



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1858.

No. 14.

THE MARTYR MAIDENS OF OSTEND. A LEGEND OF THE 16TH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.—THE LISTENER.

Considerably more than a hundred years have come and gone since one evening towards the end of May a young man, by his garb and general appearance adjudged to be an Englishman, or at all events a native of the British Isles, was observed to mingle with the motley crowd, which from every part of the city of Ostend was thronging onwards to the parish-church. It was the hour of Benediction; but no thought of prayer seemed to occupy his mind, for he paused occasionally to scan the passing groups with no inquiring eye; and when he reached the church, instead of advancing towards the altar at which the service was to be performed, he ensconced himself in a dark corner near the entrance, where, free from every chance of observation, he could direct the same fierce scrutiny to those who entered as he had already bestowed upon the passers-by.

Some attracted more, some less of his notice; but each new face had power to call forth a look of eager questioning, which again as invariably faded away into one of disappointment; until the appearance of a fresh group at the very moment when service was commencing arrested all his attention, and evidently more than satisfied his previous expectations. The party in question was composed solely of women, all young, and two at least most beautiful; the one with her fair hair, in contrast to the fantastic head-dress of the day, parted Madonna-wise upon her brow, the other veiling the "merry-mischief" of her glance beneath the long dark lashes which swept her cheek like a silken fringe, as with eyes reverently cast down and features composed to an expression of intense devotion, she stepped sedately after her companions. The two fair girls who followed were far too young to call forth much speculation from any casual spectator, and the young woman who walked behind them, and who apparently occupied a position between a confidential servant and an humble friend, would have been absolutely plain, had it not been for a countenance which bore the unmistakable expression of a sweet and calm but most earnest mind.

None of them noticed the young Briton; and though it was plain that he had recognised them, it was just as evident that he did not wish the discovery to be mutual; for he drew quickly behind a friendly pillar as they passed, and it was not until they had taken their places near the altar that he ventured to seat himself at a little distance in the rear, from whence, his face being partially concealed by his hand and by a fold of his short mantle, he continued to watch them unobserved during the remainder of the service.

Though the taller of the two maidens who had first entered the church was visibly the chief object of his attention, yet was it in some degree shared by her dark-eyed companion, while the younger girls seemed to excite his interest only from their association with these two. But whatever might be his motive for this close observation, whether curiosity or admiration, or some yet stronger feeling, he was plainly not disposed speedily to abandon it; for even after Benediction was over, and the congregation had begun to retire, he still kept his eyes fixed upon the group with an air of stubborn determination, which sufficiently announced his intention of not leaving the spot until they had set him the example. So far, however, from showing any immediate purpose of departure, the damsels remained quietly in their places until nearly the whole of the congregation had left the church; and then, after some little whispering and consultation among themselves, the Madonna-browed maiden rose and walked calmly towards the sacristy. The stranger bit his lips impatiently in apparent disappointment at this fresh delay, and made an involuntary movement forward, as if to follow her retreating steps; but again recollecting himself, seemed to submit with a kind of dogged resolution to his fate, while his unconscious tormentor proceeded with gentle and half-timid accents to inquire of one of the acolyths for the Pere de Camba.

"What would you with the Pere de Camba, my child?" asked an aged priest of a singularly benevolent aspect, who, having overheard her question, had stepped forward to answer it. "Or rather," he added, leading the way into the interior of the room, and closing the door, "rather, what would you have him to do for you?" "I guess by your accent that you are a foreigner, and by your looks that you need advice? I am the Pere de Camba, for whom you have inquired; tell me therefore if I can do aught to serve you."

"You can, mon pere, if you will be so kind. I would learn of you whether an Englishman of the name of Elliott does not reside in this town, or at any rate at some short distance without its walls?"

"Who are you that ask it, lady?" replied the

priest, with something both of trouble and of curiosity in his manner.

