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LIFE IN THE CLOISTER; OR, FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

By the Author of 'The World and the Cloister,' &c., &c., &c.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

Now it so happened that Mrs. Burke was by no means an unkind, unamiable woman,—quite the reverse. It would be very hard to imagine that the owner of that fair, good-tempered face, always beaming with a kindly smile, was otherwise than a good, well-intentioned woman. Old enough, too, was she for the discharge of her duties as a stepmother, for Mr. Burke had net given pain to his daughters by putting over them a woman but little older than themselves, for the lady had passed her fortieth year: but, if the fact must be spoken, she was simply obnoxious because she stood in the place of the beloved mother whom these girls with their strong Irish affections and warm impulsive natures had idolized in life, and whose memory they revered in death. We take it to be a thankless office that assumed by the new Mrs. Burke; yet there were many things which should have operated in her favor, and insured for her a happier home, in so far, that by age she was calculated to act in the place of a mother to those motherless girls. By nature she was far too kind to give pain to any human thing; nor was her union with Mr. Burke marked by any of those circumstances which often fatally militate against domestic happiness; she had a comfortable competency of her own bequeathed her by her deceased husband; her daughter was also provided for; and from her second marriage no young family had sprung to draw the affections of the father from the children of the first. How mischievous are these second marriages, when the children of the first have already passed their girlhood. Mrs. Burke worthy, good, amiable as she was, had made to herself an unhappy home. She had vainly tried to sound the depth of her stepdaughters' hearts, to see if there was no unawakened cord which would respond to the affection she had been prepared to bestow upon them,—if the hearts of those girls, amiable, warm-hearted as they were, would always remain as a sealed book to her. But the good lady was at length perforce obliged to abandon the task. Outwardly, she was treated with a cold civility, painful enough to the sensitive woman who yearned for affection which never perhaps might be hers. No, never; for the two girls, Kathleen and Ellen,—the one nineteen, the other seventeen years old,—considered her in the light of an intruder, and nothing else. Her own daughter helped to aggravate the unkindly feeling that prevailed: for Minna's impetuous temper rose at the injustice, as she deemed it, which was exercised by the daughters of her stepfather towards a mother whom she dearly loved. Such was the aspect of things when the services of Marion were required for the two half-sisters as general instructress, and to teach painting to the elder daughter, who had passed some time at Canley. A very few days was sufficient to let Marion into the secret. You see, these very unreserved girls would of course each enlighten her on the subject, and Marion speedily found herself occupying that most painful of all positions, the confidant of a divided family. She guessed not, however, that her newly-made intimacy was to help much to heal the sore. Kathleen had a secret of her own, which was soon communicated to Marion. She was resolved to marry and have a home of her own, in which no stepmother's influence would be brought to bear. 'And will not you marry, Miss Craig?' asked the young lady. 'Oh how wretchedly dull your life must be with no companion but the poor old gentleman whom we saw when we called at Sandy Mount!' 'I am not dull, dear Miss Burke,' replied Marion, with a laugh. 'No one can be really whose time is occupied like my own.' 'But you have not replied to both my questions; do you not intend to marry?' 'I shall never marry,' was the reply, and the fair head drooped still lower over the sketch of her pupil, to which she was giving the last finishing touches. 'But when it shall please God to call my father to Himself, I shall, if considered worthy, become a nun amongst the Sisters of Notre Dame.' 'But, dear Miss Craig, your father is not so very old.' Suppose he were to live twenty years longer—you know people do live till they are ninety and upwards—what would you do then? you would be more than forty years old, wouldn't you? that would be rather old to go, would it not?' continued the catechist. Something like a shudder passed through the

