

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of Do Bongny d'Hagerne.

CHAPTER V. (continued.)

The Father left him and Charles could bear his slow, heavy steps dying away in the distance, and then all was still.

The room he was occupying was monastic in its simplicity; there was a painted deal bedstead, two or three chairs, a table on which were some books and a *prie-Dieu*; on the white-washed walls there hung two or three devotional pictures.

"Here I am installed in one of their strongholds," said he to himself, "but my position is not so very pleasant. A week here, all alone; I shall die of inanition."

He looked out of the window. Before him lay a kitchen garden and beyond that he could perceive, in the fading daylight, a succession of hedges; to the left stood out one of the wings forming a part of the principal building, and, to the right, he could distinguish a large farm and its out-buildings. The only living being in sight was an old priest, walking up and down at the other end of the garden, saying his beads.

He was interrupted in his observations by the arrival of a lay brother bringing in his valise. After lighting a lamp and enquiring whether Charles needed anything more, the lay brother left the room. By the light of the lamp Charles examined the books on his table. They consisted of the "Imitation of Jesus Christ," the "Think well on it," the "*Journee du Chretien*," and Rodriguez's "Christian Perfection." He threw them all aside at first, but he afterwards took up the "*Journee du Chretien*," and began turning over its leaves. He found in it the prayers which his mother had taught him and which he had now entirely forgotten, he decided on learning them anew, since his ignorance of them might give rise to suspicions as to his sincerity.

Then he read over the "Rule of Life. At five o'clock rise and visit the Blessed Sacrament; half-past five, meditation; half-past six, reflection; quarter to seven, free time; seven o'clock, Holy Mass; half-past seven, breakfast, followed by free time, &c., &c."

"What a life! and for a week! How shall I ever be able to bear it in this dulllest of dull rooms and amid this leaden silence!" He also recalled to mind that he could not recede without forfeiting all chances in life for himself and his sister. Besides, he might turn this tiresome solitude to good account by reading, writing, working, for fortunately he had put a few books into his trunk.

At half-past seven he heard the noise of opening doors and steps passing in the passage; just then, too, the old Jesuit came to shew him to the refectory. He there found new food for wonder and for study. Six men of different ages and appearance were standing around a large table. They bowed politely to the new comer. A young priest, who stood a little way off in a corner of the room, said the *Benedictio* (grace) aloud, and then the men sat down and commenced their repast. A lay brother brought in the dishes separately and they were passed round from one to the other silently but in a perfectly courteous and well-bred manner. The science was only interrupted by the young Jesuit reading aloud some pious book, for the benefit of those in retreat.

At the end of the supper the young priest said the thanksgiving, and the strangers, after visiting the church for a few minutes, returned to their rooms.

Charles was soon followed by his friend, the old Jesuit, who, after ascertaining whether he was satisfied with what he had already seen, questioned him as to the rule of life, &c.

"You perceive," said he, "that there are four meditations a day of an hour each, and that these meditations are preceded by a quarter of an hour's preparation and are followed by another quarter of an hour's reflection on the meditation. Now, have you ever meditated?"

"Yes and no, Father. I have often reflected long over some important question so as to weigh well all its bearings, but I have never made a meditation on a religious topic, such as you allude to."

"You must begin then, and perhaps you may find some

*This French book is very similar to the "Garden of the Soul," and is in almost universal use.

difficulty at first, for it is certainly very fatiguing to fix one's whole attention on the same subject for an hour and a half at a time. However, you will get used to it."

He then gave him some autograph leaves concerning the next day's meditations, the first of which was the one which St. Ignatius himself considered as the base and foundation of Christian life. The text runs thus: "God created man to the end that he might praise, worship and serve the Lord his God, and thus attain unto eternal life."

After explaining to him more fully how to pass the time of preparation, meditation and reflection, the Jesuit did all in his power to encourage his young companion and took his leave, promising to return at noon on the morrow.

Leaning his head on his hands Charles was soon lost in thought, asking himself was all this real or was he dreaming. Everything seemed so strange, so different from what he expected. This calm, silent house, where one might imagine one's self alone, was inhabited by a number of men who appeared to be so absorbed in the prescribed prayers and meditations. Were they in earnest? Were they weak-minded, superstitious creatures, fanatics, enthusiasts? In a few days time, when he would better understand much that now seemed inexplicable, would he not discover that hypocrisy, lying and plotting were hidden beneath these specious appearances?

We will better understand the state of his mind by looking into his first letter to Mons. Meynaudier.

St. Acheul, Oct. 7th, 1844.

DEAR SIR, I am writing to you from St. Acheul, from the lion's den, and really, the assault was not perilous nor the victory glorious, for the doors were opened wide to me. Are the Jesuits less cunning than we have been led to believe? or rather does not their apparent simplicity hide wonderful powers of dissimulation? Eventually we shall know this.

The Rector pretended to be busy and sent a stupid old monk in his place. This individual, who is the only one I have yet had anything to do with, has about as much sense as the common run of country village priests. It was a clever idea that of sending such a man to receive a young Parisian; for this good, simple, ingenious old peasant seems to believe firmly the farrago of nonsense which he pours into one's ears. Do you not see that one's prejudices must disappear in the presence of so insignificant a personage, of one so easily duped and so ready to fall into any trap laid for him?

Here is a portrait of the old clod-hopper, bald head, two foolish looking goggle-eyes, shaded by bushy eyebrows, a protuberant nose, perpetually stuffed up with snuff, and a crooked mouth. As for clothing, he wears an antediluvian, worn-out, patched, ravelled out cassock, covered with grease-spots; as a basis to all this he has the biggest of big feet stuffed into enormous, unshapely shoes, down at heel, which shoes have long had a deadly quarrel with the blacking brush. Whilst I am portrait painting I might also give you a description of an awful creature who is a sort of domestic watchdog and at the same time waits on the strangers. Suffice it to say that he is a grotesque sort of dwarf, but, being affiliated to the Order, we are obliged to address him as Brother. Is not that sickening? Happily we do not see much of him.

I am lodged in the strangers' rooms, for the Jesuit rule prescribes a week's retreat before a man can be received as novice. This retreat consists of prayers, meditations and other absurdities in use among the devout; they go on the whole blessed day without a break. Fortunately the good Fathers leave you to yourself during these amusing performances, and as I had luckily put two volumes of Voltaire into my trunk, I manage to pass the time pretty well. As for my room and furniture, it is what might be found in the poorest of wayside inns. I fancied that perhaps there might be some trap-door concealed, some peep-hole through which a curious Jesuit or one of their trusty emissaries might spy what I was doing. I searched behind all the furniture and pictures and thoroughly examined even the walls, and have made sure that no one can see me. However, I am not entirely safe from inquisitorial glances, for my room door only latches, there is neither bolt nor lock, so that domiciliary visits can be made during my absence. I take care, therefore, to lock up my books and to keep about me such papers as I do not wish the Fathers to see.

(To be Continued.)