

In a short time after, the penitent fell sick. He paid no attention to what he conceived a slight indisposition, for he imagined his constitution was strong. But his fastings, watchings, and abstinence had undermined his health. One day he dragged himself along to his usual place under the Church porch, but had not strength enough to return. They were obliged to carry him home. From this time his illness became more serious every day, and Stephen was constantly beside him. When this poor man saw he was in danger of death he lost all his resignation and firmness; he despaired of obtaining pardon from God. The agitation of his mind frustrated every attempt at his cure, and he was in a hopeless state.

Oh! save me, he would cry to Stephen; save me. I cannot die. Oh! if I die without absolution I am lost, I am damned! Oh! take pity on me and save me. Oh! absolution.

Stephen wrote to the Court of Rome, but he did not expect the letter would be in time.

As the young Vicar had his duties to discharge, he required some one to remain with the penitent during his absence. He chose me for the purpose, and I was not a little proud of this mark of esteem.

I took up my post by the bedside of the penitent, and never quitted it. We forced him to use a mattress and a little covering. Stephen and I paid him all the attention in our power, but it was quite useless. During the day he enjoyed a little rest, but would fall, at night, into horrible ravings. Stephen made every effort to confirm his hopes in the divine mercy.

You will not die, said he to him; it is your agitation alone which causes your danger. You surely will not die; and besides, ten years penance like your's

are an atonement sufficient for any crime.

For any crime except mine, replied the penitent, wringing his hands.

O man of little faith, said the Vicar, don't you see you are offering an insult to heaven by doubting of its mercy? Listen to me then: if at your last hour, the permission to absolve you does not arrive from the Pope—and God grant it may arrive!—you will make your confession to me, and I will take on my own soul the responsibility of your absolution.

But there was no necessity for the fulfilment of this solemn promise. The deep repentance and sorrow of the stranger had found favour with heaven.

It was at the close of a day which the sick man had spent more tranquilly than usual, but which was not the less a day of agony in my eyes. We had given up all hopes of a letter from the Pope. Stephen had gone out, and had promised, at his return, to administer the last Sacraments to the dying man.

On a sudden I heard the sound of rapid footsteps. The door opened, and Stephen rushed in crying out: a letter from Rome!

A hectic flush passed across the pale cheek of the penitent, and his dying eyes sparkled with joy.

From Rome! repeated he in a feeble voice! from Rome! Give it to me: give it to me! Oh God! is it the very day of my death that you have chosen for the day of your mercy! O Lord! this would be a two-fold grace!

He raised himself up, took the letter, and tried to break the seal; but his trembling hands refused to perform their office. He handed it to Stephen. Read it, said he, it is my sentence. I have not strength enough to open this letter, and even if I had, there is a mist over my eyes which would prevent me from reading it. Oh! do read it for me.