



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1861.

No. 26.

THEOBALD; OR, THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY.

(Written by Madame la Comtesse de la Roche, and published under the auspices of the Archbishop of Tours.)

(Continued.)

CHAPTER III.—THE BANDIT.

The Signor Cafarelli was on the quay waiting for Theobald. As soon as the latter perceived this faithful friend, he ran forward and embraced him with affection.

'Come, my son,' said the old man; 'your room is prepared, and we are all impatient to receive you.'

Madame and Mademoiselle Cafarelli gave him a most cordial and graceful welcome. Our hero would greatly have preferred going at once to the chapel of the Madonna della Vesina, to visit the tomb of his mother, but his friend would not permit him. At daybreak the next morning Theobald commenced his pilgrimage. Signor Cafarelli insisted on accompanying him. They proceeded in silence and meditation; but in passing the hotel formerly occupied by the baroness D—, Theobald could not repress a sigh, when he thought that probably on earth he never more would see her who had been a ministering angel to his mother, and a bright and shining light for himself and Clarita, and whose benign influence he felt daily more and more.

'We shall never forget the loss of that excellent woman,' said the signor, who understood the natural feeling of his young friend. 'She did so much good in the country.'

When Theobald left the churchyard, after praying long on his mother's tomb, he said to the signor: 'I much wish that my mother's remains should repose with those of my father in the family vault; be so kind, my dear sir, as to take the necessary steps for their removal.'

The old gentleman promised to do so. After a long silence—'My son,' said he, at length, 'you will soon find yourself in a very difficult position. Allow me to advise you to act with much prudence. Annunciata is an active and most courageous woman; but I fear she will not prove a good adviser for you. Tell her to have patience, and do not act precipitately. Your enemies are cunning and crafty, and will be on their guard.'

'If you would speak of the Fabianos I will at once clearly explain my intentions towards them to you, above all, for you are a man of sense, and able to understand my feelings. Whether they are or are not guilty of my father's death, they have been acquitted by a jury of their countrymen, and I am bound to consider them innocent; it is to Him alone who searches all hearts to judge them now; it is to Him alone that vengeance belongs, if they deserve punishment. As to me, they have nothing to fear, and I declare to you I never will raise my hand to do them the least harm.'

'Alas!' replied the signor, who had listened with great attention to the words of his companion; 'make no rash promises, my young friend. Your sentiments are, doubtless, most laudable, and although a true Corsican myself, I approve them from the bottom of my heart; but you have forgotten your country, my son. Were you going to reside in Bastia, your feelings might find some sympathy, but, great heaven! think on Piovola! you do not know of what such a race of men is capable. Do you remember little Buonavita? You saw him at my house. At that time he was between sixteen and seventeen years of age. He also had been educated on the Continent, and had acquired much useful knowledge, with new manners and feelings.—Well, he returned to his native mountains, and some time after he received an insult which he did not immediately revenge. There was but one opinion, one cry, on what was termed his effeminate manners, in other words, his cowardice. From all he received the *rimbeccio*, or Corsican approach, for having borne an injury without instantly revenging it, upon which he sent a challenge to his adversary, who laughed at it, Juelling being unknown amongst. Civilization strove for some time with prejudice, but the latter was victorious, and Buonavita is now in the thicket, having killed his man.

'Prejudice may have conquered civilization,' replied Theobald; but religion will triumph over prejudice at last.'

'I hope so, too,' said Monsier Cafarelli, with a doubtful air, and he then changed the conversation.

