

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of De Bougny d'Hagerne.

CHAPTER IX.

That very evening Charles, through his secret channel, received a letter from Mons. Meynaudier, who expressed himself as being far from satisfied with the progress made in discovering fresh grounds for formulating accusations against the Jesuits. He recalled to Durand's mind that *plausible accusations* alone were needed since no *substantiating testimony* would be called for.

What could Charles reply? Ever since his entry he had been seeking to unearth hidden misdeeds of some sort or other and had not succeeded in finding out anything on which he could found the slightest accusation against the Order. He certainly could have recourse to invention, as he had already thought of, and could relate stories of orgies being detected, of compulsory vows being imposed, of murders being concealed, and these stories would be believed by at least 80 millions out of the 99 millions of Frenchmen who would become cognizant of them. Any penny-a-liner, however, could do that much and it was not for so easy a task that he had been sent to St. Acheul. He clearly perceived that his stay in the novitiate had been a complete failure as to any *bona fide* discovery he had made and he was convinced against his will, of the fruitlessness of further pursuing his researches. What to decide on, he knew not. On the one hand there rose up before his mind his own and his sister's personal needs as well as his desire of attaining to some lucrative position in life; on the other hand, his whole soul revolted at the tissue of falsehood he must weave if he would bring his present task to a successful issue. New and undefined emotions awoke within him, urging him to renounce his undertaking and take to flight. Overwhelmed and discouraged by these conflicting emotions he experienced anew all the anguish he had felt after his interview with the Rector.

Every morning, on rising, the novices had to meditate for an hour on a given subject, noting down whatever struck them the most. Charles had usually got through this hour as he best could, sleeping or occupying his mind with anything rather than with the external truths, and taking down some extracts from his meditation book so that he might have notes to show in case of need. On the fourth and fifth days after his interview with the Rector, however, he made the following notes, which gives a fair idea of the state of his mind. "To day, for the first time, I too have meditated. I have looked into the state of my soul and conscience, even of my honour, and have to acknowledge myself utterly miserable and unworthy. I am most unhappy, I am suffering horribly, I am ashamed, I despise and hate myself. I have come amongst these men as a spy, and have done nothing but deceive them in word and in deed. Every act of my daily life has been false and traitorous.

"I came amongst these men as a wolf into the sheep-fold, in order to deceive and betray them; I started by believing them to be guilty of every crime, whilst I, in my overweening pride, believed myself to be upright and innocent; these men have bestowed their affection on me, whilst I was only seeking how to injure them; I looked down on them disdainfully, whilst they were esteeming me for the virtues I had hypocritically assumed. And what have I discovered in them? Nothing but the most exalted virtues!

"For two months I have been living with all these young fellow-novices, and I have had time to know them thoroughly. They are happy because they believe in God, love Him and pray to Him; whilst I blaspheme, hate and curse everything that is good. Would that I could believe! Would that I knew how to pray!

"Did I but dare to cast myself at the feet of one of these novices, whom I now love as much as I formerly detested, and cry out: Help me, Brother, teach me to believe, to love, to pray!

"I will give up my mission. Were I even now to perceive some fault or error, I would not denounce it, and would look on it as some human failing, in no way resulting from anything that exists in that Order which has been so grossly maligne.

"Why then do I linger here, since my mission is ended? By some strange contradiction, though this place seems like my prison-house, yet I care not to leave it. The day after to-morrow I am to see the Rector again, and I will tell him that I find I cannot comply with the exigencies of religious life and wish to return to the world. I will then leave—yes, certainly I will leave."

That same day, during the free time, he passed by Brother Desnoux, an angelic-looking novice, hardly twenty years of age, who said to him:

"You are suffering Brother?"

"Horribly," said Charles, passing on; but suddenly turning he added: "Pray for me, you who are—"

"A word Brother Durand. Will you do me a great favour and come with me to the chapel so that we may both pray?"

Charles could hardly refuse this request, and, when after a few minutes they left the chapel, he asked his companion what secret he had for praying so well, since he had himself felt the good effect of his fellow-novice's prayers descending into his soul like a life-giving dew.

"Brother," he replied, "I have only done as our rule tells us to do when we perceive that one of our companions is assailed by temptations. I asked our dear Lord to send me the trouble that was weighing on you, so that you might be delivered from it. If, in order to restore you your peace of mind, God had asked my life of me, I would joyfully have laid it down."

Charles could not reply in words, but returning to the chapel, fell on his knees, hid his face in his hands and sobbed aloud. The novice had followed him, but on witnessing his friend's profound emotion, the cause of which he was far from guessing, he withdrew quietly leaving Durand alone.

The following day, at the same hour, Charles went to Brother Desnoux's cell and said to him:

"Yesterday you rendered me a great service and I come to ask you to take pity on me once more, for I am still suffering terribly. I have to make a most important decision, a decision on which depends not only my own future but also the happiness and welfare of my innocent young sister whom I have left in the world. Come with me to the chapel and pray with me and for me so that I may have the necessary strength and courage to perform my duty."

They entered the chapel and knelt down beside one another. Charles was much agitated and a cold perspiration bathed his brow, whilst Brother Desnoux, on the contrary, fixing his eyes on the tabernacle, prayed with the deepest recollection and devotion. Suddenly Charles rose from his knees exclaiming: "God has gained the victory! I am going immediately to the Rector. Do not desert me," he continued, addressing his companion, "but remain here praying for me till I return."

He hastened to the Superior's room and going up to the Father threw himself at his feet saying:

"Father, I have come to ask your pardon; I am a contemptible wretch."

Then in a voice broken by sobs, which he could not repress, he poured forth his tale and recounted how from his first entry into the house, he had played the part of a hypocrite and a spy.

The Father did not interrupt his recital, and, at its close, smiled with ineffable sweetness, saying: "My poor child, you have indeed been most guilty; but now join with me in thanking that merciful God who has touched your heart and brought you to repentance. It seems to me that what weighs on you the most is the evil you have done to our Company. We can easily pardon you for that offence, since, whatever may have been said to the contrary, we do not fear daylight. Who knows, either, whether your abortive attempt at making discoveries, so far from injuring us, may not turn to our advantage? Your most serious offence is your sin against God, for, since you have been here, you have insulted and blasphemed Him in your heart, you have resisted the inspirations of grace, you have despised His gifts and profaned His Sacraments. My poor child, it is herein you have offended most deeply, it is for this you should humble yourself and ask pardon, it is for this you should repent. It is not to me that you should kneel but to that God, your Creator and Saviour, whom you have so grievously offended. It is in the sacred