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THE DOUBLE SACRIFICE, OR THE PONTIFICAL ZOUAVES. A TALE OF CASTELFIDARDO.

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CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED.

'Martin,' she said, 'behave like a brave man. Do you hear? Take care of Joseph, and if Victor Morren comes, as, sooner or later, I doubt not he will, take care of him, too; his mother has always been good to us. Here,' she continued, giving him the little bag, 'give this to the Pope of Rome for your mother; he will want it more than I shall; but mind, boy, that you are to touch none of it by the way.— There are five-and-twenty francs, the half of which I received yesterday from Mevrouw Morren, and the rest from another good soul. It will not, I hope, be my last gift, for I get more than I want.'

The train appeared in the distance, the bell rang, and the Schrambeek band poured forth, as a parting greeting, Magazari's popular song, the 'Hymn to Pio Nono.'

A last fervent embrace between mother and son, sister and brother; hats were waved joyfully over every head, and a mighty cry of exultation and affection arose from the crowd of villagers.

'Long live the Pontiff-King! Long live his soldiers!'

'Farewell! farewell!' greeted them from every mouth.

And the two volunteers were carried swiftly out of sight.

What had become of Victor all this time? Late on the day of Joseph's departure, Barbara, Mynheer Morren's old servant, stood crying in the kitchen with her apron thrown over her head.

She suddenly uncovered her face to look at the clock.

'Great heavens!' she sobbed. 'Yet only half an hour, and to think I shall lose him forever—I who thought never to part from my young master but on my death-bed. I must now bid him farewell—I, who brought him up, fostered, and cared for him as my own child. I, whom he often called his second mother. Poor Victor, who would ever have thought it! and the good woman began to weep again.'

What had befallen, then, in the house of Mynheer Morren? Was Victor already wrestling with death under the weight of his sorrow, that Barbara speaks so mournfully of a last farewell? No; the young man since yesterday had been like a new creature, full of calm joy.

His mother had striven so long; they had both prayed so fervently to God, that Mynheer Morren had at last given way. The wounded pride of the old philosopher had gained the victory over his obstinacy. There was nothing which Morren could less endure than to be convicted of inconsistency. His wife had made use of this side of his character, and insisted continually upon the contradiction between his action and his principles. He had always laid it down as a maxim that every one should be left free to follow his own convictions, and he always accounted him a coward who shrank from carrying them out, at whatever cost. And now he was denying this permission to Victor, and there by not only preventing him from following the convictions of his conscience, but acting in direct contradiction to his own principles.

Mynheer Morren's paternal love struggled long with the stern fortitude of the philosopher; but the conflict ended in the victory of proud reason, the god of the free thinker, assisted, truth to tell, by his paternal love itself; for Mynheer Morren could not view without anxiety the visible decline of Victor's health, which seemed to point to the mournful issue he had anticipated.

'Well,' he said at last, impatiently, 'Victor is of age; he is therefore his own master. I leave him free to do what he wills, but my approval I will never give.'

Mevrouw Morren was with her son, making known to him the long-desired permission, when her husband sent word to her that he was going to leave town for a few days, to avoid further leave-taking; that Victor, if he liked, might come to bid him farewell, but it must be in few words.

The young man hastened at once into his father's room.

'Thanks, father, thanks,' he cried as he entered it.

'No thanks to me,' Morren interrupted him harshly; 'I deserve reproaches, rather. Child, cried he more softly, and with a tear in his eye,

'Child, who art causing me such sorrow, and whom I yet love so well, farewell! May you be happy, and may I soon see you again!'

'Ah, father, I hope so. God will grant it to us. And, father, I am very sure that a time will come when you will bless the hour when you gave me leave to go; and then you will know how dearly I love you, father.'

Victor kissed the hand which Morren held out to him, and a scalding tear fell upon it.

This was too much for the father's heart.— Mynheer Morren fell upon his son's neck, and they mingled their tears in a fervent embrace.

This unexpected change took place the evening before Joseph's departure. Victor had not time to reach Schrambeek so as to accompany his friends on their journey; but he reckoned upon being able to reach Brussels before they could leave it, and had agreed with his mother to start by the latest train for the capital.

Meanwhile the mother and son sat alone together, enjoying the painful pleasure of a last interview.

Mevrouw Morren's eye rested with motherly love upon her child.

She seemed to be absorbed in thought.