Towards evening, a shepherd sent by his aunt arrived with a horse to take Theobald to Piovola; and the following morning, at day-break, he took leave of the hospitable family of Cafarelli, promising to revisit them shortly. He was an excellent horseman, accustomed from childhood to ride, but still was frequently obliged to dismount and to take great care of himself and horse, so dangerous and difficult was the way taken by his guide, the shepherd. This was caused by the man having chosen the upper path, which led among rocks and precipices, in order

to avoid passing the tree marked with the fatal stain of poor Antonio Loncini's blood, for this day of Theobald's return was to be one of unmitigated joy. The guide, then, led the way on horseback, followed by his dog, and with his gun on his shoulder. About mid-day they reached the door of a miserable hovel, entirely constructed with the branches of trees, in the very thickest part of the wood. The shepherd then whistled in a peculiar manner, upon which, a man, armed to the teeth, issued forth, and advanced to Theobald, after having carefully double locked the door, a very extraordinary precaution in a country where the houses are only secured by a latch, and have no locks or fastenings, except in the case of the owner being in 'vendetta.'

'You are truly welcome Signor Loncini.—Do you not remember your old friend Burcica, to whom you have so often brought powder at the Red Cross, and who used to trot you on his horse when you were a little boy? How tall you are, how robust you have grown! It is a pleasure to see you. May God preserve you, signor!'

Theobald had recognised the bandit, but this meeting was by no means agreeable to him, and he felt displeased with the shepherd for having arranged it. However, he put on a good countenance, and shook the hand Burcica offered, for he remembered the man had always been ready to render a service to his family.

'Come and refresh yourself,' said he, conducting the young man towards a large block of marble, on which a supply of provisions were spread, consisting of black bread, raw onions, a goat's milk cheese, and a quarter of venison, cooked under the hot cinders. Burcica then brought a bottle of wine from the mysterious cabin, and presented it to his guests.

Theobald was greatly inclined to refuse this rural repast, but having ridden since daylight, he was extremely hungry, besides, he also feared to offend the well-known susceptibility of the Signor Burcica. However, the late pupil of the Abbe Duhamel, felt far from comfortable in this strange company.

The bandit, on the contrary, was overjoyed at the return of Theobald, and asked him numberless questions, interrogating him on all he had seen and even learnt. The young man replied at first with much reserve, but Burcica spoke of his father Antonio, with whom he had been very intimate; of Annunciata, that woman of energy; of Clarita, whom he named the good angel of Piovola; and Theobald became more communicative.

'Are you not tired of this wandering life, so completely out of all social law, that you have been leading so long?'

The question was hazarded on a desire to make his interview with Burcica useful to him, by suggesting wholesome reflection.

The bandit paused before he replied. 'You are aware what has made me lead the life I do,' he replied, at length. 'I was either obliged to suffer a long imprisonment, or make up my mind to embrace my present existence.—I could not hesitate, for I love the open air and my liberty before all things. Here I am absolute master. The thicket is my kingdom. My subjects are all those who require my services, or who fear my stiletto, and they form a large class. I raise contributions wherever I please; and no one has ever refused the supply of powder and shot necessary for my use—indeed, they anticipate my wishes; and I should never want money if I accepted but one-half of that offered me.'

'But are you not in constant dread of the Corsican voltigeurs, who are always on the look out for you?' asked Theobald.

'I laugh at them, and at the *gendarmes* as well. They are not sufficiently sharp to catch me. I sleep sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, as it suits me. To-day I am here, to-morrow I shall be fifteen leagues off in some other thicket, or on some impregnable peak.—How, then, can they take me? Besides, do not my kind friends apprise me continually of their marches and countermarches; and have I not my faithful dog, who knows and can wind their footsteps at a league's distance?'

'But this isolated existence—'

'Isolated!—not quite so isolated as you appear to imagine, particularly just now,' interrupted Burcica, smiling maliciously, and casting a glance towards the hovel. 'However, to speak the truth, there are moments when I feel tired of all these advantages; and I think in three years, when my time of outlawry is expired, I shall make an end of it. I shall marry, and return to my former existence.'

'I strongly advise you to do so, and wish you well with all my heart,' replied Theobald.

'And for what reason?' asked Burcica. 'I only war against bad people, and am always ready to serve my friends whenever it is in my power to do so. But what you say deserves reflection,' added he, in a grave tone, 'and I will think seriously upon it when I have time.'

The meal being now finished, Theobald and his guide prepared to continue their way, for they wished to arrive at Piovola in the evening.

