

A VICTIM TO THE SEAL OF CONFESSION.

A TRUE STORY. By REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S.F.

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CHAPTER I.

Winter had given place to Spring; the soft breezes from the Mediterranean had already melted the light covering of snow which for a few weeks had rested on the hills and plains of sunny Provence, and the smiling landscape wore a garb of vernal green, to be changed, alas! only too soon to a brown and dusty hue under the scorching rays of the summer sun.

It was the first day of Lent in the year 1888. The genial weather had tempted many of the inhabitants of Aix-les-Bains to forsake the streets of the old town, founded by the Romans some hundred years before the Christian era, on account of its salubrious thermal springs, and repair to the open country. Bands of pedestrians, merrily chatting together, were to be seen in every direction; of these by far the greater number were wending their way to one or other of the little gardens and vineyards scattered about on the hillsides, to spend the afternoon in the gardenhouses erected there. Almost every householder in Aix owns one of these gardens, which with their summerhouses or chalets, called by the Provencals *bastides* or *bastidons*, of every imaginable style and shape, but mostly painted white and overgrown with creepers, give variety to scenery that would otherwise be somewhat uniform and monotonous. Other excursionists, either alone or in groups, were following the paths which led to the Alpine heights, by the side of the rivulets and little stream that, swollen by the spring rains came rushing noisily down from the mountains. The roads too, leading to Lambac and Peyrolles were alive with passengers on foot or on horseback and light vehicles of every description.

One of the principal points of attraction was the heights of Ste. Victoire, a rocky eminence some seven or eight miles distant from Aix, whence a splendid view could be obtained over the wide plains and the lower ridges of hills far away to the deep blue sea beyond. On the other side next to Aix, the wall of rock, of a yellowish-white tinge, rises almost perpendicularly; the summit is crowned by a cross of gigantic proportions, called the "Cross of Provence," which stands out against the azure sky, displaying to all the country round the sign whereby the Christian hopes to achieve victory. Those who wish to reach that spot must go round towards the north, because on that side the slope from the mountain top in the valley below is gentler; and on the opposite side, though the rocks do not rise abruptly, yet the ascent is steep and rugged. On this, the south side, a village nestles in the valley at the foot of the hill. The stone houses and the gardens are built in terraces and above them, almost like an old feudal castle, rise the church and the ancient monastery of Ste. Victoire, close to the face of the rock.

On their return from High Mass, as soon as the midday-meal was finished an elderly lady and two children set out for Aix on their way to this village. The woman was well past 60; her hair beneath the white lace cap she wore, seemed scarcely less white than the cap itself. After she had gone some distance the look of fatigue discernible on her kindly features somewhat flushed by the exertion of walking, showed that she had over-rated her strength, and undertaken more than she could well perform. It was, in fact, rather too long an excursion for one of her years; but what will not a fond grandmother do to please her grandchildren!

"Charles, Julia!" she called out to the children, "how can you run and jump about as you are doing? Remember we have still an hour's walk before we reach the farm of St. Perreol, and then the ascent begins. But I did just the same when I was your age, and I fancy my poor old bones will ache long before yours do. Come, we will rest a little under those olive-trees."

"Are you tired already, Grandmother?" asked the boy, tossing his curly brown hair off his temples. "I could go a long way further without wanting to rest; I could go to Brignolles, and Ste. Baume, and on to Marseilles, to the sea. Oh how I would like to go to the sea, and get on board a big ship, and sail right away; away to the islands afar off, where the cocoa-nuts grow and the savages live, the wicked heathen whom the missionaries turn into good Christians, as Uncle Francis was telling us last time we saw him. Do you know, Grandmother, I mean to be a missionary when I grow up."

"Then you will have to be much

more industrious at your lessons, and bring home a better report for your Latin than you did last week," the girl interposed rather pettily.

"Now, now, you are quarrelling again. You promised you would be such good children, if I took you with me to see your Uncle Francis."

"Forgive me, Grandmother, I did not mean to be naughty," said Julia. "And do not look so cross at me, Charles. Come and help me to gather a nosegay for Uncle Francis, while Grandmother rests a little longer. Look what beautiful cowslips there are growing under the hedge!"

Quickly pacified, the boy ran with his sister, who was a little older than himself, to the place where the flowers were growing, and they soon came back to their grandmother with their hands full, asking her to help them arrange them.

"The poor flowers will be faded before we get to Ste. Victoire," she said with a smile.

