

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of De Bongny d'Hagerne.

CHAPTER V. (continued.)

I have mentioned there being other strangers here. There are six of them of different ages and evidently of very dissimilar positions in life. They occupy the rooms near mine and they also are following the Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Who are they? Where do they come from? Why are they here? I know not, for conversation between us is absolutely forbidden, but I hope very soon to find out all about my fellow-captives.

I have only seen them in the refectory where we take our meals in common. We pass each other the dishes, plates, bread, &c., without opening our lips, but bowing to one another like the bowing Chinese figures one sees. Whilst we are thus amusingly employed and are nourishing our bodies, a young Jesuit novice reads aloud to nourish our souls, out of a book which I can highly recommend, the "Sinners Guide," by Father Louis de Grenade. If you can find it at the book stalls on the Paris quays you should buy it, and I can promise you that you will be amused.

If I am refractory as regards the meditations and other pious exercises to be gone through in our rooms, I am most punctual in all those done outside of them, having three reasons for acting thus: In the first place a little change of air and scene is pleasant; secondly, I want to appear excessively zealous; lastly, I make my observations. My letter is already long enough, but I may perhaps add something more, since I have not yet found out how I am going to send it.

Wednesday.—To-day the Father Rector vouchsafed to come and see me. He is quite the typical Jesuit of my imagination: tall, thin, with smooth black hair and an ascetic face; a cold, piercing eye, seeming to read your very thoughts; a high, wrinkled forehead and, apparently, a never resting brain. He questioned me a good deal on apparently indifferent subjects, but evidently with a purpose. I had to fence with him that I might not betray myself. I do not like this man. He has a magisterial manner that freezes me, and yet I would dearly love to see him again and measure my strength with his. If it were not presumptuous I would say that I had met with an adversary worthy of me. I hardly think I shall see him again. On taking his leave he recommended me to follow closely Father de Keradec's direction, for such is my old Jesuit's name. "You can place the greatest confidence in him," he added, "under a simple exterior there is hidden a great heart; he is a man of sound judgment and he is also a most holy religious. Perhaps you hardly suspect the position he occupied in the world before he joined the Company.

"I should say he had been a farmer or a village priest."

"You are far from the truth. Formerly, in the world there lived a certain Count de Keradec, belonging to one of the oldest and richest Breton families. Having entered the army when quite a young man, the Count was soon remarked for his courage and military ability. As he served under the Emperor Napoleon, at a time when promotion was rapid, he was colonel of lancers at thirty-two years of age. I suppose you know that the Fathers of the Faith were those who first tried to re-establish our Order after its suppression. De Keradec met one of these Fathers and was soon on terms of the closest friendship with him, and before long laid aside his sword, renounced his fortune, title and splendid prospects, in order to enlist under the banner of his Lord and Master. Since he entered our Company he has always desired to occupy the lowest place, and even yet, except when obedience compels him to perform other duties, he gives all his time to preaching missions in the poorest villages.

I must say that this discovery quite abashed me. I had been taking the Colonel, the Count de Keradec for an old peasant! Is he shrewder than I took him for? Anyway, I must be on the defensive and play a closer game.

Wednesday Evening. I have seen Father de Keradec again and have found out about forwarding my correspondence. I first asked him whether I might not take a walk in the town during the recreation hour, but he replied that the Rule did not allow of my so doing except after obtaining

permission from the Rector. I then asked him how I could send letters to the post, and he told me that one of the serving men carried the college mail to Amiens daily; all that I had to do was to leave my correspondence with the porter, who would send my letters with the others. He explained to me, in answer to my questions, that as a stranger I had a right to correspond with whom I pleased and as I pleased, but that the novices, and, indeed, the religious themselves, could only write by permission of the superior and had to give him their letters unsealed.

Have not these men made a regular system of spying, since, even among themselves, they do not respect the privacy of correspondence! You may be sure I shall not entrust my letters to such men, but will keep this one till I find some safe means of posting it.

Thursday. Count de Keradec comes every day now to pass the noon recreation hour with me and answers all my questions in a most good-natured way. Ever since I have been here I have been turning over in my mind what possible motive can have impelled human beings, who are not absolutely idiots, to come and pass a week here, just for the pleasure of meditating on the most absurd and tiresome subjects in existence; and I felt very curious to know the names and social position of the individuals beside whom I have been eating for the last three days, and with whom I have been exchanging bows and smirks that might make a cat laugh.

I therefore asked Father de Keradec if all these good people were, like myself, future novices; and he replied, looking very mysterious:—"I can answer for at least one of them, the tall, distinguished-looking man who wears the decoration of the Legion of Honour in his button-hole; he is a naval engineer."

"And wants to become a Jesuit!" I exclaimed with such unfeigned astonishment as nearly to have betrayed myself.

The Father, as calm as ever, replied:

"You ought not to be astonished since you have the same intention."

I had had time to recover myself and replied most hypocritically, that my exclamation had not been caused by astonishment, but by joy and admiration; that, as to myself, a beginner in life, I had no brilliant position to sacrifice, as the gentleman in question had. The ex-colonel replied to this: "After all, of what does a brilliant worldly position consist? It is made up of tinsel and of dust; it is a vapour that lasts but a short time, a few years at most, and then disappears altogether. After death, God will not require of us an account of how high we have risen in our profession or what honours we have won, but He will ask an account of what good actions we have done, &c., &c."

I allowed the good old man to sermonize for awhile and then resumed questioning him about the others.

"They are good Christians who lay aside their affairs and leave their families for a few days to come here, and, in the silence of a retreat, meditate on their last end, so as thus to become better living men. It is not every one that has the happiness of being called to the religious life, but every one is called to save his own soul. All the year round, and in nearly all our houses, we have similar fervent Christians who come to us, and the number of them is larger than you would imagine. They come to us of all ages and conditions of life, and at St. Acheul alone we receive some hundreds every year."

Now here is a fact of which I am sure the Government is ignorant, and which I hasten to point out to you. Not only do the Jesuits work secretly to arrest the progress of modern ideas; not only are their houses impenetrable asylums where they unite in large numbers to conspire against such governments as refuse to yield to their hidden sway; but these houses serve for collecting together a certain number of men, already blinded by superstition, and there the Jesuits subject the unfortunate creatures to an existence like that of Indian fakcers. By means of cunningly devised meditations, their moral perception is blunted, their imagination destroyed, and by also destroying the faculty of loving in these victims as well as magnifying the importance of the mental powers, they lead them on by degrees to the heights of fanaticism. Then, when these young men have become mere visionaries,