Burcica insisted on accompanying them to the end of the ravine, at the commencement of which they now were. But before commencing his march, he returned to the hovel, and Theobald, looking through the foliage, thought he perceived another individual, clothed and armed precisely as the Signor Burcica. These two men exchanged a few words in a low voice, and Burcica rejoined Theobald, followed by an enormous dog. The latter asked him no question, well knowing that the Corsicans, although so curious, dislike to be questioned on what concerns them personally. Nevertheless, he could not repress a movement of curiosity, very natural under the circumstances, when he thought of the hovel so scrupulously locked; but he repressed the feeling, as he could not harbor any distrust or suspicion. Burcica was an old friend of the family, and he knew of no solitary example whatever in which a Corsican had ever betrayed a friendship. The young man then turned the conversation on far more useful subjects. He painted the happiness of a regular and Christian life, with the charms of family love. The bandit appeared to listen with real pleasure.—When they emerged from the wood, they took leave of each other.

'Adieu, Signor Loncini, till our next meeting,' said the bandit. 'Whenever you want me, only let me know; my arm and carbine have never failed the Loncinis.'

'Thank you sincerely for your offer,' said the youth; 'but I trust that I may never need them.'

'Do not be too sure,' pursued Burcica, misunderstanding the sense of Theobald's reply.—'You have truly become a very fine young man, and are quite capable of arranging your own affairs without aid; but no one knows what may happen. And it is always well, believe me, to have a friend in the thicket. Look at poor Monnecco and little Marietta. Where would they be without us at this moment? But I forget—you do not know this story. You shall hear it now, at least so far as it has gone. I remember that, when only so high, your discretion was proofs against everything. Did you not remark the citadel we passed?'

'What citadel?' asked Theobald, beginning to think it was a question of the mysterious hovel.'

'Oh, a stronghold of my manufacture, with a strong oak door, and a good lock and key, which latter never leaves my pocket. It contains a Parisian dandy—a lion, as they are now called in the town. This exquisite, who appears, after all, a good fellow enough, had a place in the custom-house here in Corsica. He was at Cerrione for some months, and became acquainted with Marietta in a house where she used to pass Sunday evenings. He promised to marry the young girl, and the father, Monnecco, willingly gave his consent. The young man then said he would write for the necessary papers to be forwarded; but weeks and even months passed, and no papers were forthcoming. Monnecco began to suspect all was not right, and set a spy to watch his future son-in-law, who discovered that the young man had effected a change of residence, and was going to be transferred to Nantes, in France, preparing to depart without beat of drum. In his fury Monnecco thought of using his stiletto; but Marietta implored him so pitifully, that her father was moved, and changed his tactics. He confided his plans to me, and I made them my business. At the moment that the faithless custom-house officer was escaping in the most secret manner from the town, one of my companions and I were waiting for him on the high road—for the Continentals, you know, never risk going thro' the thicket unless well accompanied. Hardly had my fine fellow proceeded half a league, when we fell upon him like two vultures. The poor youth made no more resistance than a lamb going to the slaughter. We conducted him to the citadel, which had been constructed expressly for him, and we said, 'Now, young man, bark ye, you will not leave this place until well and legally married.' This time the papers were not so long in coming. At the expiration of three weeks they arrived in due form; and this very night the *adjoint* of the mayor of Cerrione will marry him to the pretty Marietta here in the wood. Indeed, I expect her to arrive almost immediately, with her father; and Monsieur Valery may then leave for the Continent if he wishes to do so, for we shall not offer him the least impediment.'

'But you have acted against all right and law,' cried Theobald, stupified by the account.

'How so?' inquired the bandit. 'Are we, then, to allow our young girls to be dishonored with impunity, and to suffer them to be amused by promises in the air, and say nothing? We should, indeed, see fine things, if all these fops

from the Continent were allowed to make love, promise marriage, and then be off?'

'But to seize a man violently on the high road, against all law and right, and keep him a close prisoner for three weeks?'

