



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1868.

No. 8.

FATHER CLEVELAND;

OR,
THE JESUIT.

By the Authoress of "Life in the Cloister," "Grace O'Halloran," "The Two Marys," etc., etc.

From the Boston Pilot.

"Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave
This viperous slander enters."—Cymbeline.

CHAPTER XVI.—AT REST.

Early the following morning the priest visited Aileen, anxious to see her before the arrival of the false but repentant Augusta.

As he ascended the stairs leading to her room he was surprised to hear the sound of a guitar, and the voice of Aileen warbling in low and ineffective tones a plaintive air ending in a melancholy cadence. He listened and distinctly heard the following words:—

"Bright visions of a home, in regions blest,
Entrance my weaned senses quite;
And shall I then so quickly be at rest,
In yon fair realms of light and life?
At rest! ah, what sweet thoughts these words contain.

They tell this strife will soon be o'er.
At rest! no more shall throbb the weary brain;
At rest! for aye, for ever more.
Vain world, farewell; I would not with thee stay,
One day, for all that thou couldst give;
In rest! sweet rest, in Heaven's eternal day,
Freed from earth's coil I still shall live;
Vain fear and anxious hope shall be no more;
The happy goal is reached at last;
But love remains, and on its wings I'll soar—
Earth's cares and sorrows, all are past;
Time and its warfare o'er; amidst the blest,
I shall rejoice in an eternal rest!"

When Father Cleveland entered the room she laid the guitar aside, saying, with a faint attempt at a smile, "I feel much better to-day, and have been trying to sing—a vain attempt, my voice plays me false now. I have no strength left—those simple words I have myself composed. Will you, my dear Father, convey them to my parents, when I shall have been laid in my Canadian grave?"

Father Cleveland did not peruse the lines, merely telling her that she should avoid all fatigue, and folding them and placing them in his pocket, he said, "You will have a visitor shortly, my child. The lady who was here yesterday called on me in the evening. Do you remember she expressed a wish to remain with you?"

As Father Cleveland spoke, he fixed his eyes on the countenance of Aileen, determining, should he witness any agitation, even to retract his promise to Miss Seton, rather than expose her to undue excitement.

He was not disappointed, however, in the character of her whom he was training for eternity; her cheek blanched not, her voice did not falter, nay, a smile was on her lips as she replied:—

"As you will, Father; you know and will do what is for the best; the past can never be recalled; but Bertha," she added, "you will see me sometimes, will you not, and let me make you a bridal wreath of white roses and orange blossoms, for now, you know, you are free."

With some reluctance on the part of Bertha Ainslie, it was finally settled that she should at once return home, and leave her post for the future to the unhappy Miss Seton, and thus she would, at least, be enabled to complete arrangements for her long deferred wedding-day. She did not leave, however, without complying with Aileen's request to bring her the flowers she had named, for the wreath she was to wear on the day of her bridal.

Not very long after the departure of Bertha, Augusta Seton made her appearance, simply attired as became the office she was about to assume.

Father Cleveland observed that a look of pleasure passed over her pale face on noticing the absence of Bertha; she bowed as she passed him, and advancing to the couch, threw herself on her knees, and begged the forgiveness of Aileen. The suppliant posture, the humble avowal of her guilt, the tears which fell on the emaciated hand which passed her own so warmly the sob she uttered, proclaimed her entire penitence, her profound sorrow; so profound because the past could never be recalled. What joy, unutterable would it not have been, if she could have given back health and strength to the wasted being who lay gasping before her; but it might never, never be, and one glance at the countenance of the priest recalled her to herself; she remembered that he had bid her ask forgiveness, but commanded her not to recur to the past; so, rising from her knees, the once proud and stately lady, now so humbled, and in her own esteem, so lowly, threw aside her costly furs and in a simple dress of plain tserino, prepared

herself for the performance of her self imposed duties.

