

LITERATURE.

THE WOODEN CROSS.

A RELIGIOUS TALE.

Chapter I.

The sun was gilding with his departing rays the beautifully stained windows of the ancient Cathedral, and pouring into the immense building a faint reflection of his light. This magnificent edifice, the work of three centuries, reared its imposing mass like a giant, amid the modest dwellings by which it was surrounded. Every object in it bespoke the greatest magnificence, and attested the love of the people for the God whom they came thither to adore. The eye was attracted with respect towards the sanctuary which was superbly embellished with gilding, precious marbles, and statues, from the chisels of the most celebrated masters. The height of its arches, the boldness of its pillars which shot into the air like so many towers, the happy disposition of the various parts, the harmony of the entire, and the perfection of the details, impressed on this building, which was three hundred and fifty feet in length, a character of grandeur that seized on the imagination, and prepared the soul for the grave meditations of religion. You could never enter this sacred temple without feeling those sweet emotions, which so admirably relieve the heart—that is so often a prey to the agitation of the world.

It was on a Sunday evening when the inhabitants of the town were hurrying out in crowds to breathe the pure air of the country. Madam de Linden, a lady descended from a noble family, in whom piety and virtue were hereditary, had, since her husband's death, quitted the town to retire to a mansion situated in a delightful country, where she abandoned herself without reserve to the inclinations of her noble heart, in doing good, and bringing comfort to the miserable.

She had come to spend some weeks in her house in town to regulate certain affairs, which required her presence. She was resolved to leave on the following day, and was paying several farewell visits alone and on foot. Her way led her to the neighbourhood of the church, when she was attracted to the holy spot by the majestic sounds of the organ, which rolled waves of harmony throughout the vast building. On entering the beautiful church, she beheld a numerous group of the faithful in one of the lateral chapels, singing the praises of the august Mother of the Son of God. She joined the pious congregation. The holy place was filled, as it were, with the divine majesty; the sweet odour of the incense, the recollection of the people, and the sacred music,

made such an impression on her senses, that she believed herself transported into another world. Suddenly the voice of the priest was alone heard; the multitude prostrated on the pavement of the church, received the benediction of the Lord in an ecstasy of love, and soon after retired in the most profound silence.

Madam de Linden was so moved by what she had beheld, that she approached the Altar of Mary to recite some prayers. She had never before visited this sanctuary, which seemed as if isolated amid the vast extent of the building. By the flickering glare of a lamp she could discern the altar, and the ornaments by which it was decorated. Its architecture was simple, but executed with much taste. A picture representing the holy virgin at the foot of the cross, at the moment when the blind rage of the Jews had fastened on it her divine Son, attracted her attention. The painter had in some manner identified the mother's grief with the agony of the Son, and had skill to impart such an energy to his work, that it was impossible to resist the impression it produced. With a happy idea he had grouped around the holy mother of Jesus Christ, several persons loaded with infirmities, as if to teach us, that she whom the Church calls the *comfortress* afflicted, had in some measure drunk to the dregs the cup of human misery and sorrow, and that she had perfect experience of those sorrows, for whose relief we invoke her assistance.

Whilst Madam de Linden was enjoying at length the unspeakable delights which the faithful soul experiences in prayer, she was attracted all on a sudden by sighs, which issued from a corner of the Chapel. She gently turned round her head, and to her great astonishment beheld kneeling in holy recollection a little girl, who could hardly be ten years old. This child was dressed in black; her eyes fixed on the altar, her hands joined on her breast, her tears which flowed down like large pearls on cheeks furrowed by premature care, her attitude, her piety; in a word, every thing about her was interesting; you would have pronounced her an angel in adoration before the Holy of holies.

At the sight of so much innocence, Madam de Linden felt herself drawn towards the little unknown; she was about to rise to ask her the cause of her grief, but the fear of disturbing her prayer, induced her to wait. At length the little creature ended, and went out of the chapel; the lady followed her and said,

“You have been crying a great deal, my good child. Why are you so sorrowful? or what is the cause of your grief?”

“Ah! Ma'am, I have good reason to cry and be sorry. A year ago I had the misfortune to lose