'Bah, Bah! he is not so much to be pitied as you may imagine,' interrupted Burcica. 'We have done him no kind of harm. On the contrary, he has been well housed and well fed.—The fellow has eaten during these three weeks more meat than would feed a Corsican for six months, to say nothing of upwards of thirty bottles of good old wine, which he no doubt imbibed for the purpose of drowning his sorrow. Every evening we make him take a sentimental walk by moonlight, between one of my comrades and myself, as it might enter his head to give us the slip.'

'But can you for a moment imagine that such a marriage will ever prove happy?' pursued Theobald.

'That is no business of ours—Marietta's reputation was compromised by the fellow's jilting her, and the honor of Monnecco, her father, as well; both will now be repaired, that is the principal point. Besides, the young girl is pretty, the father gives her a trousseau and 2,000 francs for her marriage portion; she is, therefore, one of the best matches in the town, so you see the exquisite is by no means to be pitied. No doubt he is very glad at the bottom, that we have obliged him to marry, and I assure you, there are very many young men who would give a great deal to be in his place.'

'That has nothing to do with the matter,' said Theobald. 'All this appears to me so strange, so out of all social order and the rules of civilization, that I cannot think you have done well.'

'Ah! Theobald, you have forgotten your country; but you will soon renew your acquaintance with it, I hope. But I must leave you, for my friend in the citadel must be tired by this time of mounting guard all alone. Should you want me, put a slip of paper in the hiding-place of the red cross, by the Mucchio, or this is even better,' said the bandit, taking a coin from his pocket, with the effigy of King Theodore.—'Your father gave it to me; there are not many left now in the island.'

Theobald mechanically took the piece of money, and continued his journey, a prey to a thousand strange thoughts.

The words, 'you have forgotten your country,' addressed to him the day before by Cafarelli and now repeated by the bandit, recurred to his mind, and he felt obliged to admit the truth of the observation. All that he had just seen and heard so completely overthrew the ideas inculcated by his education on the Continent, that he began to ask himself if he had not presumed too much on his own strength, in promising to shake off, without compunction, all prejudices of his country irreconcilable with the rules of religion and honor. He felt at this moment that it would require much strength of soul to triumph over the obstacles which he foresaw, vaguely and confusedly, in the distance, would inevitably oppose themselves to the accomplishment of his good resolutions; he saw and felt that to conquer he must receive assistance from above, and devotedly offered a prayer beseeching the Almighty to endure him with strength to persevere in the paths of virtue and Christian charity.

CHAPTER IV.—THE RETURN HOME.

The sun was already descending behind the mountains, and Theobald continued to advance, his head bent down and his mind entirely occupied by serious reflection; fortunately, his horse was as sure of foot as the goats of Niola, for the young man, absorbed by his various thoughts, let the reins fall on the animal's neck, and relied on his instinct to conduct him safely in the perilous ascents and descents which constantly occurred. Suddenly the report of at least forty guns startled him, his horse bounded backwards, at the risk of dismounting his rider, and Theobald beheld twenty shepherds advancing to meet him, and in the act of reloading their guns.—By an instinctive movement, the young man sought for his stiletto, forgetting that on leaving Paris he had given it as a keepsake to one of his dearest friends; he was, however, immediately reassured by seeing a lady galloping towards him, whom he instantly recognised.

'Theobald, my dear nephew, you are here at last! returned to live with us! How we have sighed for this moment,' said Annunciata.

'Not more ardently than myself, I can assure you, my dear aunt,' replied Theobald, dismounting to assist her; but more active still.—Annunciata had already jumped lightly from her horse, and was close to him. At this time she was thirty years of age, and in spite of the heat of the climate, which usually fades the beauty of the women while young, Annunciata had preserved all the lustre and brightness of hers.—Her fine features were animated by the joy of Theobald's return, and her eyes, already so expressive, appeared more brilliant than ever; still

a few lines on the ivory forehead, a marked frown, and a disdaintful expression about the mouth, clearly denoted to an observant eye the ravages of passion on this regularly handsome face. She looked long with admiration on her nephew.