The hour had at last arrived at which the offering which had been required of her by God was to be made, and she had not shed a single tear. 'Many a pious mother,' writes the late Cardinal Wiseman in his 'Fabiola,' 'has devoted her infant son from his cradle to the holiest and noblest state that earth possesses; has prayed and longed to see him grow up to be, first a spotless Levite, and then a holy priest at the Altar; and has watched each growing inclination and tried to bend gently the tender thought toward the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts. And if this was an only child, as Samuel was to Anna, that dedication of what was dearest to her keener affection may justly be considered as an act of maternal heroism. What then must be said of ancient matrons, Felicitas, Symphorosa, or the unnamed mother of the Machabees, who gave up, or offered up their children, not one, but many, yea all, to be victims, whole burnt, rather than priests to God?'

What then must be said, may I ask also, of the Christian mothers of our day, who, like Mevrouw Morren, generously offer their children, perhaps an only son, for the cause of the Lord, courageously and gladly sacrificing their young lives for the service of the Church, undeterred by the terror of a painful martyrdom under the fire of the barbarous foe?

Ah, they know well that their children are pledges bestowed on them by God; they know that the Angels watch with the laurel-crown over the battle field of the dying soldier; they know that the crown of their child in Heaven will be the mother's crown also.

Thoughts like these were busy in Mevrouw Morren's heart, and gave her strength to bear the hard and bitter wrench of the coming separation.

It was intensely painful to Victor's heart also to say farewell; but with him as with his mother, the steadfastness of faith overcame the weakness of human love.

Let not men deceive themselves; they are not unfeeling, the heroic mothers, the noble-hearted sons, who freely offer all that is dearest to them, for God and for his Church. No; the voice of human love for parents or for children, is never louder, never tenderer, than in the heart where it is mingled with that of the love of God, to rise together as one mighty cry to Heaven.

The mother and son had sat for some time in silence, when Victor broke it at last with the words—

'Mother, it is time. We must part.'

A shudder passed over the mother's frame, but she overcame her emotion, and answered, with a voice which was calm, though full of love—

'Well, my child, my dearest Victor, the will of God be done. Let us part, like the martyrs of the early ages, full of truth and strength.— Here, my boy, is a last keepsake from your mother.'

And she gave him her photograph, on the back of which she had written the following words of saintly heroism:

'Go, my child; obey the call of God. May the Angels watch over you. Fear nothing but God and sin. Pray for your mother, who blesses you from the very bottom of her heart; she will pray for you and follow you everywhere with her thoughts, her heart, and her love.'

'Your mother and your friend, ROSA MORREN.'

'Oh, Mary! I entrust my dearest child to you. Keep him pure and innocent. Beg your Divine Son to give him back to us, if it be His holy will. But may my son ever remember the words of Queen Blanche to her child, and may he die rather than ever grievously offend God.'

'Thanks, thanks, mother,' cried Victor; 'I will never forget this counsel. I will keep the

precious gift as a holy thing next to my heart, which may defend me from the bullets of the Church's enemies, till, when I come back again, if it please God, I lay it in your hands once more as a memorial of my holy crusade.'

'God grant it, Victor,' sobbed Mevrouw Morren; 'but, oh, my child, shall I ever see you again?'

'Let us hope, mother. The Lord is Almighty, and He watches over His own. Disturb not yourself with groundless fears for the future.'

'No, my child: far from me be any such weakness, any shadow of despair. I have told you, Victor, God will, I trust, give me strength to account myself happy to be the mother of a martyr. No, my son, my view shall not be bounded by the narrow horizon of this short life; it shall pierce through the realms of eternal light to find you once more before the throne of God.'

'And now, dear mother,' said Victor, as he knelt before her, 'your blessing in your own name and in the name of my father.'

A tear sprang into his eye at the thought of that absent father, who had found no blessing in his unbelief.

Mevrouw Morren raised her eyes to heaven, as if to ask strength for her words, and then said, in a voice of deep emotion—

'May the Lord bless you, my dearest child, even as your mother blesses you. Fight manfully God's battle for His holy Church, and unchangeable in the love of your Redeemer, true and unchangeable even unto death. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

And the noble-hearted mother made the sign of salvation over the bright forehead of her son.

'Amen,' sobbed Victor, and threw himself into his mother's arms to pour forth the last utterances of nature to her bosom.

They left the room and went to the kitchen. Barbara knew by their entrance that the hour of departure had come, and burst into a fresh flood of tears.

'Come, good Barbara,' said Victor in a tone which he hoped to make as encouraging as possible; 'you must not cry at such a happy moment.'

'Not cry?' said the poor old woman. 'Oh, if I were as heroic as you are, who can make such a sacrifice joyfully! But, oh! dear child I am weak and old; Victor, I shall not have you by me when I am on my death-bed!'

'Barbara, you must not be so desponding. How do you know that I shall not come back? I hope, indeed, that God will soon send us victory, and then I shall soon come back to you and my father and mother, and we shall all live happily together again. Barbara, you would not have me stay at home when so many brave children of the Church are hastening to Rome?'

'No, oh, no, Victor: but it is so hard to part.'

