

A VICTIM TO THE SEAL OF CONFESSION.

A TRUE STORY BY THE REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S. J. CHAPTER XVII. A PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHRINE OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN.

Passion-week was drawing to a close, and the day appointed for the trial was approaching. The Montmoulin case was the talk of all Aix, and the town was divided into two hostile camps; one party asserting loudly that the prisoner was guilty of murder, and of which the principal partisans were to be found in the clubs and coffee-rooms, and among the writers for the press; whilst the other believed in the innocence of the accused, prayed that he might win the day, and expressed their opinion more or less openly.

In Mr. Lenoir's household Father Montmoulin had a staunch supporter in the person of the good wife, who defended him with a loyal heart and a glib tongue. Woe betide the neighbor, even the customer, who ventured within the precincts of the baker's shop to cast a doubt on the priest's innocence! A broadside was immediately opened upon him. Mr. Lenoir himself was by no means as positive on the point at issue. Naturally in his wife's presence he was careful not to admit the possibility of a doubt, for the peace and comfort of his house was dear to him. Nor when the children whom he had taken in and of charity were by, did he allow a syllable to escape his lips to the effect that the result of the trial might not be what was expected; he would not vex Charles, for he was fond of the boy. But to himself he said: "I cannot understand how a priest could do such a deed; but the facts of the case which one reads and hears, seem all to be dead against him." The truth of the matter was, that since Lenoir had been summoned to appear as a witness, on account of his having driven Lenoir into Aix, on which occasion the wily scoundrel had fascinated him by a recital of his exploits, he considered himself to be on the side of the prosecution, and spoke up boldly on behalf of his "friend" Lenoir, whom the adherents of Father Montmoulin regarded as the probable criminal.

He had a little dispute with his wife on this subject, and made her very angry by venturing to say a word in favor of the rascal, as she denominated him, who had not been to his Easter duty for years. "Mind," she cried resolutely, "that you do not utter a syllable in Court on behalf of that wretch who, you may be sure, was the one who sealed the poor lady."

"I shall speak the truth in Court," the baker replied. "When I am put on my oath, and asked whether I drove Mr. Lenoir that Sunday evening to the station, and heard him ask for a ticket to Marseilles, I must say that I did. You would not have me perjure myself!"

"Perhaps by saying so you may do harm to the good clergyman, who is undoubtedly innocent. Would it not be better for you not to give evidence at all?"

"And be fined, or put in prison for refusing to appear? No, wife, you understand nothing at all about it. If I am called as a witness, it is my duty to appear in Court, and state the truth to the best of my knowledge."

"Dear me, how unfortunate! Must you really give evidence that will be damaging to the priest? I could never sleep in peace another night if I had to own to myself that I had said anything which contributed to the unjust condemnation of an innocent person. There comes of so much talking and boasting! You must needs to tell everyone how you drove this miserable scoundrel to the station, and how he had related to you all manner of wonderful achievements, every one his own invention, as sure as I stand here. And then people say, we women are the babblers!"

At this juncture, when Mr. Lenoir was at a loss what answer to make, and consequently was in danger of losing his temper, for good natured as he was, he could at times be angry, master Charles entered the room with a downcast air. On his way back from school some one had called out after him that his uncle would be sentenced to death next Monday, and his mother and grandmother sent to the House of Correction. Both husband and wife sought to console the little fellow, and in doing so the conjugal differences were forgotten. "How could anyone be so cruel!" cried the good wife. "Never mind, Charles, all will go right. To-morrow we will make the pilgrimage we have talked about so long, to Holy Cross, and pray to the blessed Mother of Dolours, whose feast is kept to-morrow. And, you will drive us to the foot of the hill, will you not?"

"You can take the pony and trap, and John shall drive you," replied the worthy baker, rejoicing to find peace was restored. "You know, my dear, I cannot possibly get away myself to-morrow."

held high festival, and minstrel and minstrel found a hearty welcome and a liberal guerdon.

No thoughts of bygone times occupied the minds of our pilgrims, but the beauty of the day and the mirthful song of the birds had the effect of raising the spirits of the whole party. Only when a turn in the road brought into view the distant church and convent of St. Victoire did the children's faces cloud over, and their eyes fill with tears. But the passing sadness was quickly dispelled, and when the hamlet of Croix Rouge was reached, they alighted at the Golden Lily Inn, whose sign-board showed the ancient four-days, in the cheeriest frame of mind. There they left pony cart and driver, and after taking some refreshment, they began to climb the steep side of the mountain.

The old forest at its foot was first passed through, one of the few forests in Provence which the axe of the woodman had mercifully spared. Then came the mountain itself, with its rocky walls, resembling grey granite, which appeared to rise perpendicularly from the plain below. On the north side, looking towards Aix and the heights of St. Victoire, at a giddy height in the wall of rock, is situated the holy cave, wherein tradition says, St. Mary Magdalen passed the last years of her life in contemplation and extraordinary penance. Thousands of pilgrims have in the course of centuries visited this sanctuary, and found solace and succor in times of sorrow and distress. Thither Mrs. Lenoir and the two children were bound, as they followed the narrow zig-zag path that wound round the side of the mountain.