'How tall and strong you have become!' said she exultingly; 'you will, I trust, be a worthy head to our family. Oh! woe and misfortune to the family of the Fox,' added she with enthusiasm; 'for they would have devoured the harmless lamb, and the lamb is now changed to a lion!'

Theobald frowned, for he had not forgotten that the father of the Fabianos had formerly been surnamed the 'Fox,' in consequence of his character for cunning and craftiness, and the metaphor was by no means to his taste. 'How are my grandmother and Clarita?' he hastened to inquire.

'You will see them both presently. Do you not remember this neighborhood, Theobald?—We are but a quarter of a league from the village.' All this time the shepherds continued to fire in token of rejoicing.

'Come and thank these good people, my nephew,' said Annunciata—'they are all devoted to us, and,' added she in a low voice, 'you may depend upon them all, when an occasion offers.' Theobald left his aunt without reply, and advanced to the country people, bowing and offering his hand, which they all pressed heartily.

'Let us remount,' said Annunciata, 'for you are awaited with impatience at home. But what do I see? You are entirely without arms; how is this, my nephew? Are you a young lady, that you fear the weight of a rifle; or can it be that you do not know how to use it?'

Theobald's self-love was wounded to the quick. 'Lend me your gun for a few moments,' said he to the man that had served him as guide. Now the young man's principal recreation, while studying for the law, had been shooting at a mark in a gallery formed for the purpose, and he had become an admirable shot. After having satisfied himself that the shepherd's gun was in good order, he was going to aim at the highest branch of a chestnut tree at a great distance, but at the same moment he perceived a bird of prey, soaring in the air at a prodigious height—so high that it appeared to be a black speck in the midst of space. 'I will aim at this vulture,' cried Theobald. The gun went off—the bird was motionless for an instant, then they beheld him fall to the earth, turning over and over, a shapeless mass—it was dead.

'Bravo, bravissimo, signor,' cried all the shepherds with the greatest enthusiasm. Annunciata said nothing, but she embraced her nephew with impassioned tenderness; and the cruel, ferocious joy that beamed from her eyes made Theobald regret having given way to the vain desire of exhibiting his skill.

'You see, my dear aunt, I shall not let you want game during the season,' said he, affecting a light tone.

'Nor game of a higher description, I hope and trust,' replied Annunciata, with the smile of a demon.

'Let us proceed,' cried the youth, 'we have already lost too much time,' and he pressed his horse to a gallop, hoping to shake off the disagreeable impression caused by his aunt's words, for so many contending emotions agitated him violently. It was joy, above all things, to return to his country, his relatives, his countrymen; but all these sentiments were mixed with a painful feeling, which he could not exactly define. Annunciata quickly rejoined him, and he would willingly have left her side, had it been possible; for he felt instinctively that this woman, however engaging she might be, was like an evil genius attached to his footsteps. Impossible, however, to avoid her at this time, the proud Amazon placed herself at her nephew's side, at the head of the procession, intimating to each person the place they were to occupy. As soon as the houses of Piovola became visible, the firing of the shepherds recommenced with redoubled ardor, and attracted all the inhabitants to the door and windows. This kind of ovation did not please Theobald, who would greatly have preferred gaining his home quietly, after so long an absence. Annunciata, on the contrary, appeared to triumph in it; she made her horse curvet, and saluted, either with a wave of her hand, or her voice, every one of her acquaintance. On proceeding up the principal street, the young man perceived the house belonging to the Fabianos; it was entirely shut up; indeed it might have been taken for a state prison, so abundantly was it provided with iron bars and locks. As they passed it, the firing became furious, and the demonstrations of joy changed almost to imprecations and threats.—Theobald was on thorns.

'Annunciata, cried he to his aunt, 'for the love of heaven, put an end to this.'

'My friends,' said she to the shepherds, 'the time is not yet come for showing your loyalty.—Be moderate.'