"Sir," replied the maiden, "if indeed you be the Pere de Camba, of whom in better times my good father was often wont to speak, you will know not only the secret place where at present he hides him from his foes, but likewise the writer of this letter, Master Richard Bishop, of Brailes House, Warwickshire, whom you once honored by ranking him among your friends."

Pere de Camba opened and glanced his eye over the letter she presented; and then, turning to the lady with an expression of double kindness in his good, kind face, he took her hand and said, "The daughter of the noble Elliot, and the great-niece of my good friend Richard Bishop, has indeed a twofold claim upon my love and service, to say nought of the reverence which I needs must feel for one whose family has given the first of a new line of orthodox prelates to that unhappy land of schism from whence she comes. Say, therefore, Mistress Winifride, in what can I assist you?"

"I would fain see my father, sir; for it is now two long years since he left England and me, his daughter; banished, as I doubt not you already know, for his faithful adherence to the fortunes of a most unhappy monarch."

"That will be easy of accomplishment, my child. Your father leads almost the life of a recluse in a cottage without the walls, and in Ostend he is known only as the holy hermit of England. When, therefore, would you wish to seek him?"

"Oh, soon! very soon, mon pere! Sunrise to-morrow, or indeed it scarcely seems too late to-night. I do so pine to see him, when I think how long, how very long, it is since he has looked upon his child!"

"Nevertheless to-night is much too late," said the priest kindly but decidedly; "and sunrise to-morrow would be much too early. Suppose we choose the happy medium, and name the hour of seven?"

"Seven, then, let it be," the maiden answered with a grateful smile. "Can you provide me with a guide, mon pere?"

"I know of one who cannot be far off," he replied; "for he generally remains until I leave the church, and if you will wait a moment I will seek him for you;" and opening the door of the sacristy as he spoke, the Pere de Camba walked down the church, closely followed by the lady.

Her young countryman, who all this time had never quitted his post, was instantly moving in the same direction. Then as they paused in conversation with one of the acolyths who had served at Benediction, concealing himself behind a pillar close to where they stood, he had the satisfaction of hearing, not only the name of the hotel at which the fair stranger was lodging, but likewise every particular of the directions which the unsuspecting cure gave the boy for her safe guidance the next morning to the residence of the English hermit without the walls. The intelligence, thus surreptitiously obtained, seemed to make an alteration in his plans. The lady was no longer the chief object of his attention, which was now transferred to her guide-elect; and no sooner did the latter quit the church than the stranger closely followed in his track. He took care, however, not to attempt any communication with him so long as they were within sight of the church; but after he had put two or three crowded thoroughfares between himself and all danger of observation from that quarter, he made a long stride forward, and tapping the boy upon the shoulder, inquired in a confidential tone if he could direct him to the cell of the English hermit. Happily for his schemes, this designation had been more than once repeated by the Pere de Camba in his consultation with Winifride and her little guide; and the stranger was far too quick not to guess at the real condition of the person thus described, and to take advantage of the information he had gained.

"Yes, to be sure," replied the boy, completely taken off his guard by the friendly and easy tone in which he had been addressed; and then, connecting in his own mind the stranger who now accosted him with the party he had just left in the church, he added, "Monsieur may rest assured that the demoiselles will be as safe under my charge as if he had the happiness of being their conductor himself."

A slight faint smile played for an instant on the stranger's lip, as he thought perchance that he might not be exactly the guide the young ladies would have chosen; but he repressed it ere it could have attracted his companion's notice, and merely remarked, with a slight infliction of virtuous indignation in his voice, "Demoiselles! I know not what demoiselles you speak of; but is it possible that ladies are permitted to visit the holy man? I should have thought so stern a recluse would have willingly dispensed with the company of such fair distractors."

"Ladies don't often visit him, certainly," replied the boy: "I never heard but of one be-

fore; and no one knew if she were really a woman, or only a man in woman's clothes. However, it is the Pere de Camba who sends my demoiselles, so it must be all right; for he is the hermit's bosom-friend, and visits him once a-week, to confess him, some folks say, or to talk government matters with him, as others think; for the hermit is said to be fonder of the English king on our side of the water than of the great lady who queens it on the other; and the good father is much of the same way of thinking, as every one knows at Ostend."