Quickly, but with perfect silence, she moved about the room, disposed the pillows more carefully beneath the head of the feverish invalid, administered a cooling draught to the parched lips, and then taking up some fine work, on which Bertha had been engaged for Aileen's use, she withdrew a little aside, and appeared to be intently engrossed in her occupation.

Father Cleveland was by no means unobservant, even when he appeared to be engaged in conversation with Aileen—not a movement escaped his notice; he saw the tears occasionally drop over the muslin she held in her hand, and heard the sighs which ever and again broke from her lips.

"I hope I may trust her, but there is no help now," he thought, for he observed that these evidences of emotion were involuntary; and telling Aileen that he should see her without fail on the morrow, he prepared to leave.

He was quitting the room with a simple 'Good morning' to the unhappy Augusta, when she rose from her seat, and, with an expression of gratitude upon her haggard countenance, she said:—

"I shall see you later, Father Cleveland; I thank you for the permission you have given me to remain here. I shall not abuse it."

For one moment he paused.

"You are an inhabitant of Toronto, Madam?" he said inquiringly.

"My father is one of its most influential citizens," she replied; and then added, "I am his only child. My mother died when I was but fourteen years old. I have been out of the pale of the Church for several years; left to myself—to do my own will in every circumstance of life. I have become a haughty, dissipated, fashionable woman; yielding to my evil inclinations; rarely performing a good or generous action; however, no more of this," she continued, dashing impatiently aside the tears which again welled up to her eyes, "some time hence—later—" and her voice sank almost into a whisper, and she glanced significantly at Aileen, "later I will tell you in what manner I will strive to make atonement for the past."

"May God confirm and strengthen you in your good resolutions, Miss Seton," said Father Cleveland, as he left the room.

Before he returned to the Presbytery, he called at the home of Bertha Ainslie. Here he met, as he expected, with Guy Vernon, the person whom he most wished to see; for, known as he was to most of the influential persons in and near Toronto, it was he alone who could efficiently help him in the attempt he was already meditating, of raising a subscription for the parents of the unhappy Aileen.

Guy Vernon's services were then immediately put into requisition, and amongst the first to be called upon he intended to visit Mr. Burnett, the gentleman who had rendered himself so conspicuous by being the first to discontinue receiving the services of Aileen.

They were standing in the recess of a window speaking of the unfortunate young girl and the circumstances attendant on her untimely end; Vernon, loud in his denunciations against Augusta, whose name was on every one's lips, when Bertha, her light step unheard by either of them, entered the room.

"Every word you say, my good friend, is but too true," replied the Priest; "but still you must own with me, that an immense amount of guilt remains on the head of those who judged poor Aileen so remorselessly, and condemned her unheard."

"And what, then, shall be said of her whose thoughtless tongue repeated the heinous story in her ears. What do not all good and just persons think of Bertha Ainslie, even if they are too merciful to speak their thoughts?" said Bertha, now standing before them, holding in her hands a wreath of orange blossoms, which the wasted fingers of the dying Aileen had, that morning, woven for her bridal of the following day.

"They call you indiscreet, my Bertha; they know that you sinned not from deliberate ill-will," said Vernon, annoyed that she should have overheard the conversation of himself and Father Cleveland; "but now," he added, wishing to turn her thoughts into another channel, "bring me paper, pen, and ink, Bertha, and mark down for me the names and addresses of some of the wealthiest families, especially those to whom poor Miss Desmond was known, and I will hasten immediately, Father Cleveland, upon my charitable errand, and see you again later in the day; for you know our wedding will take place on Saturday, and, as I intend to leave Toronto for a few weeks, I have but little time to spare."

On charitable thoughts intent, then, Guy Vernon hastened on his way as soon as Bertha had drawn him up the required list, and walking with Father Cleveland to the door of his little Presbytery, they then parted, the former proceeding

straight to the handsome residence of Mr. Burnett.

