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CLARA LESLIE.

A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

But the bells were clanging on all sides, and the canons in procession going forth to meet their venerable Bishop; and now the organ poured forth its volumes of sweet sound, and the *Dixit Dominus Dominus meo* was chanted forth in full choir. A veil was placed before the Blessed Sacrament; but the young Englishman seemed to kneel on untired, and, almost entirely without the help of his book, which he held in his hand, followed the whole service distinctly and audibly. It was only when the preacher in his coat and stole had knelt and received the episcopal benediction, and ascended the steps of the pulpit, that he arose and accepted the chair offered him. And now all the attention of the Anglican was riveted on the face and language of the preacher. He was a pale middle-sized person, with a long black beard, and features that seemed moulded on the model that painters have formed for the likeness of our Incarnate Lord. They were strikingly beautiful; and the liquid Roman Italian in which he spoke together with the gentleness of his polished manner, was just calculated to win an Englishman, who cannot understand that kind of impassioned Italian eloquence that carries the fervent spirits of that glowing southern land before it without an effort, and melts them into sobs and tears of contrition and love, while it appears overstrained and overdone to the colder and more reserved temperaments of the north. He spoke of the Primacy of St. Peter, and the mistake of those who would separate the temporal from the spiritual power of the Father of the Faithful. Solemn and touching was the close; and then as one man the whole multitude knelt and poured forth those simple petitions to the Mother of Mercy which are familiar alike to peasant and king, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. *Mater amabilis, Virgo potens, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis!* It came forth like one mighty voice, and the young English girl who was kneeling near lifted her sweet pale face, as the tears stood like dewdrops upon it, and the Anglican clergyman bent his with a full heart, and felt that he alone, alas, was in a barren and dry land, while it was "flowing with milk and honey," to all around him.

And now the clouds of fragrant incense were obscuring the light that crowned the resting-place of the Incarnate Lord, the organ rolled forth again in its full tide of song, whilst the *Tandem ergo Sacramentum* arose, and then the jewelled Ostensorium was elevated in the hands of the venerable Bishop. Even the Anglican knelt down in awe; for he too believed that the very Lord of Hosts was there. When he arose, the young Englishman had just risen and turned his head. In a moment he was at his side, warmly pressing his hand.

"Why, dear Merville, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure. Who thought to see you here?"

"I was little expected to see you, Courtney," replied the Anglican, whom our readers will easily have recognized for their old friend; "but I see how it is," he added, looking full at him.

Courtney passed his arm within his, and with a long genuflection towards the now deserted altar, led his friend towards the side-door that opens into the great square of Valetta.

"That is an old story," said he playfully, as they reached the entrance. "I wonder you have not seen my 'perversion' in the newspapers long ago. They published it in one just after it happened, and then informed the public in the next number that I was 'a mere youth.'"

"The grapes were sour, it seems," replied Merville; and with a hearty laugh the amiable Puserite and his convert-companion took their way down Strada Reale arm in arm.

CHAPTER XXVII.—THE CONVERT'S JOYS.

The awe that lies too deep for words,  
Too deep for solemn looks,  
It finds no vent into the face,  
No spoken vent in books.

They know not how the outward smile  
The inward we can prove;  
They fathom not the creature's fear  
Of Uncreated Love.

Father Faber.

It was still early the next morning when our Anglican friend sallied forth from his hotel on his usual morning errand. He generally made his way into St. John's; but on this morning he passed the door, and proceeded down a little street that leads to the 'Nix mangiare' steps, crossed Strada S. Orsola, and stopped at the door of a small church he had remarked on his walk the day before. It was dark, but crowded with people passing in and out, chiefly of the lower orders; and round the middle aisle were ranged figures, large as life, representing the Passion of our Lord. Mass was just commencing at the high altar, and, kneeling down close to the altar-rails, he took out his book, and began