frame of the devoted daughter as Kathleen rambled lightly on; it was but for one moment, as the thought flitted across her mind that her life might after all be always passed as now.—She quickly recovered herself, however, and replied— 'Yes, it would be rather old, Kathleen; and perhaps things might so turn out that, if I were obliged to live in the world for twenty long years, I might never go at all. But one must not look forward, for 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' There is nothing to be done but quietly to accomplish the work before us, and which for the time being reason and religion alone alike show us our work, and leave all the rest to our heavenly Father, for whilst we *prospere*, God oftentimes *disprospere*. ' Whilst Marion had been speaking thus, her head still bent over the drawing, and a tear trembled in her eye, Minna and Ellen, the young ladies whose feuds were neither few nor far between, were gazing at her intently; and the former exclaimed,— 'One of these days, I think I should like to go into a convent; nay, Ellen, you need not quiz me so, I am quite in earnest, I assure you; and who knows, perhaps you may enter the same novitiate with me. But I was going to ask you, Miss Craig, to tell me something of the early foundation of the Order of Notre Dame; Kathleen, you know, was not many months at Canley, and I cannot get anything out of her.' 'But our time is nearly up,' said Marion, glancing at the timepiece; 'what if you walk part of the way home with me when studies are over, and then I will gladly tell you the little that I know? Nay, I will ask Mrs. Burke to allow you all to spend the evening with me.' The invitation was gladly accepted; and, revived after their long walk by a refreshing cup of tea, Marion drew the girls around her, and commenced as follows:— 'I am going to tell you something about the Sisters of Notre Dame and their foundress, an account of which I read whilst in London. ' Julia Billiard, then, intimately known as Mother Julia, and foundress of the order, was born at Curvilly, near Compiegne, and was a young woman of rare merit, ardent zeal, and solid and enlightened virtue. She was born in the year 1751, and was the daughter of parents but poorly favored by the gifts of fortune; but from a very early age God had drawn to Himself in a special manner this child of benediction. ' At the age of seven years she used to assemble around her the children of the parish to teach them the Catechism, which she was already able to explain with a wonderful intelligence. ' The Cure of the parish failed not to notice the treasures hidden in this privileged one. He lavished on her every care. As she advanced in age, she advanced also in virtue; and God, who intended her to do great things for His glory, prepared her by willing that she should first pass through the crucible of tribulation. She became very ill; her malady withstood every remedy, and left her at the age of thirty years deprived of the use of both legs. She constantly suffered the greatest pain, and a violent contraction of the nerves of the jawbone took from her the possibility of speaking in an intelligible manner. The good cure, who had continued to direct her, brought her the holy communion daily; and Julia was fastened for twenty-two entire years to this bed of suffering, without the power of making a single step; and many ladies of position, brought by the venerable cure, came to seek from Julia examples of patience and resignation, and gave to her testimonies of their affectionate sympathy. But this tried soul was shortly to be deprived of these consolations, for the cure and the noble ladies were obliged to flee in order to escape the revolutionary persecution. ' No more sacraments; no more communions; no kind friends to comfort and console; and she now felt oppressed by the weight of her trials.— But God, who suffers us not to be tempted above our strength, shortly restored her to peace and happiness. Julia's reputation for piety caused her to be suspected by the revolutionary party, and they endeavored to seize upon her person in order to subject her to shameful outrage; but she passed by in the midst of them, hidden in the bottom of a carriage, without being perceived. ' This was in 1794; and one of the ladies who had been intimate with Julia had taken refuge at Amiens, and she she immediately wrote to her to persuade her to take up her abode in a small apartment in the Hotel Blin, in which she herself dwelt. ' Mademoiselle Marie Françoise Vicomtesse Blin de Bourdon, whom God designed to labor with Julia for the salvation of souls, had also passed through a stormy life. She had come forth from the prison in which she had been detained with her family, they having been condemned to perish on the scaffold, but were re-