That gentleman was not at home, but Mrs. Burnett, languid, fashionable Mrs. Burnett was; and her feminine curiosity excited to know the reason why she was favored with a call from Mr. Vernon, to whom she was but very slightly known, she made her appearance without the slightest hesitation.

The first salutations over, Mr. Vernon explained that he was about to enlist her charity in behalf of the parents of the unfortunate Miss Desmond, whom she had been the first to dismiss, 'believing,' he added, 'a very cruel slander,—a slander which had first deprived her of her friends and patrons, consequently of the means of earning an honorable maintenance, and then thrown her into a lingering illness, a decline, it is said, but may far more properly be termed a broken heart.'

"Dear, dear, how shocking this is!" said Mrs. Burnett; "and do you really think the poor girl is dying, Mr. Vernon? I do hope you are mistaken. I am sure I did not care about Mr. Burnett being so prompt, but we had good reason to believe all that we heard. We could not doubt the veracity of a lady in Miss Seton's position. I can only say, that I am myself both grieved and shocked, and still hope that the poor young lady will recover."

"Her recovery is hopeless, Mrs. Burnett," said Vernon, smiling to himself at the strange conglomeration of ideas which had led silly Mrs. Burnett to infer that because it was a person ranking somewhat high as to social position who had uttered a slander, it was to be received less doubtfully than if spoken by one in an inferior class of life.

Mrs. Burnett then drew from her purse a handsome donation, which she gave to Mr. Vernon, assuring him that she should mention the purport of his visit directly when her husband came home, feeling certain that he would add to the sum she had herself given.

It was not long after the departure of the latter, before Mrs. Burnett had the opportunity she desired; and she acted, as she had promised she would, by endeavoring to awaken her husband's sympathy. But Mr. Burnett was unlike his wife, who was not, perhaps, the worst of her class; if he gave an alms, he did it ostentatiously; he was one of those who rather make a parade of doing a good action than otherwise, and on this occasion he met with an annoyance he little thought of.

His wife urged him to allow one of the servants to convey to Mr. Vernon the sum he intended to bestow; but, big with his own importance, instead of being shocked at the line of conduct he had been the first to pursue, by setting an ill example to others, he insisted on going to St. Croix on the following morning, and himself placing his gift in the hands of the much injured Aileen. Could the proud, self-satisfied Mr. Burnett have suspected what was in store for him on the next day he would have freely given ten times the amount rather than have endured the ordeal he had to pass through. In less than three hours Guy Vernon had gained a tolerably handsome sum; for all on whom he had called were sorry when they heard the story he had to tell, and deeply grieved, if their own consciences told them they were guilty, whilst those who were guiltless thanked Heaven aloud that neither by word nor deed they had erred.

Father Cleveland was alone when Vernon returned to the Presbytery to announce his success; and he at once placed a large sum in his hands, together with notes from several persons, promising various amounts, to be forwarded during the ensuing week.

The day was drawing on, when Vernon bade the Priest adieu, and for some little time he sat listlessly turning over the pages of a book; then he paced up and down his little parlor in that restless state of mind which makes us so abstracted that we can settle calmly to no occupation.

I wonder why he looked out so nervously on that white dreary landscape; why he felt so restless and anxious concerning Aileen. May it not have been that he was disturbed by one of those unaccountable forebodings of impending danger—one of those presentiments that occasionally distress the strongest minded amongst us. Any way, the good priest could not bear to remain quietly at home. The winter sunbeams still shed their sickly light on the white landscape, but his busy imagination conjured up to his mind's eye a face well nigh as white. He had left her better. He had not intended again to brave the inclement weather; but, perhaps, there might be a change; whether or no, he could not endure the long hours that must intervene before the following morning; so he resolved to start at once, and thus reach St. Croix before that sickly, yellow sunlight should fade away.