"Quite right that he should be!" cried the stranger. "All honest men think the same.—The hermit is a Jacobite, as we call them in England, and I faith so am I, since at Ostend I can say it without danger of my head; wherefore lead on, mon brave, and look you say nought of this transaction to your demoiselles; for it must be a profound secret between the hermit and myself."

"Nay, but—" said the boy, pausing with some perplexity of manner—"it is surely a pity monsieur did not name his wishes to the Pere de Camba; for the holy man is said not to be over fond of intrusion, and at this hour of night it is quite likely that a visitor to his cell may get a bullet instead of an embrace for his pains."

"Oh, is that all?" replied the young man laughing; "you need have no fears on that score, my good fellow, for the night is much too far advanced to think of beating up the old lion in his quarters; and, in fact, I did not mean to visit him now, but merely to have a look at his den, in order to make mine own way thither at some future time. Take this gold piece, and lead on. The sum shall be doubled to-morrow if I find you have been faithful and true, and have kept my secret."

"Bon Dieu, how rich these Englishmen are!" exclaimed the boy, quite overcome by such unlooked-for munificence. "Come on then, monsieur, since you will have it so; but we must make haste, for we shall have barely time to go and return before the town-gates are shut for the night."

"Lead on," repeated the stranger; "and when we return you shall show me the way to the Golden Fleece."

"Golden Fleece!" cried the boy in a tone of undisguisable amazement; "why that is the very same hotel where my demoiselles are staying."

"Indeed!" the stranger answered, with a well-feigned look of surprise; "I seem destined to cross their path to-night. However, the Golden Fleece will probably hold us all; or if not, I can seek accommodation elsewhere. So listen on."

CHAPTER II.—AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

The unconscious object of these various manoeuvres was that evening sitting with the rest of her companions in one of the large empty-looking apartments of the Golden Fleece, when, unattended and unannounced, the stranger who had so closely dogged their footsteps entered, and took a seat, though all unbidden, at her side.—The two youngest girls started up blushing deeply, partly from timidity and partly from surprise; and she of the dark eyes and raven locks might possibly have done the same, if a glance from her more guarded companion had not restored her to at least the semblance of composure. A long and awkward pause ensued, during which the stranger seemed endeavouring to repress some emotion that unmanned him; nor was it broken until the maiden with the fair hair addressed him in tones that could scarcely be said to tremble though a marble pallor had overspread both cheek and brow.

"My cousin Douglas, you are welcome; if, indeed (which I fain would hope) your visit be well intended as assuredly it has been unexpected on our parts."

"And undesired, doubtless you would have me to understand; cruel, as you ever are, Winifride," replied he whom she addressed; while yet, in spite of the bitter look of disappointment on his features, he attempted to take her hand—a movement which she dexterously evaded under the pretence of taking up her "knitting," the fashionable feminine amusement of the day.—"And you, fair Elizabeth," he added, endeavouring to cover his repulse with an affectation of indifference, "are you also unkind and ungenerous as of old? and have you still neither heart nor hand to offer to your kinsman?"

"Neither heart nor hand, Master Douglas," the girl answered promptly, "unless, indeed—though I do sorely doubt it—that kinsman hath come back from his captivity a better man than when the fortune of war consigned him to a foreign prison."

"Good faith! you need doubt of it no longer, coz," the stranger answered with a voice and smile of bitter irony; "for if to be strong of will, and firm of purpose, and reckless of all consequences, constitute, as I take it, sterling worth, though in another sense to that which you religious hypocrites would set upon the term, then am I now to all intents and purposes a better

man than even when I put thy grandfather's head in peril rather than relinquish one iota of my wishes."