For the good baker's wife the ascent proved no easy task. From time to time she was forced to stand still, panting for breath, while the children scampered like chamois up the steep and stony path, and right glad she was when the narrow platform before the tiny house, built against the rock, where the two Dominican monks who are in charge of the sanctuary have their dwelling place.

Before entering the cave, Mrs. Lenoir sat down to rest awhile, and enjoy the view of the country, which lay stretched out before her like a vast panorama, shut in on the north east by the peaks of the lesser Alps. At her feet, far down below, was the forest, diminished by distance to the proportions of a small copse; to the west was a wide expanse of plains and hills, country watered by the Arc and its tributaries, while more to the right, the rocky summits of St. Victoire were discernible, towering above the lesser hills. The eyes of our pilgrims naturally turned in that direction.

"I can see the point where the cross of Provence must be," said Charles, "but I cannot see the cross itself, nor can I perceive the church and convent of St. Victoire."

"Marius' camp hides the church and the village from our sight," replied Mrs. Lenoir, "and the distance is too great for you to see the cross. Pray do not go so close to the railing, you might slip and fall down this giddy height. Come, let us go into the grotto, and pray fervently for your uncle and grandmother."

They went accordingly into the sanctuary, and all three knelt down before the picture representing the great penitent held aloft by angels' hands whilst raised in ecstasy above the tops of the mountains.

"Look children, you see how the angels encircle St. Mary Magdalen, our great patroness and protectress of Provence, high above the mountains, every day, that she might join in their prayers and praises," said Mrs. Lenoir. "Now you lay your petition before her, and commend it to her earnestly. For great is her power with our blessed Lord, beneath whose cross she stood, and who appeared to her and spoke lovingly to her after His Resurrection."

Charles related the story of the innocent miller who was falsely accused of murder just like his uncle, and who was acquitted, because another man deposed to his guiltiness on oath. He told the tale well, and the Judge heard him to the end. "It was this story," the boy concluded, "that made me think I might do the same for my uncle, and is really a good and holy man, and since I was told that you, sir, were to be my uncle, I took the liberty of coming to ask you how I was to take the oath, and get my uncle released."

"Well, my man," the Judge answered, stroking the boy's head, "you have told your tale and stated your case admirably. You will make a lawyer some day. There is one difficulty though: children cannot take an oath in a court of law."

"What a pity! But I am not a child now." "You have not reached the age prescribed by law."

"And people will not believe my word, though I never told a lie." "I have no doubt that you are fully persuaded of your uncle's innocence, but unfortunately that is not enough for me. But you shall not have come to me for nothing; I promise to do all in my power in your uncle's behalf. And as for your grandmother and mother, you shall be allowed to visit them, as soon as the trial is over."

The boy expressed his thanks, and departed with a light heart, and a nice cake in his pocket. The Judge sighed as he turned over the minutes of the case and said to himself: "Poor little fellow! I could not let him know what a bad lookout there is for his uncle."

TO BE CONTINUED.

myself the pleasure of further conversation with you. You will excuse me, Madam; after the trial I shall be at your service."

"I will give her something, and ask what her other name is. If I ask her to come and see us in Aix, then I can impress upon her the importance of giving her testimony on behalf of the good priest."

Mrs. Lenoir was as good as her word. A few minutes later she learnt the name of the girl, Anne July, and inscribed it duly in her notebook. She came to Aix at the time of the trial and appear in Court. The only objection the girl urged was that she had not a good enough dress, and this obstacle Mrs. Lenoir at once removed by saying she had a very pretty shawl that she would give her.

With light hearts the little party entered upon the journey home, and before sunset the town was reached. Mrs. Lenoir gave orders to drive straight to the solicitor's house. She found him in his office, and on sending in word that she had an important communication to make concerning the Montmoulin case, she was forthwith admitted to his presence. She told her tale somewhat less completely than the solicitor could have wished, but at the end he seemed very well satisfied, although he did not hold out too bright hopes to his visitor. "The incident interests me," he said, "and I thank you for informing me of it. I hope we may be able to turn it to account. I must request you, however, not to say much about it, or our opponents."

"Oh, I understand what you mean. But I am not one of those people who talk about everything. And you really hope that you will succeed in triumphantly proving his reverence to be innocent?"

"Most assuredly I do. But now in the interest of my client I must deny

the building fund. At the dedication of the church, her father's gift was the high altar, and two memorial windows; and on her parents' death, Miss Tallon and her brothers and sisters, all married but herself, had given a beautiful marble altar, in keeping with her father's earlier gift, to the Lady Chapel.

In wealth and respectability, the Tallons had long been the foremost Catholics in Brucetown. Miss Tallon, as the eldest and most masterful held on. And order for the Public Prosecutor might take exception to me to life tenure of the family residence, a few blocks from St. Joseph's, where her aged uncle and two maids growing grey in the service of the house, abode with her.