reverentially following the service. Numbers of communicants had just retired, and when the time for communicating had again arrived, he saw that many more were approaching. He drew a little back, and at that very moment the same slight figure he had seen the day before again passed close to him, and knelt just in front of him. The priest descended from the altar, and she in her turn raised her head, and received the Blessed Sacrament. She then bent down, and it was not till the benediction had been given that she again raised her head, and slowly making the sign of the cross, turned to come back to her seat. This time he could not make a mistake, for her face was towards him though shaded by the veil that partly overhung her little straw-bonnet. He had, then, seen aright, and Clara Leslie was before him. She was evidently perfectly unconscious of any one around her; the long dark fringes hung over her eyes; a slight color was in her cheek; but the expression of her face was one that once seen could never be forgotten. It was that peculiar loveliness that is often seen on the countenance of those who have just been so intimately united with their Incarnate Lord, when the love that has taken possession of the soul even throws forth a radiance upon the outward form. She passed slowly by him, and knelt down at the chair a little behind, which she had quitted a short time before, leaving an impression on his mind that could not be thrown off. Unwilling to lose this opportunity of renewing his acquaintance, he drew into a side chapel, and there remained watching the continual silent movement that seemed to fill the church. Here there was a group kneeling round the confessional, where the coarse habit of the Franciscan could be seen within, each in taking the place of the last penitent as each side of the confessional was in turn opened and closed again; in some devout souls were performing the 'Via Crucis,' while others were contemplating the representations of our Lord's Passion. There, again, others were making the round of the chapels, devoutly kissing the ground, and repeating a prayer at each altar; while every now and then the little bell rung, and a range of communicants presented themselves at the altar-rails to receive the Bread of Life. It was a scene of living devotion, calculated to make a deep impression on an Anglican mind, and in the middle of it still knelt the slight figure of the young English convert.—Some time elapsed ere she rose, and gliding into one of the side chapels, in a moment she was to be seen leaving the church in company with her companion. Bright was the look and warm the words of recognition as he came up to them at the door; for Clara had not forgotten the frank defence of the Jesuits, and those descriptions of Catholic ceremonies that had taken her fancy so completely on the evening he had spent in Os-naburg Terrace; but she did not expect the kindness of his manner to be so wholly unchanged. At first she thought he could not have known of her conversion; but she was soon undeceived.

"How strange to meet again in this unexpected way!" said he, as they slowly mounted the steps towards St. John's.

"Were you in time for the beginning of the last Mass at the high altar?" asked Clara with a slight catch in her breath.

"I was," replied Mr. Merville; "I was close to it the whole time, though I do not think you saw me."

Clara looked up, and met his eyes fixed upon her. It was half astonishment, half inquiry, and the tell-tale colour began to mount into her face as she said, "You must have been surprised."

"I was not quite sure I saw right," said he; "but, my dear Miss Leslie, I am not among the number that can lament the step you have taken. These are very difficult times wherein to know how to act in matters of conscience, and indeed I fully believe that you have been providentially led to this."

Clara's heart filled. "Thank you doubly. Your words are as sweet as they are unexpected; for one meets very little but cold looks and hard words from those who were once so dear."

"People become bitter," he replied; "they change rapidly. But you too must not lose all your sympathies for those you have left behind." It was sorrowfully said, and there was an almost inaudible sigh.

"I do not think I knew what to love them was," replied Clara, "before I was a Catholic.—I do not think any one can conceive the intensity with which one yearns that those who have led one so far on one's way to Catholic truth should likewise taste the rest and peace God has mercifully given to one so unworthy, and not to them. One often asks why is it that one has been thus chosen, when so many who loved Him so much more, and sought Him so much more fervently, are left behind."

"We must indeed abstain from judging one another," said Mr. Merville. "If you have gain-

ed, as you think, a large step in advance, thank God, and in all humility pray for us; and, on the other hand, I would that less severity were shown towards those whose consciences lead them from us. 'To our own Master we stand or fall!'

Clara's eyes glistened. "You will not be long what you are," said she. "Ere many months—weeks, I was going to say—are passed, I am sure we shall welcome you among us. God cannot but reward such charity."

Mr. Merville smiled. He was evidently amused, not displeased.

"I know not what is to happen to us," said he, after a pause; "we are passing a dreadful crisis; but I am sure we are being providentially guided."

"You mean the Gorham affair," said Clara, "which is as yet undecided."

"Yes," continued Mr. Merville; "if there is still a work for the Church of England to do in her present anomalous and separated state, then she will come out of this trial firmer and stronger than ever; but if she lose the faith, then she is not what we have believed her to be, and the sooner we are out of her the better.—Perhaps it may now please God to bring this provisional state of things to an end, and to call all Catholic-minded persons to unity under the Primate of Christendom. If so, I hope for grace to obey the call, and leave all and follow Him most readily and thankfully; for a separated state is not one to be desired."

"No, indeed," said Clara earnestly; and her heart was lifted in prayer for the wanderer who was so earnestly longing and seeking for truth and unity, and she felt convinced, in the first fervour of her conversion, was so shortly to find it. "Do you know you have another convert to congratulate?" added she playfully turning to Catherine, who had been silently listening to this conversation.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Merville, looking at her. "Well, though I, of course, must think the view you take of the Church of England a wrong one, I feel at the same time that you are in that part of the Catholic Church where you, at least, are safest."

"I am quite an aged convert," replied Catherine. "I feel quite old beside this very young Catholic," she playfully added.

"I think I am destined to meet none but converts," said Mr. Merville, "in this island. Yesterday, who should I see kneeling before me in St. John's but my old travelling-companion Courtney; and, to my great surprise, I found he too had been gazetted as a convert."

The ladies both laughed. There was something irresistible in Mr. Merville's manner, and he joined with that musical laugh which was so peculiar to him.

