



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 11, 1867.

No. 23.

EUSTACE; OR, SELF-DEVOTION. CHAPTER II.—Continued.

But Eliza wrote to me regularly and frequently, and her letters were not those of one friend speaking to another; they were not the simple productions, such as I often delighted to read, of my gentle and amiable friends at—, but rather the supercilious and warning epistles of some proud, arrogant woman, writing to one beneath her guidance; nor were those long sentences so full of religious sentiments, the enunciations of a really pious soul, but rather the constrained, picked phrases of one who thought and meditated well ere she wrote; for nothing seemed natural—all cold, constrained, and formal.

I will not dwell on my subsequent unhappiness, or my own want of resignation to the will of God on the long, sad days I passed, as sad to Maggie and my father to witness my unhappiness, as to myself. Unsettled, anxious, and restless, I experienced that wretchedness which none feel so painfully as those who, having chosen a state in life, whether in the active scenes of the world or not, bring to it all the enthusiasm and eagerness of a nervous and excitable temperament.

I failed, too, before the departure of Eliza, to extract from her the real reason why I was left in London till an indefinite period. She had not the candor to speak, and prudence sealed my own lips, condemning me to silence. Wearily, then, the weeks passed on. I had no longer a motive, to attain which my exertions were indispensably requisite; had this been the case, my spirits would have recovered a more healthful tone, and I should have been in every respect the gainer.

It may be for the good of others, with temperaments as ardent as my own, that these lines are penned. May they recognize what I, at this epoch of my life, failed to discern, the hand of an all-wise and merciful Providence, directing all things for the best, and leading us to heaven in His own good way, if we erring mortals only resign ourselves to His tender guidance, and with a firm and trusting faith can bring ourselves to believe, that though the path we have chalked out for ourselves to pursue be in itself most holy, and even undertaken with prayer, deliberation, and advice, yet, that man is ever likely to be deceived, and is prone to delusion; and that it, because our own feelings sway us unduly, we deviate from the course which Providence wills we should pursue, we peril our immortal interests. Fair as the way may seem, hilly as the path may be which we desire to follow, yet we may err; for whilst man proposes, God disposes, and it would have been well for my disturbed and anxious mind had I earlier put in practice these truths which faith required me to believe.

At the close of a few weeks, when anxiety had finished the work which cold had begun, the disease, the seeds of which had long slumbered in my constitution, broke out with such sudden violence, that it could no longer be doubted but that consumption was at work; then, too late for the sake of those so dear to me, I would have wished to retrace my steps, for might not an easy, calm frame of mind, a trustful reliance on Providence, have done much towards reinstating the health already inclined to fail? As it was, in the long months that elapsed, during which I never rose from my bed, I strove to suffer, as far as I could, with patience, and braved the death which I was told was approaching, as a transit to the glorious hereafter.

But mine was the sick room of poverty; a thousand anxious cares fell on my poor Maggie, for time passed on, my father's hopes to get the appointment I have alluded to vanished into thin air, and gaunt poverty again visited our dwelling. Maggie, during certain hours in the day, was compelled to be absent to deliver her daily lessons, and then, propped up by pillows I would write imaginative tales, translate, revise, correct, until a sudden accession of faintness would warn me to rest from my labors. I deemed this the employment of my death-bed. I little thought how distant then was the grave. Long, long I lingered, hovering as it were between life and death, touching on the confines of the other world whilst yet in this, working with my poor Maggie to pay our rent, to provide the meagre necessaries of the day, smiling when the good physician shook his head and pronounced me worse, exulting in my inmost heart when I overheard the words, 'she will not last long,' and shuddering not at the heavy night dews, the short hard cough, or the sight of my wasted form.

