

THE LAMP OF THE SANCTUARY.

PART I.—ITS BRIGHTNESS.

"Who will grant me that I might be according to the days in which God kept me, when His lamp shined over my head?" *Job. xxix. 2, 3.*

IN the recesses of the Pyrenees, not far from the Spanish border, there was (our tale is of the last century), a small rural chapel situated on a hill, known by the name of Mont-Marie. The chapel itself was simple and unpretending, solidly built, and of considerable antiquity. The inside was, however, richly adorned. The altar had silver furniture, and the walls round it were covered with votive tablets, and with silver donatives, hung in commemoration of favours piously believed to have been received through the intercession of the blessed Mother of God, to whom the chapel was dedicated.

Indeed it was celebrated through the neighbouring country for many miles round, as a place of great devotion, almost a pilgrimage. Over, but behind the altar, on which was a rich tabernacle, stood an image of the spotless Virgin, bearing in her arms her Divine Son. It was nearly as large as life, of white marble and of ancient workmanship. Every one who looked at it with a favourable light, pronounced it a matchless piece of art, a work of highest inspiration. Nothing could be more benign, more sweet than the expression of the Mother, nothing more winning, yet more majestic, than the countenance of the Child.

In the midst of the sanctuary before the altar, was hung a silver lamp, as is usual in Catholic churches and oratories, burning day and night. Never, on the most tempestuous night, was it known to be extinguished; for it was abundantly supplied by the piety of the people, with the purest oil from the olive-yards of the country. And this to many of them was a matter of great importance. For that lamp was a beacon and a sure guide to the traveller at night. It was, therefore, so hung, that its bright radiance shone through a round window over the door, and could be seen to a great distance. The path which led from several hamlets to the main road in the valley, passed near this chapel; it was a narrow rugged track along the mountain's side, skirting a precipice; and the directions given to the traveller was to go boldly forward so long as the light of the chapel was visible before him; but so soon as it disappeared by a jutting of the rock, to turn sharp to the right and fearlessly descend, as the precipice was now exchanged for a gentle slope that led to the wider road. So certain was this rule, that no accident was ever remembered to have happened along that path. Thus did a beautiful symbolical rite of worship lend itself to a most beneficial purpose, and become the cause of great social good; thus did the altar of God send abroad its cheerful brightness to light up the dark and wearisome path, (alas! how like that of life!) and thus were the solitary traveller's thoughts attracted to the sphere where his guiding-star burnt clear before the mercy-throne of the Lamb, there to offer, in spirit,

homage; or led to think on that wakeful Eye of Providence which darts its ray from a higher sanctuary upon our joyless way, to cheer and guide us thither.

The chapel was under the care of a hermit priest, who lived in an humble dwelling beside it; and ministered to the spiritual wants of the neighbourhood, as the parish church was at some distance.

On the road which we have described, and about two miles from the chapel, was a poor small mountain hamlet, inhabited chiefly by woodmen who worked in the forests around. Among the cottages which composed it, one was remarkable for its neatness, though as poor as the rest; and the young couple that occupied it, were no less distinguished as the most industrious, the most virtuous and the happiest in the place. While Pierrot was sturdily working among the hills, his wife Annette was sitting at her wheel spinning incessantly, unless busied with domestic cares, while at her feet sat their only child not yet three years old, but already giving tokens of sense and virtue. Like every other child born under the tutelage of that chapel, she had been called at baptism, Marie. The child was the delight of her parents, for with great liveliness of disposition and cheerfulness, she united sweetness of temper and gentleness of mind. It may be easily imagined how they watched her every look with the anxiety of fond affection.

It was with dismay, therefore, that about this time each parent observed a notable falling off in her good looks and in her spirits. For some days, neither durst communicate his alarms to the other; but at last it became manifestly necessary to call in medical advice, for the child was growing every day paler and thinner, and was losing strength. But every effort of human skill proved vain, and the physician declared that nothing short of a miracle could save the child. The parents were disconsolate, and seemed distracted with their grief; till, finding no comfort on earth, they turned their thoughts more fervently to Heaven, where, however, they had all along sought help.

It was a fine autumn evening, when the heart-broken parents were seen slowly walking along the narrow path we have described, evidently directing their steps towards Mont-Marie. The mother bore a precious burden in her arms, lighter indeed than the one she carried in her heart. It was her frail and sickly child carefully wrapped up, though the afternoon was warm.

When they reached the chapel it was still day, and many of the peasantry were then making their evening visits as they returned from work. The door was open, and the western sun streamed in full glory through it, and steeped the interior of the place with golden lustre, giving to the paintings, the hangings, and the bright ornaments of the altar, a richness and magnificence truly royal. It seemed as if it was the hour of majesty, the time for urging great and noble suits, at the throne of Power; the presence-chamber