"Why, there's the very man," said he, as the identical Mr. Courtney was seen coming out of the west door of St. John's which they were passing, his colour a little heightened, and a certain subdued tone in his playful manner which told on what errand he had been out that morning.

He joined them in a moment, and morning greetings passed between the converts.

"You deserted St. John's this morning," said he, placing himself at Clara's side.

"You know I am very partial to the Franciscans," said Clara playfully. "I am quite obliged to you for pointing out to us that beautiful little church of Santa Maria di Gesu. It is so wonderful to feel one is in such real and close communion with the sons of the great St. Francis."

"It is indeed," said Mr. Courtney; "so many hundred years as that Order has existed, and now they still remain just as ever keeping the same rule, looking up to the same Father!"

"How came you not to tell me last night our friends were here, Courtney?" said Mr. Merville at this moment, interrupting his conversation with Catherine, at whose side she was walking.

"Perhaps I did not want to give you too strong a dose at once," replied Mr. Courtney playfully. "A whole function, benediction, sermon, and Vespers, besides one whole live convert was enough for one evening." And he glanced knowingly at Clara, who could not help laughing.

"And what is there to be seen in the way of ceremonies?" said she; "for you are the Observatore Romano of Malta; you manage to know everything."

"There will be High Mass at St. Dominic's on Thursday, St. Romuald's day," replied Mr. Courtney; "and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament almost every where next Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, as they are the last days of the Carnival. By the way, he added, "I forgot that Sunday is the great procession in honor of the shipwreck of St. Paul. It is the great festival of the island, and there is an Office expressly for the day,—Vespers, Mass, and all—and only in Malta."

"Where do you learn all this?" said Clara,

greatly amused; for his manner was so boyish and yet at the same time so gentle, he made Clara feel as if she were speaking to one whose every thought was so wrapped up in enjoying the Catholic truth and beauty he had found, that none other could find place in his mind.

"I have the free run of the Franciscan convents," said he; "and some of my friends among the monks, knowing my taste for functions, keep me 'au fait' of all that is going on."

"What is that large church in Strada Mercante, a little further down than the one where you say the English sermons are preached?" asked Clara.

"You mean St. Dominic's," replied Mr. Courtney; "there is a large convent of Dominican monks attached to it, and it is there where there will be High Mass on Saint Romuald's day."

"Valetta seems to abound in convents," said Clara. "I am so new to foreign countries every thing excites my curiosity, and it is all so very picturesque. It seems so strange to me to be really in this land of Catholic romance one has read so often, but not only as a stranger, but as a real living member of it. Only look now at those strange looking figures in white cloaks that are passing; what Order are they of?"

"Those are Carmelites," replied Mr. Courtney; "Gray Friars, as they used to be called in England, but not of the reform of St. Theresa. You know the Dominicans, in their white and black dress, do you not?"

"Yes, they are the only ones I can as yet distinguish," replied Clara; "except the Franciscans, with their ropes round their waists."

"A priest in a long black robe passed at the moment; he looked earnestly at them, and then bowed to Mr. Courtney."

"Would you like to see a Jesuit?" said he, in a low tone, as he returned the salute; "there is one bowing to you over the way."

Clara turned hastily to look, scarcely able to restrain a laugh.

"Why, how do you know them from all the secular priests that quite swarm in the streets?"

"Oh, do you not see the cut of their hair?" replied Mr. Courtney. "Only ask Merville if he does not know a Jesuit from a secular priest."

"Oh, I forgot Mr. Merville's predilection for the Jesuits," said Clara, glancing toward him, and the recollection of that evening in Os-naburg Terrace coming before her mind. "By the way, we have finished the year 1849. Is the prophecy fulfilled? Are they returned to Naples?"

"Some few are," replied Mr. Courtney. "They left this island for Naples before the end of 1849."

"How very strange!" said Clara earnestly. "I think one of the new worlds that dawn upon the mind of a Catholic is this opening, as it were, of the known and felt influence of the world unseen in almost everything that is founded and undertaken by Catholics. I suppose it is all a natural consequence of that wonderful gift of faith which one receives on being admitted into Christ's Church."

"You the existence of miracles," said Mr. Courtney, "and their frequent, almost daily occurrence in the Catholic Church."

"Yes," said Clara; "it is so strange to see the coolness with which Catholics hear of miracles having happened. They only say, 'Now you see how great the Blessed Virgin's power is in Heaven!' but they do not seem to regard it as something very strange and marvellous. And then there is a simplicity in their way of believing things that seem to a mind without faith only ridiculous and unworthy of God."