"In troth, an it be as you say, Sir Cousin," replied the lady, striving to conceal an involuntary feeling of terror and repulsion beneath a light and laughing manner, "David himself was not a truer son of Adam, when he set Uriah in the battle-front;—no, nor Solomon, when he bowed before a thousand idols to please the vanity of a thousand wives."

"Nay, retorted Douglas, "your wit is short of the mark, good mistress. With all his wisdom, Solomon was a fool; he risked perdition for the sake of many, while I would hazard it but for one, and that one is —"

"Self," interrupted the spirited girl, her eyes flashing and her face kindling with irrepressible indignation.

"You are right; no other is, or could be worthy of such a sacrifice," replied Douglas coolly. "You have a keen judgment, Mistress Elizabeth."

"It needs no great wit to judge the present by the past," replied his cousin; and of him who, even as a boy, sacrificed all things to his wayward passions, it surely may safely be predicted that self will still be the idol and the intimation of his maturer years."

"Peace, Elizabeth!" interposed her graver companion; "such upbraidings are most unmeet a maiden's lips. Our cousin," she added, turning coldly but courteously towards their unbidden guest—"our cousin is doubtless well aware that we have but even now concluded a long and wearisome journey; and therefore I trust he will hold us excused if, consulting our weakness rather than our politeness, we leave him to seek a much needed repose."

"His known tenderness and consideration for all human creatures leave no doubt but that he will consider this an indisputable and conclusive argument," said Elizabeth.

But again Winifride checked her. "It is not for us to bandy words, Elizabeth. Master Douglas, we pray you to permit us to retire."

"Not until you have heard me, Winifride;—and that in private too," replied the young man, his face assuming that very look of relentless obstinacy of which he had been boasting.

Even Elizabeth felt her spirit quail before it, while Winifride, on the contrary, though she grew paler and paler, as was her wont, beneath the assumed calmness of her outward bearing, yet continued the conversation in the same tone of dignified composure with which she had commenced it.

"To what purpose, Master Douglas?" she said. "If it be but to discuss the question first mooted years ago, at the house of our venerable uncle, Master Bishop, such an interview would be as vexatious as impertinent; for I could but say what I have said before—and nothing more, and nothing less."

"Fie! Cousin Winifride," cried Elizabeth, "to be so mild! Now, as I were in your place, I would tell Master Douglas to his face, that if he were then an object of pity and indifference, now he is one of pity and aversion, nay, of the most profound contempt; and that not half so much for his unmanly persecution of a defenceless maiden as for his shameless backslidings in politics and religion; his forsaking the faith of his fathers for a hundred generations, and his mean adhesion to the upstart government of an undutiful daughter and a faithless sister."

"I thank you for that word, fair coz," Douglas broke in, with a look of malignant pleasure. "You have heard her, damsels all; and you cannot refuse to bear me witness, when I call upon you, that Mistress Elizabeth Bishop has committed herself to words of treason; yes, treason against the queen of the Protestant people of England, and against the Church of which that princess is the defender and supreme head."

"Not treason—not treason," murmured the two youngest girls; and "not treason," boldly echoed Elizabeth herself. "For treason can be uttered only against the Lord's anointed; and him, thou knowest, I touched not in my discourse."

"Hush! my cousin," again Winifride interposed. "Master Douglas, once more, will it please you to retire?"

She moved towards the door as she spoke;—but Douglas sprang forward, and drawing the ponderous wooden bar by which it was intended to be secured, exclaimed, with the addition of a terrible imprecation, "Not a living soul shall leave the room this night, Winifride, if you do not pass me your word for a private interview. Take your choice, brave damsels!" he added, in a taunting tone; "yes or no, either will suit me indifferent well; for if I fail in speech with Mistress Winifride, I can at least find consolation in the fair company into which fate has flung me."

"And what if we will not endure it?" cried Elizabeth, the quick blood mounting to her neck and brow. "What, sir, if we choose to call others to our aid?"