A little later then, and the quiet Presbytery was left far behind him; yet he looked many times at his watch, and counted, with feverish anxiety, the very minutes as they sped onwards,

til he beheld in the distance the village of St. Croix, the fading sunlight still gleaming on the white walls of the cottages around.

With nervous tremor at his heart, Father Cleveland looked anxiously at the windows of the house in which Aileen lodged. The curtains were not yet drawn. She still lived, then.—Would it be granted him to sustain her spirit in its upward flight?

He was not expected by either of the occupants in the chamber above; but the well-known knock sent a bright flush to the cheek of the dying Aileen, as she reclined on a couch beside the window, watching the setting sun and the dreary landscape, shrouded beneath its white pall.

She evinced no surprise at his unexpected coming, but exclaimed:—

"I am so glad you have come again to-night; I have much to say to you."

"Well, would not to-morrow do as well, Aileen?" said the kind-hearted old friend. "A sudden idea alone prompted me to return. I did not intend to visit you again till the morning."

"The morning would have been too late, Father," she said, as with a visible shudder she turned from the contemplation of the scene without; "the morning would have been too late," she repeated, folding her hands across her breast. "God has been so good in sending you to me—but I shall never see again the risug of the sun whose last beams are now fading away, and I have a little still to say to you, my best of friends."

Father Cleveland started as he looked on the wan but still lovely features; yes, there was a change, there rested over them a grey shadow which he had not seen before, and he whose sacred calling had taken him to many death-beds knew that that shadow was the shadow of death. Reader, you have witnessed this change when you have watched some dear one pass away—the wasting, lingering illness may distort the features, but this change only occurs when death is near at hand.

The Priest sank into the seat Augusta placed beside the couch, and then said, "Mr. Vernon has been busily employed this morning, my dear child—a handsome subscription is being raised for the benefit of those you love; I shall myself solicit aid to return to Europe; there will be no difficulty in doing so, as I am only appointed to the Fernside mission during the temporary absence of his Pastor."

"The thought that you will yourself see my dear, dear parents makes me very happy," was the reply. "Will you tell them from me, that my last prayer was for them; that I judged it best to maintain silence as to my illness, knowing well that it would only serve to increase their suspense; tell them, too, that I died resigned and happy, with no earthly wish ungratified, now that I know their future will be cared for—thankful, most thankful, Father, that God in his tender providence, has sent you to my side."

There was a pause for a few moments; Aileen was the first to break the silence; her voice was low and indistinct; Father Cleveland bent his head down to catch the words.

"Rest, sweet rest, forevermore," and then, after a pause, she murmured the words "In Thee have I hoped, let me not be confounded," and the breath came with more difficulty still, and the heavy dew on the white face told that dissolution was at hand.

And the sonorous voice of the good Priest, as he recited the prayer—for the dying—and that gasping breath of her who was in her agony—alone broke broke the stillness of the night. Augusta was perfectly silent; by a powerful mastery over her feelings she drove back the tears which welled into her eyes, and restrained the sob of anguish, almost too great to be borne; her mental agony in that terrible moment was supreme, as she, like some fell murderess, stood looking on, with that pallid victim of her sin dying before her eyes—with the friend of that victim by her side. Dread penance, methinks, must be done by that naughty woman to wash away her sin; yet surely none in all her life—for she meditates leading one of great austerity—can equal, much less exceed this, in its severity.

The agony was a long one, too; but consciousness remained to the last, and at length the struggle was over, and a sweet smile, like that which had often played on the innocent features in times long past—in old days at Alverley—again lighted up the countenance—the outstretched hand grasped that of her earthly friend, whilst the other strove to trace the sign of redemption, with the ruby cross still firmly held, but the effort was made in vain, one gentle sigh, soft as the zephyr of a summer day, and the spirit of the heroic and devoted Aileen Desmond had passed to the better world.