"Oh, Uncle Francis will put them in the pretty gilt vases you gave him when he says his first Mass, and they will soon revive in water. They will look beautiful on each side of our Lady's statue. One day last week Annie Lecomte, you know, the daughter of the gardener just outside the town, brought some flowers to school which were much more faded, and yet they revived when Sister Angelica put them in water. But look there! Is not that our baker, Mr. Lenoir coming along, driving all alone in his grand new cart?"

"Yes, it is!" exclaimed the boy, quite delighted to see the man, with whom he had struck up a friendship, on the strength of the cakes, one or two of which were generally given him when he went to the shop to pay the monthly bill. "Hullo, Mr. Lenoir," he shouted, waving his hat over his head, as the worthy tradesman approached at a leisurely trot: "good day to you and a pleasant drive."

"Why, that must be my young friend Charles, if my ears do not deceive me," answered the baker, bringing his stout brown coat to a standstill, and putting up the eye glass which was attached to a cord round his neck. "My eyes are not as good as my ears now, but yes, it is he sure enough. Will you come for a drive my boy? What, can that be you, Mrs. Montmoulin? You do not mean to say that you have walked all the way from Aix? Well, you are wonderfully strong for your years. I could not have walked half so far, though I am a good many years your junior."

"No doubt of that, my good man," said the old lady. "My feet have not to carry your weight. But for the matter of that, I am really much more fatigued than I thought I should be."

"The good-natured baker burst out laughing. "True," he said, "my legs have twice as much above them as yours have. That comes from all the flour and other stuff that gets down my throat every day. But where are you bound for, this lovely spring-day?"

"We are going to Ste. Victoire. I wanted to see my son again after the winter, so I thought I would take advantage of the fine weather to visit him with my grandchildren."

"How fortunate! I can take you all three as far as the inn, and it is no distance from there up to Ste. Victoire. Come, let me help you up at once; and you Charles, help your sister to get up behind."

Mrs. Montmoulin demurred a little at first from accepting the offer, but it was no use; with a shout of delight Charles clambered up into the light, two-wheeled cart and dragged his sister after him, while the grandmother, with the assistance of her friendly acquaintance, got up in front and seated herself beside him, overwhelming herself with apologies.

"Don't say a word about trouble, ma'am," the baker rejoined, touching his horse with the whip. "I feel it a pleasure to drive a lady like you. I have more respect for hands that bear the marks of honest work, than those whose fingers are covered with diamond rings. I have had myself to work hard from my youth up, and if God has prospered my exertions more than those of some men, I have no reason to boast of it. So you are on your way to Ste. Victoire, to see your son? Well, I am sure he ought to be proud at having so excellent a mother. But do tell me—not that I want to meddle in your private affairs—the worthy priest has a very good income, has he not? Could he not do some thing more for you now, as you are getting into years? It

must have been a hard struggle for you to defray his expenses at the Seminary."

Mr. Lenoir was a very worthy man but he did not possess much tact. Mrs. Montmoulin knew that he meant well, so she suppressed the feeling of resentment his inquisitiveness excited, and answered quietly: "I managed it with the help of God and some kind friends. The sum I was obliged to borrow is almost entirely paid off now, and my son has recompensed me amply for my little sacrifice it cost me by his affection, if in no other way."

"What! my good madam, is it possible that you are still encumbered with debt on account of your son's education? Why, he must have been a priest for eight or ten years, and surely in that time he could have laid by sufficient to pay off what was still owing. Excuse my plain speaking, but it strikes me that he cannot have been very thrifty in his house-keeping."

"In one respect my son is not thrifty," Mrs. Montmoulin replied with a faint smile; "he lives as plainly and simply as possible, it cannot be denied; his great extravagance is in regard to the poor. Every mouthful he can deny himself he gives to them, and if when visiting the sick he meets with any case of real destitution, he is as lavish with temporal as with spiritual assistance. This soon runs away with the scanty salary he receives from the Government."

"Yes, I know the Revolution did away with the fat livings of former times, and I have often thought that taking orders was a bad speculation now-a-days. But the good pastors have a comfortable berth for the most part, and might easily put by a hundred francs or so a year. Of course if a man gives every penny away to the poor he has only himself to blame. He should leave it to the municipality, or to the charity organization to look after them."

