same roof! Edward and William never had any other design in their visit to St. Siffren than to see their friends through the grate. But the destruction of many convents in the Sardinian states made them conceive of other hopes. From its first inception the project was crowned with a complete success.

Emily had comforted her heart by her recitals. Pauline and I had resolved that we would leave the apostate church; our spirits were calmed, and our dear Emily was able soon after to regain a robust health, and assume the gentle gaiety that a sincere piety always produces.

It was in the winter. Madame d'Ivanhois was unwilling to consent to our departure for the present, and I acquiesced all the more readily since I was without a home. M. Verani had placed the remnant of my fortune in a bank at Geneva, from whence it had been passed, with the advice of M. Beaumont, to England. I was then independent; but I had no dwelling-place, except in the heart of my dear Pauline. Mme. Verani was, like myself, a wanderer upon the earth.

Yet I was not uneasy in the sweet retreat where Mme. d'Ivanhois wished me to pass the winter. M. and Mme. Verani soon joined us. We formed a sufficiently large society for the daily study of the Bible, and the venerable pastor of the village came to explain to us with as much of piety as of profound learning.

I would like to enter upon the details of the arguments which were used by William and his parents with Pauline to lead her to renounce the vows that she had pronounced of William as her husband. What especially convinced her was that she had pronounced these vows contrary to the authority of the Scriptures, and especially to please man; and that in consequence those vows, contrary to the will of the Lord, were no longer able to bind her.

In fact, our Lord has never required his disciples to reject the primitive order of leaving father and mother and cleaving to the wife. On the other hand, the forbidding to marry is one of the marks of a church subjected to voluntary worship rather than the character of a church conducted by divine law.

My dear Pauline became the wife of William. Almost all the population of the valley assisted at the marriage. Were I to live many years I should never forget that day. It was the last day of the year. The country was covered with an abundant snow which formed a magnificent contrast to the rocks and pines under which the summit of the Alps reared themselves like glittering pyramids of silver. A bright sun embellished the scene. The happy couple advanced toward the church to the sounds of merry bells and in the midst of cries of joy from the people who, from time to time, sang a song asking the benediction of God upon the primitive institution of marriage, terrestrial image, but blessed, of the union of the soul with the Lord, and not at all of the ideal marriage of a mortal with a celestial spouse outside of a visible union in the world. How then this biblical marriage differed from the profession of a religious, in the bosom of the Romish church!

It is the entire church which is espoused to the Lamb, so she will not enter into that glorious union until the nations are assembled before Him. Then only will she be espoused, pure and chaste, as the apostle says, to Him.

The landscapes were covered with heather, and during the march the crowd increased, so that when the church was reached, it was filled in a moment. All faces shone with joy, for those poor people were happy with the choice that William had made. The oldest had known him since his infancy; they hoped that he and his wife would treat their children with as much kindness as his parents had treated them. The benevolence of Pauline and her affable manners encouraged this hope; she looked upon them all and sighed, and I can say that these sighs did not promise more than she performed, for, with divine aid, she was a benediction to that little valley, a solitary, a little world in itself, lost in the midst of the mountains.

I was struck with the simplicity of the ceremony, and especially with the benediction pronounced by the worthy pastor. It was impossible to compare the simple and spiritual service of the Reformed church with that Romish worship where the form is everything, and where the most profound mysteries are presented in vain and blasphemous ceremonies.

We returned to the house in procession by the same route. While we were at the church the sun had risen

above the summits of the hills, and he poured out his rays upon the valley, illuminating every snow-laden branch and making to glitter like diamonds the azure peaks of the glaciers. The good people of the valley took it as a favorable omen, and they poured forth another song for the occasion. The songs did not cease until the party entered the house, where we served our humble friends with a repast which Mme. d'Ivanhois had prepared for them.

The venerable pastor rejoined us in the parlor. He talked to us of the divine goodness which manifested itself in providing for our terrestrial needs, but still more in that ineffable work by which the redemption of a believer is assured aside from his own works. Then speaking of salvation, he explained it, making us understand something of its profoundness, and we all wept with feelings of joy and gratitude. Never have I seen a similar scene. We dismissed these good people, and were glad to take some rest. The sun went down while we were at the table, and we terminated the day in talking about the marvelous goodness of God, particularly manifested toward us poor religieuses. This marriage naturally separated me from Pauline and drew me to Emily; and in the first days of spring, when the melting snow inundated the roads, I decided to accompany her to England.