stored to liberty at the moment of the fall of Robespierre; and she then resolved to renounce the world, and depriving herself of the advantages which her birth and fortune might have laid at her feet, she resolved to consecrate her whole life to prayer and works. ' Julia had no sooner been brought to Mademoiselle Blin, than the latter made it a point of duty to take care of the suffering invalid whom Heaven had sent to her, and lavished upon her the attentions of a sick-nurse. In spite of the little attraction attending this charitable office, seeing that she did not even understand the language of the sick person, it established between the two one of those holy and strong friendships, the bonds of which death itself can only break. ' About the same time Julia received one of those consolations which her soul was always eagerly longing for. A virtuous priest also came to reside with the Vicomtesse Blin. He said Mass in the invalid's chamber, gave her the holy communion daily, and presided at the religious exercises of many young persons who gathered themselves around Julia, giving to her the name of mother. The good priest was, however, sought after by the enemies of religion; and, in order to shelter himself from their domiciliary visits, he took refuge at Bethencourt, in a *chateau* belonging to two of the ladies who formed a portion of the society at the Hotel Blin.— ' Thither Mother Julia was removed, and Mademoiselle Blin de Bourdon resolved to follow her. ' They then undertook to teach young girls to read and write and knit, but still without thinking of consecrating themselves to the education of youth. The entire village soon became changed, and God crowned their first labors with success. But it was not till 1803 that they returned to Amiens. The Pere Varin, the Jesuit father from whose life I extract this little account, soon discovered the treasures of grace enclosed in this simple and generous soul; and, against all appearances, he believed her called to labor for the glory of God more than she had hitherto done. And when he communicated his thoughts to the humble invalid, she replied,— ' My father, how is it possible that this can be done? ' She had recovered, however, for some time the use of speech; but her sufferings were still very intense. ' It was, however, at this time, I fancy, that she received in the house to which she had withdrawn with Mademoiselle Blin some zealous young ladies who wished to devote themselves to the instruction of poor young girls. ' In 1804, Pere Varin gave them a little rule by way of trial; and on the 2d of February the first members of this society devoted themselves in the presence of blessed Sacrament, to the education of youth. ' About this time God granted to the lively faith of Mother Julia the cure of the paralysis under which she had so long suffered. ' In the October of the following year, the Vicomtesse and her friend, with two of their first associates, engaged themselves by vow to the work the thought of which God had inspired them with—this was the education of the middle class in towns and villages, still following merely the rule given them by the Pere Varin; and Julia then made overtures with Monsignor de Beaumont for the foundation of a house in Belgium. The prelate joyfully acceded, and she speedily prepared for the departure of their first colony. ' During her journey the foundress was called to Namur by the bishop of that place; and it was agreed that the following summer she should bring some sisters, in order to commence an establishment there. ' The foundation of Namur, of which Mademoiselle Blin was the first superioress, is the most important of all. From hence emerged, at a later date, those throngs of pious maidens who went forth to the deserts of America to give to the uncivilized female children, along with the bread to feed the body, the word of God to nourish the soul. ' As to Mother Julia, she was subjected to many painful trials—the bishop, and even Pere Varin himself, being prejudiced against her.— In the end, after trials and contradictions which I cannot enter into, the Bishop of Amiens regretted the line of conduct he had pursued, and loudly declaring that he had been mistaken, acknowledged her for superioress general of the order. The Sisters of Notre Dame were then established in various dioceses in France, and many foundations were established throughout Belgium. ' I have little more to tell you about Mother Julia, except that the excessive fear which the passage of foreign troops occasioned her in 1815, and the uneasiness she felt concerning some of her community who were in the very midst of the theatre of war, hastened her end; she died in the spring of the year 1816, her reputation being very great for virtue and prudence.'