And may we not pay a tribute of gratitude to those men, surgeons and physicians, who, taken en masse, are worthy, indeed, of our respect? They behold that which others see not; they are a privileged class; they can tell why the heart is oftentimes diseased, why the dreadful angina pectoris attacks us, and why consumption, with

all its train of hideous evils, seizes on the victim; they know when poverty may be traced as the source of all this suffering, and then the good physician oftentimes becomes the friend, and if his art will not effect a cure, he at least endeavors to alleviate our pain. And lo, winter had passed, spring had put forth her young green things, and, to the wonder of all, I rose from that sick-bed, but not to leave the room. Ah, no: two, nearly three weary years must elapse ere that might be the case, and I had mourned and longed to be at rest, often repeating to myself the words of the Psalmist, 'Woe is me, that my sojourning is so prolonged.' Who will give me the wings of a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest? Then subduing the wayward spirit to more holy thoughts, murmuring with the crucified One, 'Not my will but Thine be done.'

Sadly, wearily, then the days crept on; my poor father found little relief even in the books his cruel fate had left him, for his most cherished and valuable tomes had gone in the days of our adversity. Poor Maggie! she too was changed, so thoughtful, so sadly quiet now. However, two friends were left to us, good Father Vincent and a lady, without whose kindly offices we should indeed have been at a loss. It happened one day, at a time when we were plunged in the deepest distress, and I more ill than usual, that Mrs. Melmoth, the friend in question, had proffered to sit with me while Margaret snatched an hour's rest. I sunk into a heavy sleep, and on awaking heard my friend pronounce my name coupled with that of Eliza Stukeley, and at the same moment a whispered exclamation of indignation burst from the lips of my sister. My curiosity prevailed over my discretion, I for once played the part of an eaves-dropper, and the following conversation met my astonished ears, the whispered dialogue every now and then broken by expressions of astonishment and anger from the lips of Maggie.

I had apparently awakened at the commencement of Mrs. Melmoth's narrative, for, as nearly as I can remember, she spoke as follows:—

'I was in Father Vincent's room this morning, my dear, and you may judge what I felt when I found that our poor Minnie might long since have been settled in a convent but for the perfidy of Eliza Stukeley, to whom you know she was for so long a time attached, and who unfortunately acquired such influence over her. I will tell you how I found all this out, not from good dear Father Vincent, but from a young lady who had called to see him, a friend of Eliza's, who, it seems, has met Minnie in her company.—This Miss Norton is acquainted with the nurse with whom Eliza is at present staying; and whilst in company with the Mother Superior, Eliza being also in the room, our dear Minnie's name was mentioned, and Jane Norton's affectionate heart exulted so for your sister's sake when she heard the Superior say—

'I have read several of Miss Herbert's letters. I know from these letters how eager she is to become a nun; we are a tolerably well-doing community, and may well afford to receive any lady with whom the want of fortune alone presents any obstacle. What say you, sister Mary,' she added, addressing Miss Stukeley, who was then beside her, 'you know Miss Herbert well? I have thought of inviting her hither for this purpose; give us your opinion on the matter.'

'I think her disposition and temper too haughty and turbulent for the convent,' was the unhesitating reply.

'You say this on your conscience,' resumed the Superior, murmuring as if to herself. 'I am sorry for it; but if it be thus, then better think of it no more.'

'I say it on my conscience,' replied the false friend, and, added Mrs. Melmoth, 'the doors of the convent are closed on our poor Minnie forever; and instead of that haven of rest, what has she had and may still have to suffer?'

Tears now rushed to my eyes; I could keep up the deceptive part I had assumed no longer, but raising myself on the couch, I exclaimed,

'Fear me not, Margaret, fear me not, dear Mrs. Melmoth, my poor weak heart tells me that all this is meant for wise purposes; I rejoice that I have heard this tale.'

'But I am very sorry, dear Miss Herbert, and shall not easily forgive myself for having mentioned it even to Maggie, much less in your own sick room. Indeed, indeed this tale of perfidy and wrong should never have been made known to you.'

I missed for a few moments; I was willing to catch at a shadow if I could but hope that Eliza had been less perfidious under the mask of religion, and I then said,

'Do you know Miss Norton? Did Father Vincent credit this story? What said he? He thought very highly of Eliza.'

'We cannot doubt the words of Jane Norton,' replied Mrs. Melmoth; 'I know her well, and so does he. He pities you much, Minnie, and sees that he was deceived in his estimation

of Miss Stukeley. Will not his words convince you? To me I own they spoke volumes.