We have said that virtue such as hers—and be mindful, reader, that we place before you a heroine of real life—was sure to meet its reward; we have spoken, perhaps, unadvisedly, in saying

that even here such would always be, for in other cases, as in this heroic, self-devoted daughter whose story we have told you, it may not be in this world that the reward will come, beyond such as we may ourselves experience when conscience, with its small unerring voice, tells us we are doing well.

No, not here, not here, struggling sons and daughters of genius, or misfortune, must you look for a reward—not here, heroes and heroines, of whom the world in its guilty indulgence, knows nothing, and if it knew would not heed—but is not eternity ample compensation for the sorrows and trials of time, of that time which will appear as a sneek when the veil shall be withdrawn and they shall look back on this sad mortal life.—True, they may ever and again yield under the pressure of their cross, deem it heavy, and be tempted to wish that it were given them to cast it aside but a little while; yet if such as these be in truth in earnest, they will still fight bravely on, conscious that a rich reward awaits them; that the poverty and obscurity and hardship of their lot, so painful—if they cast their eyes around and see how delicately it fares with others, who live for themselves and for the world alone—shall be rewarded by a never-ending happiness in the world to come; that world in which every tear shall be dried; where virtue, oppressed and despised, shall be exalted, and its enemies put to shame; and in which every action done for God, every act of heroic virtue performed in time, shall meet with a reward exceeding great in a happy eternity.

Such thoughts as these might surely have passed through the mind of the good Priest, as he stood beside the death bed of his young friend, who to one less experienced might still have been supposed to live, so gently had been the transit to eternity after the sharp agony which had preceded it. So, indeed, thought Augusta, as she bent down her head in hopes once again to catch that faint gasping breath, but in vain: no need to keep her sorrow pent up any longer, and, throwing herself upon her knees beside the bed, she gave vent to a passionate burst of tears, heeding not the presence of the Priest, who still prayed beside the bed of death.

Then, when after a few moments' pause, he moved aside, she arose, and with streaming eyes stood, with a countenance well nigh as pale, and features as rigid as those of the inanimate form before her,—well might the miserable Augusta have exclaimed in the language of the Psalmist: "Because I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me."

It was before her in the solemn presence of the dead; for it, as it always does, it strikes us with awe when we stand near that thing of clay, that perishable casket from which the soul that animated it has forever fled, it was, as far as she was concerned, invested with a twofold solemnity.

It was before her, whilst he was there; he who knew so well what she was, her guilt, her sin, its fatal consequences; and well he knew why the pallid cheek grew flushed as crimson when her eyes met his, as they stood on either side the bed of death. It will be before her all her life; it will be before her when she shall herself stand on the threshold of eternity, and to her eternal confusion, unless her repentance be sincere.

"You had best ask the people of the house to get a person to fulfil the last duties," said the Priest when he had finished the prayers he had been offering up for the soul of the departed one.

"I will do all myself," she replied, as she forced back her tears, and then having previously closed the eyes of the corpse, she prepared for the performance of her task.

"You had best not remain here to-night, Miss Seton," said the Jesuit; "return with me, and if you prefer not to go home till the funeral has taken place, Miss Ainslie will, I am sure, be happy to receive you."

"Do not fear for me, Father Cleveland," she replied, "I will do all that is necessary and shall pass much of my time in watching and prayer; later, I can take some rest in the adjoining room; I shall be best alone."

"I do not like to leave you, Miss Seton; you will find this place very lonely," he again urged; "you had better follow my advice."

"What have I to fear," she replied, "she was so good, she is praying for me now. Pardon me for not acceding to your request, I had rather stay till all is over, and then?"—Here Augusta faltered, and throwing herself on her knees gave vent to a burst of uncontrollable anguish, the more violent because it had been so long repressed.

For a few moments Father Cleveland looked on irresolute how to act; to leave her alone under such circumstances, with a conscience tortured as he knew hers to be, was terrible; under any event, the presence of the poor pale thing before him might render solitude painful, perhaps unbearable, but in her case it was aggravated