"Such as the authenticated miracle of Saint Vincent Ferrer," said Mr. Courtney, "which is in the acts of his canonization. They became so tired of the number of miracles he, and even his hat, worked, and the constant ringing of the convent-bell at all hours of the day and night that ensued, because people were always coming to beg Padre Vincenzo to come and heal them, that his superior ordered him to work no more. Of course, he obeyed; but one day, as he was passing a house which was in course of building, a man fell before his eyes from a scaffolding.—'Stop,' said the saint, in his simplicity,—'stop, till I go and ask leave to work a miracle; and in the sight of the assembled multitude the man remained in mid-air, while the saint went to his superior to get the leave he wanted."

"You do not mean to say that is true?" said Clara, in amazement.

"Perfectly true," replied Mr. Courtney. "witnessed by hundreds of people, and enrolled in the Acts of canonization! Why, it is not half as laughable as some of the things you read in the life of St. Philip Neri, 'the mad saint,' as they used to call him."

"But St. Philip Neri was unique," said Clara; "he seemed to have led the world captive in play. He worked miracles in play, and even laughed in the confessional. You remember the story of the woman who came and wanted to tell

him she had thought him possessed, when he was elevated during Mass in an ecstasy above the ground; and how he told her she was 'a foolish old woman,' and kept laughing and repeating to himself 'Possessed! yes, I am possessed?'—And yet, that throbbing heart! that loving gentleness and tenderness! What a delightful old man he must have been! one would have liked to have been his penitent. I wonder you have not entered the Oratory,' added she, after a moment's pause.

"Who knows what may yet happen," said Mr. Courtney, playfully. "At present I cannot make up my mind to leave this beautiful world I have just entered. My friends the Franciscans almost look grave when I tell them I cannot give up my favorite functions so soon. I must have my fill."

"And then bid them adieu for ever," said Clara, half-smiling, half-sighing, as she looked up with one of her bright looks into the cloudless azure above them, little thinking that her bonnet could not shade that bright look from her companion.

They had been slowly walking along Strada Venova, and now stood at the door of the hotel. "Are you too located here, Courtney?" said Mr. Merville.

"Except when I am among the Franciscans," replied Courtney, smiling; "but to-day I am going to cicerone these ladies to see the relic of the arm of St. Paul. I think they will tell you I act my part very well."

"Mr. Courtney is a master of his art," replied Catherine; "and as there will be a place vacant in our carriage, perhaps Mr. Merville may like to see a specimen of it, and accompany us to Citta Vecchia."

And so it was arranged. But our readers must imagine the awe with which Clara knelt on the spot where St. Paul had stood, and gazed on the very arm that had been lifted when that mighty preacher of the Gentiles was shipwrecked on the little desolate island of Melita, and won it to the arms of Christ's Catholic Church. She thought how 1800 years had elapsed, and still, one and unchanged, those 'barbarians' who so courteously entertained the great Apostle had retained the faith of Christ. The seed he had sown had yielded fruit a hundredfold, and Malta solemnly placed under the mantle of Mary by her Bishops and people, despite of the attempts of Turks and heretics, still stood forth clinging fast to the one faith and the one centre of unity, —the great See of SS. Peter and Paul. The Carnival, with its masks and gaites, its follies and sins, had little to attract a convert's attention. The churches, indeed, were open, and made doubly attractive by the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; and while music and shouts of merriment without betokened the folly of some, the fervent and adoring throngs within showed that it was but the sinful and thoughtless that thus placed themselves in temptation's way. The real Catholic spirit of Malta was to be seen gathered round her priests, praying for the giddy crowd without, and attempting to make up by renewed acts of love and homage towards their ever present Lord, for all that might offend His holy Eyes, or grieve the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mother and patroness of their island home.

Many a time did Clara, in kneeling amidst those silent worshippers, and listening to the words of warning that resounded in those sacred walls, pray that her country-people, instead of imitating and surpassing the folly of other countries, and then attributing every excess committed to the Catholic religion, would look a little nearer home, and ask themselves whether their religion made them show a better example; and at the same time not shut their eyes to the glaring fact that they are constantly grossly calumniating the Catholic priesthood by saying that they uphold and encourage the excesses of the Carnival time, when, if they would take the trouble of looking into the churches and confessionals, they would see what part they are taking in it, instead of joining, under the disguise of a mask, in all the foolish amusements that are going on.

At last the quiet of Ash-Wednesday came on, and the Church assumed her colors of mourning. The Venerable Bishop himself blessed the ashes at the church of St. John's; and a Protestant who had heard young Courtney's playful observation as they entered the cloister-gate. "Are you, too, going to have ashes on your head, Miss Leslie?" and afterwards remark, in the same playful way, to Catherine that she had not obeyed the Gospel precept of "washing her face" the morning when he perceived the marks of the Bishop's fingers, dipped in ashes, still on her forehead after the ceremony was over,—would not have expected or understood the deep recollection that characterized the young Englishman's manner, nor the sweet and lowly expression of humility and gentleness with which he, too, in his turn, went and knelt before the Bishop to receive the sign of approaching penitence and