"Oh, my dear Sir, the alms these officials dole out to the needy are often made bitter to them by unkind words, and more harm is done than good. How different what is given in a kindly spirit, sparing their feelings as much as possible; it is like balm to the sorrowing heart. No, I think my son is right there; the Parish Priest is the father of the poor, as he has very often told me. In the old times the property of the Church was the property of the poor; the rich benefices were doubtless for the maintenance of the clergy in the first place, but all that was over was to be spent on the church or distributed to the poor. And my son makes it a rule to do this, to a much greater extent, in fact than he is bound to."

The well-to-do baker glanced at his companion, whose dress, though scrupulously neat and clean, betokened a very slender purse. "Well, well," he rejoined, "you must not be offended, but I cannot help thinking it is his first duty to help you a little more in your old age."

"Oh, as long as God keeps me in health," replied the old lady with a heightened color. "I can continue to make both ends meet. My little business answers very well, my fingers are never idle, and even in the dark I can go on with my knitting. Then there is the new machine, which daughter bought out of the few pounds her poor husband left her, that makes beautiful vests and all kind of woollen garments. So we two manage to keep ourselves and the two children thank God. And in order that you may not think hardly of my son, I must tell you that he has repeatedly offered to pay my rent, and constantly urges me to go and live with him, so that I need have no anxiety about my last days. I almost think I shall accept his proposal, for now he has plenty of room in his house."

"Of course he has room enough and to spare, if he inhabits the old monastery. There must be a splendid view from the upstairs rooms, and capital air too, very different to the narrow streets of our old town. I, for one, should congratulate you on the change of residence. Why, you would take a fresh lease of your life up there! Look you can see Ste. Victoire now, what a pretty place it is!"

A turn in the road had, in fact, brought our travellers in sight of the old monastery of Ste. Victoire which had till then been hidden by a spur of the mountains. The white walls of the long, regular building, standing on the slope of the hill, looked out from the midst of a perfect forest of plum and other fruit trees. Below were grouped the cottages and a few larger houses which

formed the village, amid well-kept gardens and clumps of trees, while the church, a venerable structure, forming one wing of the monastery, with a high steeple, dominated the whole scene. Behind it rose the hill, almost bare of trees, but decked with verdure, up to the blue vault of heaven. The whole formed a pleasing landscape, illumined as it was by the soft warm light of a southern sun.

"Hurrah, Ste. Victoire, Ste. Victoire," shouted Charles, who had been amusing himself with his sister's help, by tying up in bundles the violets, cowslips, and narcissus which they had gathered. "I think I see Uncle Francis. Look, the window of his room is open, it is the last, just where the old olive stands." Thereupon the boy waived his cap vigorously, and Julia fluttered her handkerchief in the hope of attracting her uncle's notice.

"Come now, I don't believe even your young eyes could see your Uncle all this way off," said Lenoir, turning around and addressing the children. "But from the monastery you could easily descry my cart coming along the road from Brignolles. Do you look out for it a little before six o'clock, and when you see it, come down leisurely with your grandmother and Julia to the inn; I shall stop half an hour there. Then I will take you back to Aix with me."

"How kind of you, Mr. Lenoir! That will be first-rate! We shall be able to stay over so much longer with Uncle, and Grandmother will not be a bit tired," exclaimed Charles; and Mrs. Montmoulin was soon persuaded to accept the kindly offer.

"I have got quite unused to driving," she said. "This is almost the first time I have been out in any conveyance of the kind since my husband's death. In his lifetime we were accustomed to go out in the gig every Sunday afternoon, he would drive me and the children to Molsheim or Hilkirch or some other place in the vicinity."

"Those places have foreign names, they are not in France, if I mistake not," the baker observed.