'It will be all the more joyful to meet again. But I must go. Farewell, Barbara; pray with my mother for me, and pray also for my father, as I shall pray for him and you.'

'Oh, surely, surely, child of my love,' sobbed Barbara. 'Farewell, Victor, farewell!' and she hurried out of the kitchen to give free vent to her tears in the garden.

Victor's traveling bag, ready packed by Barbara, was now hanging on his arm. Mevrouw Morren followed her beloved child to the door, gave him one more embrace, and the young man left the house with the words:

'Farewell, dear mother, till our next happy meeting.'

'Farewell, dear son!' was her answer; 'farewell in the grace of God!'

Her suppressed emotion choked all further utterance.

No sooner had Victor vanished at the corner of the street after kissing his hand to her for the last time, than she hastened to her room, and, before the image of the Immaculate Mother Maid, she relieved her overburdened heart by a flood of tears and an earnest entreaty for grace to persevere in her sacrifice faithfully to the end.

When Victor reached the railway station, he was recognized by two passers-by.

'Ernest,' enquired the one, 'is not that Victor Morren?'

'Indeed it is,' was the reply, 'and he is going to the railroad. Whither can he be going, Maso?'

'Per bacco!' muttered Maso; 'is it not to-day that the young bigot from Schrambeek was to set off? Who knows but Victor is going to Rome too?'

'He is fool enough. Now we must find out. Let us go to Morren's house.'

A few minutes later they rang the bell.— Barbara opened the door.

'Is Mynheer Morren at home?'

'He went out of town yesterday.'

'And the young gentleman'

'Ah, he has just now set off for Rome,' and poor Barbara burst again into tears.

The two visitors made a great show of sympathy, sent many kind messages to Mevrouw, and went their way.

'Maledetto papalino!' said Maso, between his teeth; 'he shall pay for it, Ernest; he shall pay for it.'

And his dark eyes gleamed with bloodthirsty hatred, like the eye of a tiger ready to spring upon its prey.

When Victor joined the party of Pontifical Volunteers that evening, at Brussels, he was greeted by a joyful cry.

'Hurrah! hurrah!' they cried; 'here is Victor!'

'Welcome! welcome!' cried Joseph. 'Victor, I knew that you must come.'

And the two friends embraced heartily.

CHAPTER VI.—ROME.

A few days had elapsed since the departure of the three Papal Volunteers. Mynheer Morren with his wife, had gone to their country-house at Schrambeek, where they were accustomed to spend some time every summer. Mevrouw Morren was especially glad to be there at this time, partly to congratulate her sister upon her recovery, and still more to give and receive from her sisterly sympathy in their mutual anxiety for their absent children.

Since Victor's departure, Mynheer Morren had been unusually reserved and stern. Sometimes he passed the whole day shut up in his library, so that his wife could hardly get a few words out of him, and those few dry and cold to the utmost degree.

The loving wife and tender mother assuredly suffered greatly under this undeserved harshness but she was resolved to persevere in her sacrifice to the end, and she gained courage and tranquility before her image who is called the 'Mother of Sorrows.'

Her husband was too just and reasonable not soon to perceive the folly of his conduct; and as his sound judgment brought him to a calmer state of feeling, he became gradually more kindly towards the noble woman, who he could not but acknowledge bore his harshness with a most wonderful patience and forbearance.

Of Victor he had not yet suffered a word to be spoken.

But let it not be imagined that the voice of paternal love had been silenced by his son's departure.

'That love is never extinguished except in the heart of a monster.'

It cost the proud reason of the philosopher too much to acknowledge himself to be overcome; but however obstinate the philosopher might be, the father could not lay aside his feelings, and immediately after Victor's departure Mynheer Morren had written to a friend, an artist in Rome, who had lived there for many years, begging him to keep an eye upon Victor, and to give him information of his welfare from time to time.

The husband and wife had been already two days at Schrambeek, and tidings were daily expected from the Papal Volunteers.

The villagers of Schrambeek watched eagerly for news.

'Well, Jufvrouw Mary, nothing yet?'

This was Peerjan's daily inquiry of Joseph's sister as they left the Church after Mass.

'Nothing yet, Peerjan; but we could hardly have heard yet.'

'That's the thing; don't talk to me. I know it well enough, for I have been in Spain, and Spain lies flat over against Italy. It's no trifle to take a journey there.'

'Oh, no, Peerjan; the journey is not so long as in your day, steam makes it so much easier.'

'That is true,' said the Piquet. 'At all events, they are brave boys, and do honor to Schrambeek.'

At last, one morning, just as Mevrouw Morren entered her sister's house, the long-expected tidings came—a letter with the Roman post-mark.