'They were, 'For it must needs be that scandals come, nevertheless, woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.''

'Leave me to myself,' I murmured; 'I must have solitude and reflection now.'

Solitude, ay, yes, I did indeed need to be alone; and burying my face in my hands, I wept long and bitterly—oh, how bitterly, to think over the perfidy of her whom I had trusted.—Then, too, a thousand little things came thronging to my mind, and I wondered how it could be that I could ever have cared for this woman, who evidently, for some cause or another, was my direct foe.

And the Mother Superior, too, good easy soul, whose heart was doubtless full of charity, her mind full of good intentions, and yet whose understanding was so obtuse and dull that she failed in the discernment requisite to remind her that there were wise old heads in the convent at—, with whom poor Minnie had dwelt in peace and love for many months, and would fain have retained her there amongst themselves, and from whom but one short line would have been of greater value than ought else beside.—Ah, I murmured, small experience hast thou of the character of others, so readily to lend an ear to a false friend; and shocking as it may be to harbor the thought that one about to devote herself to religion would wilfully play an uncharitable part, what cause for wonder, when out of the chosen twelve of the Redeemer of mankind, there was found a traitor? What matter for marvel, then, that the novice should not always be pure from the stains of earthly passions, that she should carry with her the petty jealousies and rivalries she harbored in the world?

And as time passed on, so did the rude hand of poverty press yet more harshly; and I knew what it was to tremble at the voice of the angry creditor, to lay my hand on my heart in a vain endeavor to still its tumultuous throbbings, to shed tears of bitter agony, to indulge in vain and sinful repinings when I heard my good physician say to Maggie—

'She may live for years, but only with great care; her disease has long been in a quiescent state, but cold or anxiety may at any period of life produce a rapid change for the worse.'

And still, still time passed on, and brought no alleviation to our misfortunes; nay, they were increased, and destitution almost stared us in the face. My sister Maud strove to do her best in the small remittances she not unfrequently made us; but her own circumstances were far from good, and she had long since had to study the hard lesson how to rear her family, with the respectability due to the class she held in life, on very incompetent means.

But my heart sickens at this retrospection of the past, which I would fain for ever bury in my own mind. Not so much is it at the share I myself had in those bitter sufferings, as at the sad reflection that one for whom I would and did make every effort,—though, alas! they were fated to be fruitless,—died in the midst of the sharpest penury; and bitter indeed is the reflection that his life was cut short ere the power which I now possess to save him was my own.

By slow degrees I recovered a portion of my former health; but I own the truth, if when I still thought myself dying I bore the news of Eliza's perfidy with calmness, that feeling died away on more than one occasion under the pressure of our severe distress, and I oftentimes, in spirit, drew near to the foot of the Cross ere I could gain patience and resignation.

CHAPTER III.—THE MINIATURE—THE MEETING—HARD TIMES.

Darker and darker grew the clouds which hung around our fortunes. Creditors became more importunate with each succeeding week, and would no longer brook delay. One by one, every little article which could be converted into cash had disappeared,—our piano, our books, our trinkets, all, all had gone.

Christmas was at hand,—the third anniversary of Kathleen's death,—for us, apart from the religious celebration of the festival, it was but a scene of increased suffering, for there was present want at home, and the anticipation of meeting with a harsh landlord the following week.—The last hoarded valuable we possessed must be disposed of,—it was the miniature of my beloved mother, set in pearls, and which my father had had taken in happier days.

'It shall not be sold,' said Maggie, weeping as I placed it in her hand; 'there may yet be a hope of our recovering it.'

Wrapping herself up in a large shawl, and covering her bonnet with a thick lace-veil, which she drew over her face, my dear sister left us in quest of one of those abodes so often sought by the children of poverty.