"They are in the environs of Strasbourg," the old lady replied. "We resided there until the commencement of the ill-fated war put an end to all our happiness. My husband carried on a trade in fruit, on one occasion when he came into Provence to purchase a quantity of the dried plums of these parts, I made his acquaintance. My parents consented to our union, so I followed him to the Rhineland as his wife. We got on well till the outbreak of the war; and almost before we were aware of it, the Germans surrounded Strasbourg. Those were terrible times, Mr. Lenoir; one did not dare to venture into the streets because the enemy's shots flew about on all sides. After the defeat at Metz all hope of an accommodation was at an end. The quarter of the town where he lived was most hotly attacked. Before the bombardment began in earnest, through the intervention of some Swiss gentlemen of position, permission was obtained for the old men, women and children to leave the town. This was proclaimed with the beat of the drum in the streets, and immediately George said the children and I must go. Our parting was a truly sorrowful one. For the children's sake I complied with my husband's wish. Francis was then a lad of sixteen and still attending the Gymnasium; Charlotte was a few years younger. We bade each other an affectionate farewell, then I joined the band of exiles—some two thousand in all—which were to pass through the enemy's lines under the escort of our Swiss friends, and proceeded to Bâle. Before we had crossed the frontier the cannonade in our rear announced that the attack on the city had begun, and soon a red glare lit up the sky in the direction we had left. Ere long we heard that the authorities had surrendered; and I learned in the newspapers a portion of the misfortune that had befallen us. It was said that every house in the quarter where our home was situated was reduced to ashes. I waited from day to day, looking for tidings of my husband; I felt daily more convinced that had he been alive he would have come, or at least would have written to us. The worthy people who had offered a refuge to the children and myself tried to console me that no dependence could be placed on the post in the time of war; they sought to deter me from returning to Strasbourg, but at the end of a week, I could bear the separation no longer. Leaving my children under the care of our kind entertainers, I took the train to Strasbourg. God grant that you may never witness such a sight as met my eyes! Just as, after clambering over heaps of debris and still smoldering ruins, I reached the spot where our house had stood. I saw the police extricating the body of my dear husband from beneath the rubbish. I identified him by his clothes and his wedding ring. See, this is the ring."

So saying, Mrs. Montmoulin brought out a bent and blackened ring, and showed it to the man who had listen-

ed to her narrative with the deepest interest. "One can see that it was in the fire as well as its master," he said as he examined it closely. "It has been indented too by the falling walls. And did the Prussians let you go without molestation? People say they were very devils."

"No, they were quite civil and even allowed me to have the small sum contained in the cash-box, which they also dug out of the ruins. One of the officers too, who was superintending the men, gave me a half sovereign, when he heard that I was the widow of the man whose remains had just been found, and that I was left utterly without means of subsistence. God gave me strength to bear up at that time, or my troubles would have deprived me of my reason or brought me to the grave. As soon as I had seen my poor husband buried, I hastened back to Bâle, having made up my mind to go back to my old home in Provence with the two children. The good people who had shown us hospitality would not take nothing from me, not a penny! God reward them! They even gave me a little present, and bade me God speed on my journey, when we started on our way through Geneva to my dear old native town, Aix, where my mother was still living. I took the little house, our present abode, and opened a small business in woollen manufactures with the few hundred francs that George gave me when we left Strasbourg, all the ready money he had at the time. This has provided us with a scanty subsistence, just enough to live on ever since. But I am wearying you with my long story, Mr. Lenoir. You must forgive me, when an old woman begins to talk of by-gone days, she finds it difficult to stop."

"Forgive you!" her companion rejoined. "I owe you many thanks for telling me this, and I feel for you with all my heart. If ever you want a friend in need, do you come to me. Upon my word you have shown great courage. I only hope the remainder of your life will be more tranquil and happy than the past has been, for you have had several trials. When you go to live with your son at Ste. Victoire you will have a good time before you."

"If it is the will of God, Mr. Lenoir, I have been looking forward to it for a long time," the old lady replied, and as she spoke she sighed deeply, for a dark presentiment seemed to rise up before her, like the shadow of a heavy cloud, as in another trial were yet in store for her. "If it is the will of God," she repeated gently.

"I trust your hopes may soon be fulfilled. Here we are at the inn already! Your conversation has made the time appear so short. Now, Charles, my boy, look sharp, and mind you are down here again by six o'clock." And the stout baker swung himself to the ground more nimbly than one would have thought possible for a man of his weight, and politely helped Mrs. Montmoulin to alight. The two children soon jumped down, and after heartily thanking their kind friend, they followed their grandmother up the hill to the convent.

(To be Continued.)

PRESENCE OF MIND.

The presence of mind of an American soldier in moments of danger is one of his chief characteristics. A brother of Father de Smet, the noted Jesuit missionary, who labored among the Indians of the West about a quarter of a century ago, was with his regiment on some Western campaign. One day he wandered too far from the command, and suddenly found himself surrounded by a band of hostile Indians. He was seized and was just about to be tomahawked, when he remembered hearing his brother say one day that the Indians had a great devotion for the sign of the cross, the symbol of the Catholic faith. Accordingly he raised his right hand to his forehead and in distinct tones repeated the words: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." As De Smet had expected the effect was magical and in less than five minutes he was a free man.