"You may call," he answered, with a malicious

smile, "but will any answer? Look at these thick walls and massive doors, and say if your very neighbors of the next floor could hear your cries, even if they were not (as they are) sleeping-off their deep potatoes of most vulgar schnapps?"

"Would you were fast in your prison still!" cried the vexed Elizabeth; "what ill fortune has sent you across our path once more, bad man?"

"Doubtless the gods, fair nymph, who would make us amends for our long captivity," he answered, with a mock air of odious gallantry.—"I was even on my way to England when I received advice of your departure for these sandy shores; and on these sandy shores accordingly I have waited your arrival, winning meanwhile a reputation among the fair Ostendians which has made me the idol of every young frau, and the terror of every old one."

Winifride's very soul trembled within her as she listened to this audacious speech; but her resolution was taken on the instant, and she only said: "I will speak with you alone, Master Douglas, since you insist upon it; but only on condition that you give me your word of honor afterwards to retire."

"Word of honor!" echoed Elizabeth scornfully.

But Winifride checked her with a look, as she continued: "You, dear Elizabeth, will withdraw into the next chamber with our young friends; and Hilliard shall remain with me; but out of ear-shot of what may be spoken."

"That is not a bargain!" cried Douglas indignantly; "I said alone, and with no other witness than —"

"God and our own conscience," cried the maiden calmly. "Master Douglas, I fear you not; but I speak to no man save in the presence of a third person; and for the rest, Hilliard is my second self, and a secret of mine is as sacred in her hands as if it were her own."

Douglas at first seemed about fiercely to refuse this compromise; but something there was upon Winifride's brow which warned him that if he rejected these conditions he might fail of his point altogether, therefore he sullenly signified his assent by withdrawing the wooden bolt from the door, and so leaving the rest of the party free to depart. This the two youngest girls did in a hurried and terrified manner; but not so Elizabeth, who paused on the threshold to give him a look of defiance, which he, to do him no more than justice, retorted to the full.

CHAPTER III.—THE INTERVIEW.

"Jesu! Maria!" cried one of the girls, as they all crowded into the next apartment, like a flock of frightened lambs. "Alas! God protect our dear Mistress Winifride! Saw ye the scowl this fierce stranger cast upon her as we left her alone with him?"

"Nay, little Annie," said Elizabeth, laughing, "that scowl was intended for me; only Winifride being half a head taller, it fell instead upon the brow of the only woman who has calmness and dignity enough to quell the spirit of that insolent Scotchman."

"Then he is not English, dear Mistress Elizabeth; I am truly glad of it, for I should have been ashamed of my countryman."

"No, Annie; his mother, indeed, was the sister of my mother, and of Winifride's as well;—but she married a Douglas, and so the blood of one of the oldest and noblest families of Scotland is tingling in his veins."

"Good lack! and yet he did act the evil part you have hated at just now," cried the girl, in unfeigned astonishment.

"He did all that I have said, and with more villany even than I have yet described," answered Elizabeth, compressing her beautiful lips to an expression of utter scorn. "He wanted to wed Winifride; and when he found that, her heart being set upon a convent, she would by a means consent to be his wife, then was he wicked and mean enough to seek by force to extort her acquiescence."

"Nay, and indeed!" the girl responded under her breath from very fear; "and what did he, dear Mistress Elizabeth? Did he waylay her on the road-side, and bear her to some old deserted castle, as is told of the heroine of an old romance which used to lie in a closet near my late mother's chamber?"

"And which little Annie Scandret used to read and believe as devoutly as if it were the Bible from whence her father was wont to find texts for his discourses," said Elizabeth, who in the midst of her anxiety and vexation could not refrain from smiling. "No, indeed, my own Annie; and lucky for Winifride it was that he did not, seeing that I know not in all the country round about Brailes House of any courteous knight who (as is needful in all such fair distresses) would have ridden to the rescue. Master Douglas had a much more prosaic, and, alas that I must say it, a much more fatal method by which he sought to accomplish his end. He renounced his faith, gave in his adhesion to the usurping government of Anne; and having thus