' And have you nothing to tell us of the Vicomtesse Blin, who had so narrowly escaped the guillotine?' inquired Ellen. ' Yes,' replied Marion; 'she was chosen, by the unanimous voice of the sisterhood, to succeed her friend and spiritual mother; and she governed with great virtue and prudence until her death, which happened in 1838. She was, we are told, a model of wisdom, meekness, and firmness combined; and the order, under her government, made great progress. Since her death it has flourished more and more, bringing to every spot in which it has been established, the fruits of salvation which the Pere Varin had in view at the time of its foundation. It has extended not only through Belgium—in which there are more than fifty establishments—but also, as you are yourselves aware, to England and America; counting in England ten houses, and almost as many in America. I must also add that in 1844 the Institute of Notre Dame was approved by the highest authority in the Church, which confirmed its constitutions and its rules.' ' But, Miss Craig,' said the curious Ellen, 'I fancy I should like some more contemplative order; but just tell me a little about the rules, please.' ' How ridiculous you make yourself, Ellen! said her sister; 'the idea of your thinking of being a nun! I am sure Miss Craig must be quite tired talking so much.' ' Not I, Miss Burke,' said Marion. 'I am not soon tired of talking when I speak of the life led by my convent friends so I will tell you, my dear Ellen, that the principal aim of the Sisters of Notre Dame is the instruction of the poor; so that in every house of the order there is an establishment for them—either a poor-school, an orphanage, or, as in Belgium, a reformatory and hospital for the aged and infirm. Sometimes there is not merely one, but, as is the case in London, Manchester, and Liverpool, as many as eight or nine poor-schools under their care, to which the Sisters go two by two every morning; whilst others have boarding-schools for the children of the middle or higher classes, according to the locality. Namur is, I am told, a name dear to every Sister of Notre Dame, as it is there each one takes her first steps in the religious life, receives the habit, and pronounces her vows. Do you not then see, Ellen, that the life of the Sister of Notre Dame partakes both of the active and the contemplative? they hear mass, and have an hour's meditation every morning, and—' ' An hour's meditation!' broke in Minna; 'why, Miss Craig, that would never do for me. Why, I cannot give a quarter of an hour to anything of the sort, it is too hard for me.' ' Nonsense, Minna,' said Marion; 'there is nothing hard at all in it. Do you find it hard to think? are you not thinking all day long? Why then, should it be hard to reflect, only when we think of the happy eternity we all one day hope to enjoy? You see, however, there is more of the contemplative life than you appear to have bargained for. Do you think it would suit you?' Marion laughingly inquired; 'there is rather the more of the life of Mary than that of Martha in its practice, you see.' ' Well,' said Kathleen, 'it is to be hoped they will both choose the same noritate, Miss Craig, if they do take it into their heads to go into convents. I think Minna and Ellen should really go together, for their lives will be so peaceful, they will only know trial by name, unless they will make a little by disputing together, as they are constantly doing now.' ' My dear Miss Burke, I think you hold a very mistaken notion,' said Marion. 'As you have been a pensioner some few months at dear Canley, I should have thought you knew that the novitiate was not without its trials—some of them very rough ones for poor human nature.' ' I am persuaded there are none of them which I could not patiently bear, and come off triumphantly,' exclaimed Minna. ' Ah, my dear Minna,' said Marion, 'put in the saving clause, "with God's help." Who amongst us shall care to say thus much of our daily trials, when striving to live as good Christians in the world, let alone the hourly aiming at that higher state of the most exalted virtue and perfection itself, required of those who follow the life of a religious? for remember, my dear Minna, self-denial in all its branches must be practised. In what, think you, the novitiate would present the greatest difficulties to you?' ' Really, I can scarcely tell you, Miss Craig, unless it be that I always like to have my own way,' said Minna; 'and I suppose I should not often get it there, added to which I am dearly fond of being what you call idle; and I suppose the nuns would fill my hands with work. I should not relish either the one or the other very much at first, I daresay; still there is a holy quiet about a convent life which pleases and interests me, so much that I feel as if I could do battle with myself if I were allowed the chance.'