HOW TO TREAT A CATHOLIC PAPER.

Treat your Catholic paper considerately and courteously. Treat it as a good friend whom you would favor if you could; and whose opinion you wish to retain.

If there is ever a doubt in your mind, give your friend the benefit of the doubt. Regard your Catholic paper as a co-worker in the cause. It holds up the flag of faith. See that the standard bearer is supported.

When you do business with the Catholic paper, try to do it pleasantly, cheerfully and with kind words.

Above all—and this is the best courtesy—do business according to the business rules which the Catholic paper requests you to follow. Be sure that, if you comply, there will never be any misunderstanding.—Milwaukee Catholic Citizen.

AN EXTRAORDINARY CHURCH STRUCTURE.

It was only the other day that we had occasion to refer to the strange fact that the Rev. Father Heldmann, of St. Paul's German Catholic Church, Chicago, was mentioned as a possible candidate for Congress. Whatever truth may be in this report, one thing is certain that Father Heldmann is dearly beloved by his parishioners and that he is neither a politician, nor in any way an aspirant to any distinction outside of those which come to a faithful priest. The following brief sketch of him will serve as an introduction to the subject of his church, its construction, and dedication.

Father Heldmann, who has had charge of St. Paul's parish since 1888, was born in Chicago, of German parentage, Aug. 1, 1858. He was educated at St. Francis' college Milwaukee. He thinks little of himself, and a great deal of his people. For years his heart has been in the building of a school and a church, as honest and as solid as honest materials and honest workmanship could make them. At the present time and during these years he has lived in a little, old-fashioned cottage, furnished as simply, probably, as the poorest home in his parish. The plain-board floors are bare. Only the most necessary articles, tables, chairs, etc., and those of a plain, old pattern, are to be seen.

A week ago last Sunday, Archbishop Foshan, of Chicago, dedicated the new St. Paul's Church. The description of this new edifice is most interesting, and leads us to believe that it must be unique in form of ecclesiastical edifices the world over. A Chicago contemporary thus speaks of it:—

"It is a church without a block of wood, a nail, or a piece of plaster in it. From vaulted roof to pavement of enduring masonry outside, and inside, seen and unseen, the whole is honest, vitrified brick. Imitation, the artificial, finds no place in the structure. Everything is what it appears to be, and everything appears to be what it is. Like Solomon's temple, in the chronicle of the Kings, 'The house when it was building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.' Said Father Heldmann to his parishioners:—

"Let us build a church, a church in the plain, honest architecture of the Fatherland for an example to this quick, new country. To last not a century but twenty centuries. The building has no model in this country, and suitable bricks in the various shapes required could not be found here. Just 708 different kinds of Gothic bricks and moldings were made to order. Altogether about 2,500,000 bricks were employed in constructing the building, 500,000 of these being of a fancy variety. All facing bricks and moldings are vitrified, making them non-absorbent and self-cleaning."

"The seating capacity of the church is 1,200. The dimensions are as follows:—

Two hundred and nine feet is the total length, including the sacristy. The width over all is 108 feet. The two towers are each thirty-two feet square at the bottom, and 245 feet high above the sidewalk. The width of the body of the church is sixty-eight feet. The main entrance is through six pairs of doors in three large vaulted vestibules, which lead directly into nave and side aisles. The nave is entirely free from columns, as there are no pews on the side aisles, these being used as aisles only, and extend all around the church and back of the high altar. The height of the nave is seventy-five feet, the width forty feet between the columns, which divide it from the side aisles. The body of the church expands as the front is approached. It has the bulk of the seating capacity in the transepts, so that the majority of the congregation are brought within close proximity to the sanctuary.

"Altars, communion rail, front of organ loft, and pulpit are of terra cotta. White terra cotta figures of religious subjects decorate the interior of the church. This remarkable building rests on a foundation of solid rock, which extends under the property ten feet below grade. Financial operations in the building of St. Paul's church were likewise upon a solid basis. No contractors or middlemen figured in the buying and selling. Bricks and terra cotta were bought by Father Heldmann from the makers. All work was done by day, on the plan of 'pay as you go,' directly from the church treasury."

This peculiar and admirable temple has cost \$75,000. Possibly some day this style of structure may become the fashion; but certainly, as far as the present goes, it stands alone in the ranks of ecclesiastical edifices.