

"I am well, but much engaged; go down, I will come presently."

"Yes!" she said, solemnly, when the retreating steps of Barbara no longer sounded upon her ear; "I have been in error; I see it now; I will no longer have many Gods, and now as I have done, before the shrines of saints, who have no power to answer prayer. Henceforth my only star shall be the heart—my God, a Spirit, which must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Away, ye vain idols!" she cried, suddenly snatching the crucifix from its niche, and a small ivory image of Madonna, before which, in humble prostration, she had uttered so many vows. "Ye shall deceive my soul no more."

Wrapping them in her white lace apron, she ran quickly down stairs into the servants' hall, where a bright fire was blazing upon the hearth. Here she found Mr. Vincent drying his wet garments, for the rain was still falling heavily, and most of the domestics gathered round the fire. Hurried on by the impulse of her feelings, and without pausing for a moment's reflection, Monica stepped upon the hearth, and cast the images into the heart of the blaze. A stifling cry of wrathful execration burst from the serving men, who in heart were all Catholics; and they drew back with pale cheeks and frowning brows, and scowled upon the daring act of the rash enthusiast, while a ray of joy kindled up the deep-seated eyes of Master Vincent, as he turned with an approving smile, and gazed in surprise upon her beaming face.

"The accursed witch!" muttered one of the servants, a more intelligent-looking man than his fellows. "May this impious act be visited upon her in her own flesh. As she has burnt the Son of God and put him to open shame, so may she burn hereafter in the flames of hell!"

Half-terrified at her own vehemence, Monica heard not the fearful anathema pronounced against her by her father's servant; and if she had heard, little emotion of fear or anger would it have awakened in that restless, impetuous heart. As the flames enveloped the images before which she had often prostrated herself in childish adoration, she turned an enquiring, hesitating glance, upon Master Vincent, which seemed to say: "Have I done right?" He read her meaning, and quickly answered:

"Right—quite right. The moment that an old usage, however sanctioned by custom, becomes sin in your eyes, cast it from you. It is not the image of the Saviour you have committed to the flames; for what sinner ever drew portrait of the living God, but a vile idol, which has usurped his place. I would that Laurence Wilde,

who even now reprobated your virtuous act, had courage to perform the like himself."

The man smiled disdainfully, and his stern grey eye fell upon Monica with such a glance of deadly, life-destroying hate, that it did not escape the observation of the chaplain. He made no comment upon what he saw, but presently took an opportunity of leading the young lady from the hall.

CHAPTER IV.

Monica no longer refused to accompany Sir Tulse to the parish church; and she even listened with attention and interest, to the eloquent, but rather lengthy sermons, of Hubert Vincent; but in religion, as well as on every other subject, she chose to think and decide for herself. Alas! for our poor neophyte, she had rejected the communion of her worshipped church, to fall into an error still more deadly. Instead of trusting to the Holy Spirit, and listening to the advice of Master Vincent, she trusted wholly to her own reason, and the weak scarcely formed judgment of sixteen; till the imposing, but fallacious doctrines of Arius, although unknown to her, were such as she received as gospel truth.

To disclaim original sin, to deny the actual deity of Christ, and to believe in the perfectibility of human nature, appeared to her, not only rational, but absolutely necessary to salvation. She viewed with compassion, almost bordering upon contempt, the jarring creeds of different sects, which even at that time were forming throughout the kingdom. All forms and ceremonies appeared to her as utterly absurd and useless, and she discarded all prayers, but those which sprang spontaneously to her lips, as the inspiration of the moment gave them birth. There were days when the language of her mind spoke only in prayer—deep, fervent, simple prayer; and weeks again would elapse, without a single address or supplication to the throne of grace. This desultory worship did not produce upon her life and actions those salutary and beneficial changes which a purer creed and more constant mode of worship never fails to effect; and with all her aspirations to the throne of God, and her intense desire to become good and holy, she was humbled and disappointed at the little progress she made.

Shocked at the fatal doctrines which she had so warmly adopted, and which she openly avowed, Master Vincent employed all the powers of his fine mind, to win her from the edge of the fearful precipice on which she stood. Tears, prayers, entreaties, all were vain. Monica was