The cover was torn asunder with anxious haste, and two full sheets fell upon the table.— Victor, doubting whether or not his parents would be at Schrambeek, had enclosed his letter to Joseph's; or rather, the two young men had written a united letter, and the second sheet was a postscript from Victor to his mother.

'We reached Rome,' so ran the letter, 'this evening, and we cannot let morning's post go out without sending you these few words to tell you that our journey, both by sea and land, has been safely accomplished. We left Paris on Tuesday at mid day, reached Lyons on Wednesday morning, and Marseille in the evening. We arrived at Leghorn on Friday at mid-day, and on Saturday morning landed at Civita Vecchia.'

'What was our joy at last to tread that ground on which we had so intensely longed to be! We would fain have thrown ourselves to kiss the earth, which is as dear to us as Palestine to the Crusaders. But how shall I describe our

feelings, when, from the train along the banks of the Tiber, our eyes fell first on the Basilica of S. Paulo, then on Santa Maria Magiore, and many of the other great churches of Rome.— When we landed at Porta Portese, and were welcomed by many of our fellow-countrymen, who had preceded us to Rome, unconsciously, he wrote, 'I muttered to myself Tasso's beautiful verses on the Crusader's first sight of Jerusalem; for Rome, my Jerusalem, lay full before me, and I could find no words but his to speak what I felt:—

Roco apparer Gerusalem si vede  
Roco additor Gerusalem si scorge:  
Roco de mille voci unitamente  
Gerusalemme salutor si sente.

'But,' continued the letter, 'We must not forget Martin. Oh! he is so happy, and he says he would not go back if you would give him two thousand francs. He is very droll, and has amused us wonderfully on the way. When we asked him if he had no message to send to his mother, he answered—'T'll her that all is well; that I am very happy; that the five-and-twenty francs are all safe and sound; and that she was in the right when she said to me—One gets to Rome by asking the way, and you won't be alone there.'

In such a happy strain—which was more than enough to prove their perfect contentment—Victor and Joseph continued their letter which closed with the assurance of speedy news, and the request for an early answer.

On a separate sheet Victor had written the following words to his mother:

'Dearest mother—I ought not to prolong my letter, but it is such a great delight to me to converse with you. I wish I could describe to you all the interesting things which I have already seen. I shall not tell you that I am tired with the journey, for I am not, though we only stopped a night at Marseilles. It is about half-past eleven o'clock, so I must leave you. Our parting costs me dear, but the motive which called me to it is a great consolation to me, and I thank God who inspired the sacrifice which He has enabled me to make to Him. Dear mother, may the holy motives which induced you to offer me to the Holy Father be your comfort and set you fully at rest on my account. Above all, be not sad; but console yourself, as I do, by the thought of the holy duty which we are fulfilling.'

'Farewell, dear mother; I embrace you with all my heart, and my father also, whom I charge you to love with double affection—for yourself and for me. And lastly, my very dear mother, give your blessing to your own Victor.'

Here is the true expression of faith and heroism, the most entire simplicity with the sublimest self sacrifice.

Victor and his comrades were shortly after their arrival incorporated into the body of Zouaves; they were to remain a few days in Rome before joining their companions in the camp at Collescipoli.

We may imagine what use Victor, who was so enthusiastic a worshipper of antiquity, made of his short stay in Rome. He visited, successively, the libraries of the Vatican and the Minerva, the museums and the galleries of paintings and sculpture; nor did he neglect the monuments of old Pagan Rome, the Forum, the Capitol, the Temple of Vesta, the Baths; but, above all, like a fervent Catholic, as he was, he lingered in admiration amid the wonders of Christian art; he spent hours upon hours under the giant vaults of S. Peter's, before the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, within the venerable walls of Santa Maria Maggiore and S. John Lateran, and in the wide aisles of the other great Basilicas of Rome.

But with the most especial love he lingered in the Catacombs, the ancient scene of the piety and heroism of the early Christians. With fervent faith he knelt before the tombs of the martyrs, and renewed his vow to give his life nobly after their example, for the defence of our holy Faith.

He was praying one day before the grave of the Pope in the Catacomb of S. Callistus, and it seemed to him as if the glorious sufferers arose from their rest, all glowing with supernatural fire, and as if they infused a portion of it into his own breast, making his blood flow quicker through his veins and his bosom swell with unwonted courage.

Another day he went with Joseph and Martin to the Basilica of S. Sebastian; and here again he felt inspired with new strength by the thought of that glorious Saint, who first earned the title of 'Defender of the Church.'

But his happiness was completed by an audience of the beloved Father of the Faithful, the gracious and loving Pius IX.; and he wept with emotion on receiving a blessing from the hand to which the Lord had intrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Nor did his happiness stop here, as he wrote a few days afterwards to his mother