' Dearest Minna,' said Marion, taking the hand of her pupil within her own, 'much more is wanting to you than this attraction to the life you speak of merely for its holy quietude and peace; yet the sweet call given but to a few may be still happily vouchsafed to you. I cannot promise you that in one iota you will be allowed to follow the bent of that indomitable will of yours which I have seen you so glad to follow; or that, save at stated hours of recreation, you will not be compelled to work,—to work, Minna, either with head or hands. The real essence of a religious life consists in obedience, or the perfect renunciation of your own will; and an idle nun would be indeed an anomaly in the cloister, in which each sister is expected to work according to her talent for the weal of the whole community; but bear in mind Minna, that as, to use a familiar proverb, 'Rome was not built in a day,' so our faults and imperfections are not cured in an hour. It is as necessary to be virtuous with one's self in the practice of virtue as in any of the daily occurrences of life. All are not saints, you know, when they enter convents.' ' No: I should think not, indeed,' said Ellen. ' Why, Minna, do you not remember Margaret and Emma Gisborne? I'm sure they were not paragons of perfection, nor did they set an over good example to any one else; they were passionate, self-willed girls. I am quite certain Minna and myself, though we have a quarrel sometimes, are perfect angels compared to them. Margaret came back before she had been two months in the Loretto Convent, to which she had begged hard to be sent; and Emma, well, Emma stayed, and became a professed nun amongst the Benedictine nuns in some English Convent. So, I suppose, she cured herself of her bad habits.' ' You need not suppose it, Ellen, but may take it for granted,' said Marion. 'I have no doubt, were you now in the company of the young lady you speak of, you would find her the very reverse of what she once was; for, depend upon it, her self will and pride would be the failings on which the first onslaught would be made; they must, I will not say have eradicated them, perhaps, but at least they must have been subdued, or most assuredly she could never have been admitted to her religious profession. So if the young lady went full of faults to the good Benedictines, let us be quite certain that she has long ere this laid many of her failings at the foot of the cross, or you would have seen her tack as well as her sister. Now I hope I have not frightened you,' she added, 'with my narration of what is required of a young person before she can be admitted to the religious state.' ' Not I, dear Miss Craig,' exclaimed Minna; 'I only wish I were half as patient and meek and humble as I know you to be, then—?' ' Hush, love, you must not talk in that way,' said Marion, placing her finger on her lips.— ' Silly Minna, how do you know how much I may feel within me that I have to overcome?' ' Oh, nonsense, Miss Craig!' was the reply of Ellen. 'You know we have heard how rich Mr. Craig was, and now look at the change! I think you a perfect saint to walk through the wet and cold and never say a word; and bear with matchless patience your poor papa's imbecility, for you always have a smile on your face; and I think we have tried your patience often enough, and yet—?' ' Never so sorely as now, my dear girls,' said the poor young governess, starting up, her face covered with blushes. ' Go on, go on, Ellen,' said the mischievous Minna, 'it is only her humility makes her speak in that way.' The gentle Marion turned away as if she had not heard the last playful sally of her gay young friends; she tied on her bonnet in the adjoining room, in order to accompany them on their homeward way; then placed a comfortable supper before the querulous old gentleman, who drew her face down to his, stroked tenderly the golden curls which fell on his withered forehead, calling her his best and dearest daughter, and prayed that heaven's blessing might descend upon her head, and then exclaimed,— ' But where are you going my love? You are not going to leave me for long, Marion? Will you be back in ten minutes?' ' I shall not be away a bit more than an hour, papa; and Mrs. Murphy will look to you, lest you should want anything before my return,' said Marion. ' An hour! a whole hour! It is very long to be left alone, after you have been away from me the best part of the day,' murmured the old gentleman, in the same querulous tone. ' I cannot help it; you know I cannot help it,' she said, with a gesture of impatience, hurrying from the room as she spoke. Yet even as the words trembled on her lips, she reproached herself for want of patient forbearance. Her heart knew its own secret better than the young girls whose company she had so recently quitted.