With the shame sure to be felt by the gently born when reduced to profit by such aids, Mar-

garet shrunk from the wide and well lighted thoroughfares, and turned into one of the many obscure streets in the purlieus of Westminster and seeking the back entrance of the shop, with hot tears coursing each other down her face, she awaited her turn to be served. Coarse was the language which met her ears, and long had she to stand ere she could hope to be attended to, for it was the eve of a great holiday, and throng after throng of wretched men and women poured in and out in one continuous stream to and fro that refuge for the unfortunate. Now the half-drunken artisan presented himself to redeem, till the day after the holiday, his Sunday suit of clothes; then some haunting woman, offering some gaudy trinket; and then a poor widow pressed timidly beside my sister, whose thin and wasted countenance told indeed a tale of poverty and she offered the last thing she possessed, her wedding-ring. Margaret was struck by her timid air, and drew gently aside to allow her humble companion in misfortune to pass; the movement was observed, and a tall masculine woman, vixen stamped on every line of her countenance, elbowed her way to the counter, exclaiming in an under-tone—

'A poor lady! As you keep yourself so closely veiled, mind now, we are all alike here—you are no better than we, forsooth, or why are you come here on a Christmas-eve? So just make way, and let me get served first.'

Maggie shrunk aside, her heart full almost to bursting. Which, think you, reader, is the worst, the coldness of the rich, or the vulgar insolence of the lower class? We think the latter. If some amongst the rich wrap themselves up in sullen apathy, and turn a deaf ear to your distresses, they at least share the insult; but with those of a lower grade, oh, there is no 'bonne bouche' so sweet to the vulgar bad man or woman; they think themselves, as it were licensed to insult you on the score of your gentility. It is quite sufficient to excite their hatred for them to know that, as far as regards social position, you are immeasurably their superior; only let them know that you are as bad or perhaps worse off than themselves: and pride and poverty being synonymous terms in their minds, they will soon have an insolent word ready for you.

Well, to return from my digression, the poor widow received two shillings for her ring, and fixing her eyes, humid with tears, on my sister, dropped a courtesy, and thanked for her kindly action. As she passed the tall woman, too, was dismissed, and then poor Maggie drew near, and with something of the feeling of one who sees an act of desecration committed, she beheld the shopman turn over and examine my beloved mother's miniature.

'The pearls seem tolerably good ones,' he said. 'Of course the miniature, in itself, is valueless. These things are really of little worth save to the owner, and are yet often left with us who become the losers. However, I will lend you ten shillings, the half of what you asked.'

Poor Margaret! she had become well schooled now in the lessons adversity teaches. Expostulation, she knew, was useless, and, accepting the trifle offered, she hastened from the spot. She had threaded her way through two of the streets, and was passing one of those pests of society denominated gin palaces, quickening her steps with more than usual haste, for angry voices struck upon her ear, when a man staggered forward, and seizing her by the arm, endeavored to prevent her further progress. She shrieked out as the intoxicated wretch forced himself before her path, still retaining his vigorous hold, and in her struggle the small coin she had received fell from her hand.

'Unhand me,' she exclaimed, terrified beyond expression; but language will not express what her feelings were when a too well remembered voice replied,

'Let me pick up the coin you have dropped, my pretty one;—but what now, fainting in the streets—nay, nay, then, you must—I'll take no denial, but come with me to yonder shop, where I will get that which will revive you.'

Conquering, by an almost superhuman effort, the disposition to swooning which was fast rendering her unconscious, my unhappy sister was now dragged to the very door of the place in question, when, rallying herself to the utmost, she again struggled for release. This time that discovery which she was most desirous to avert, was made known, for the strong gas-light fell full upon her face, and with a low, mocking laugh she heard the words,

'Oh, my sister, my fine, dainty, lady sister; I trow, reduced to go to the pawnbroker, for I followed you from thence; ay, will you now let me help to find what, through mine own fault, you have lost?'

And reeling from the affrighted girl, he made alas, an ineffectual effort to find the lost coin. Maggie knew too well that it was, for ever gone; a heavy rain which had fallen early in the

day, and the traffic of the evening had covered the pathway with that greasy, black mud only to be met with in the streets of a large town, and with the blinding tears coursing in torrents down her cheeks, she was preparing to thread her way homeward, anxious to elude the guilty wretch, whom she shamed to call by the name of brother, when, discovering her intent, he again sprang to her side, exclaiming,

'Not so fast, Mistress Maggie; I have met you at last, and I do not mean to let you go till I find out where the old governor is, as also your own whereabouts.'