It was in the month of April that we separated from this dear family. In order to avoid France we passed by Geneva and Mayence; then we descended the Rhine to Holland, and from there we embarked on England. There was only one incident connected with this journey worthy of repeating. We were stopping over Sunday in a little German village where we were not a little embarrassed, for none of us spoke German. Our embarrassment increased and the landlord went to find an interpreter, making us understand that a few days before, a poor woman had arrived, a stranger, whose misery prevented her from following her journey to Mayence where she was to find friends. Judge our surprise, when in that unfortunate creature we recognized Mother Genefrido, clothed as a peasant and reduced to most extreme poverty.

Oh, it was a happy moment! I fell into her arms; Emily did the same, at the risk of frightening the poor old religieuse—for she suspected as little as I the substitution of Agnes for Clarissa in the funeral ceremonies. At the same time the tribulations of that worthy woman came to an end; she accompanied us to England and lived with us until her death.

She was unable to tell us much about the events happening at St. Siffren after our flight; she had escaped under the cover of obscurity and tumult, and had hidden in the cabin of the peasant who had cared for the little Ella Rose. From there, after having changed her costume, she had begged her way, even to the place where we encountered her. Her destination was the home of Mme. Barthelmy, at Mayence. She said that she spent the winter at Geneva, where she had found much kindness and benevolence.

It was a month from the time that we left Pauline until we arrived in England. From London we went without loss of time to the home of M. Beaumont in Devon county. We found a modest mansion agreeably situated in a park and surrounded with charming hills. With the view of the verdure and the accidents of the land, a Piedmontese herself would scarcely miss her native mountains. Everything was so appropriate, so fresh, so comfortable that we exclaimed: "We are in paradise!" The English people enjoy an unlimited liberty of conscience.

In the same parish, behind the park, was a charming villa, little, but elegant and gracious. It was inhabited by a man to whom, under God, M. Beaumont owed his elevated views of christianity. Though he was a little older than Edward, he had been his companion in study. Later M. Beaumont had given him the spiritual direction of his parish. Perhaps you would like his portrait; it would be difficult for me to trace it, since he has nothing in him which would attract attention, unless it be perhaps a humility and an extreme gentleness, united to the most agreeable manners. His whole manner breathed that elegance which gave an exquisite delicacy of sentiment. It seemed to me that true piety manifested itself particularly in him and made him one of the purest, simplest and most amiable beings I had ever seen. Not being permitted to reveal his name, I will give him that of Theophilus, whose well known signification applied to him as fully as to every person who loves God.

A sadness was very naturally over him the first time we saw him. He had lately accompanied the remains of a dearly loved young sister to the tomb. She had lived with him until the time of her death. Her name was Lucy. He still wore emblems of mourning. The return of his friend was to him a great consolation, and M. Beaumont pressed him to spend all the time with us that he could spare from the duties of his parish. This completed the circle of our acquaintances. Happy together, we shunned other new acquaintances.

In the midst of us Mother Genefrido was perfectly happy. She had an apartment to herself. In a little painted cabinet she had erected a kind of altar; a cross was suspended from the wall, a figure of wax represented the virgin, and she had ornamented the cabinet with artificial flowers. She kept the cabinet so well closed that I had been in the house some weeks before I saw the interior.

This discovery produced upon me a disagreeable impression. I related what I had seen to Emily and her brother. They thought that we had better ignore this circumstance and use every opportunity to engage the venerable mother in the reading of the Bible, and to hear the teachings of the true faith. But, fearing that she would talk with the domestics, Emily and I resolved to wait upon her and aid her in her toilet, which thing attached her to us more and more.

Yet during her life which followed and up to her death she never received an entire conviction that Christ is all in all, and that the church of Rome is an apostate church, but some years after, having a chance to glance into the cabinet, I saw that the cross, image, and flowers had disappeared, and that nothing remained upon the altar save a cushion, upon which rested an open Bible. There was a folding stool before the table.

And now how shall I terminate my recital? I, who have sworn the veil and who was formerly a cloistered nun—dare I say that the year of my novitiate was not terminated when I became the happy wife of Edward Beaumont? Some months after my marriage, my good sister Emily married Theophilus. Many years have passed since, and now I am the mother of two sons, larger than myself, and three daughters, Emily, Pauline and Agnes. In a few weeks, if God permits it, my son will marry his cousin Agnes, in whom have been renewed all the personal and spiritual graces of her amiable mother. They await the arrival of Pauline and William, who are now on their way with three of their children. The two oldest are boys, and the youngest a girl, bearing my name.

I pause. God grant that the facts

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