'For heaven's sake,' she exclaimed, 'rest content with the evil you have done me to-night. You have abandoned every filial duty; we ask nothing of you but to let us rest, leave us then to our own misery, and go your way alone.'

'Nay, nay, not so fast,' replied the depraved young man; 'I want you to come home with me first—I live close by.' And drawing Maggie's arm tightly within his own, he drew her to the door of a small house hard by, pushing her in as he opened it by means of a latch key which he held in his hand.

And who, reader, was one of the occupants of that room, who, indeed, but the masculine, hard-featured woman whose abuse my gentle sister had that night encountered, our 'sister-in-law, in fact, and her two children; one of them,—what a strange anomaly with such a mother—growing into one of the prettiest girls she ever beheld. An appearance of rough, rude neglect pervaded everything around, yet not of the squalid misery one might have fancied. It was the first time Maggie had met this woman, who, despite her effrontery, changed countenance, and seemed ashamed as Arthur introduced my sister, bidding her to set refreshments on the table.

'I will touch nothing in your house,' exclaimed Maggie, vehemently, 'you have done me the greatest injury already. I insist on your allowing me to return home immediately.'

'Most willingly, dearest sister,' replied the drunkard, who, overcome by the warm air of the room, could now scarcely keep his footing, yet persisted in walking home with her. Expostulation was useless, but the warm air effected more than all Maggie's expostulations, for, unable to maintain his footing, he sunk powerless on a chair.

'Wretched drunkard,' exclaimed the wife as my sister seized the moment for escape; yet she returned not home unwatched, my wretched brother was sensible enough to make a sign to his wife to follow her, and as my poor Margaret entered her house she saw the person whom she now knew as my brother's wife, standing beneath a lamp on the opposite side of the street.

'Foot-sore, wet, and weary, my poor Maggie threw herself into my arms, and indulged in a plentiful flood of tears, as she narrated the trials of the night.'

'Christmas-eve! Oh, what a Christmas, what a mockery of our sharp distress, our domestic trials, did those lighted streets, those cheerful sounds of unusual traffic, that merry peal of bells present, for hour after hour passed sluggishly by. Our poor old father was very ill, unable to rise from his bed. Want within, and misery without, our present severe distresses even aggravated this very night by the wretched depravity of our own brother, where, where was the nourishing meal, the cooling and refreshing draught which we had intended to give our poor invalid. And the hours passed on, the church-bells were hushed, the utmost silence reigned around, the stars twinkling myriads in the azure vault of heaven, shedding their pale light alike over the innocent and guilty, and Maggie and myself, bathed in tears, sat musing ever our melancholy fate, for the cold frosty air suddenly succeeding the storms of the previous day, benumbed our limbs: no blazing fire lent its cheerful ruddy glare, no curtains hung in heavy folds around the bed, and I observed with horror our poor father shivering under his scanty covering; he saw our troubled faces, the tears which trembled in our eyes, and taking a hand of each within his own, the old man began to console us.

(To be Continued.)

Be convinced that, without the practice of humility and patience under crosses, and the mortification of thy corrupt nature, thou art not leading a good life. Divine charity will augment in thy heart in proportion as human self-love diminisheth.

Beware of entanglement in the snares of human friendship, lest thou fall from perfection by sinning against Divine charity.

SEEKING FOR A BALL.—The Count de Grance being wounded in the knee with a musket ball, the surgeons made many incisions. At last, losing patience, he asked them why they treated him so unmercifully? 'We are seeking for the ball,' said they.—'Why then did you not speak before?' said the Count. 'I could have saved you the trouble, for I have it in my pocket.'

Each time thou wishest to decide upon performing some enterprise, raise the eyes to heaven, pray, God to bless thy project; if thou canst make that prayer accomplish they work.