She was nearing her fortieth year in single blessedness; and ably keeping up the family tradition of generosity to religion; adding thereto new forms of social service, not only among the familiar poor, but among the oftentimes needy foreigners drawn so numerous to Brucetown in recent years by the big wicker furniture manufactory. Yet, while every one respected Miss Tallon and acknowledged all her claims, there was hardly one who would not have braced himself for a private interview with her, just as Father O'Connor did.

"How are you, Julie?" asked the priest, pleasantly. He had baptised every one of the third generation of the Tallons, and had seen this one grow from infancy to her prime maturity he himself verged on his vigorous and young-hearted old age.

"Well, considering everything," sighed the lady, standing respectfully, as the priest settled himself as well as he could in the slippery horse hair arm chair opposite her.

"I trust there is no trouble in the family," said Father O'Connor, with kindly solicitude.

"No, indeed, we never have trouble in the ordinary acceptance of the word," rejoined Miss Tallon, with a perceptible stiffening of her exceedingly erect person.

All the Tallons were as proper as Miss Tallon herself. The young people were the painful models of the various schools they attended. On their occasional visits to Brucetown, Father O'Connor would have given much to see one of these decorous nephews "hanging on behind" to a grocer's cart; or one of the nieces with a torn gown or hair disordered in beautiful play; just as he wished for an occasional lapse from grammatical accuracy or a hearty laugh from the model aunt herself.

As one victim of adverse fortune was wont to put it: "Yes; I know she has given me many a thing, but she makes a body feel like a worm of the earth at the same time. It's 'Why don't you keep yourself clean?' as 'Why don't you mend your clothes?' as 'If a body had all day, after being up all night with a sick baby, to say nothin' of a drunken husband thrown in now and again. But the little woman, God bless her! In she comes, and not a word about the dirt, but she takes up the baby herself, and bathes him as nice as you please, and makes me lie down for a couple of hours while she straightens up things and lays a bit of dinner ready for us before she's off. And I've known her many a time to go down on her knees and wash poor old Granny Grogan's feet makin' nothin' but a joke of it; and the other day she was at the Polack's, way down the road where nobody else goes. The poor mother had hardly the clothes to cover her, and didn't that good little creature slip off her own worn-out skirt, savin' your presence, and put it right on Mrs. Zamfoxy, or whatever you call her."

Sometimes the priest found a poor sick room made beautiful with the flowers Mrs. Thornton had carried thither. Often he came upon her peacefully at home in some wretched clothing, while she mended the tattered clothing of the children and made them presentable for school. She had not much to give. She had to manage her little income well to keep up appearances, but she gave of her time and labor without stint, and forgot the charities of the day in the girlish pranks or flirtation of the evening.

"After all," mused Father O'Connor, "she has never an ill word of anyone, and if she only had the vocation she would make a grand Sister of Charity."

But he smiled in spite of himself at the thought of Mrs. Thornton in a convent; the while he prayed for something to soften the daily increasing bitterness of Miss Tallon's heart toward the woman who stood between her and her own.

It had been a trying day for Miss Tallon. Mrs. Thornton's absence from the meeting of the Society of St. Martha had not been a relief; for on all sides there were regrets for her.

"She is so handy about making things over, and so ready to show one how," said even Rosa Deering, erstwhile Miss Tallon's shy and silent worshipper.

For once, Miss Tallon did not call on Father O'Connor after the meeting. She hastened back to the stately solitude of her own home, where she might be free of bitter thoughts of the woman who was supplanting her, and whose mischievous qualities seemed hidden from all eyes save her own. She would have denied herself even to Mr. Hamilton, who still visited her now and then, but that she met him face to face in the hall before the maid could announce him. Almost on his heels came Father O'Connor.

"I haven't seen Mrs. Thornton for more than a week. What has become of her?" asked the former. His heart had heard the same words forty times that afternoon. This was the last straw. A bitter word that could never have been recalled sprang to her lips, but the priest's heavier voice drowned it unheard.

THE WOMAN WHO NEVER DID WRONG

BY KATHERINE E. CONWAY.

The housekeeper announced "Miss Tallon, Father." Father O'Connor set his book-mark in at the eviction scene in "Luke Dalmege," and with a momentary compression of the lips that meant facing a frequent and not altogether agreeable duty, passed into the parlor.

This was the meeting day of the Society of St. Martha, and Miss Tallon always called on him directly after adjournment. Through several years' experience he knew that these calls always meant complaints—more in sorrow than in anger, to be sure—of the other officers or of certain members; with a contrast hardly conscious of her own fidelity to duty, and the sacrifices she had made for the society and its beneficiaries.

For Miss Tallon was president of the society. She was "the head of everything" among the Catholic women of Brucetown, as any member of St. Joseph's parish would have explained to a stranger. Indeed, if the Golden Rose or the Laetare Medal were to be given in Brucetown, the people would have deemed it Miss Tallon's inalienable right.

Truly, she had many claims, ancestral and personal, on local Catholic gratitude. Her grandfather had given the site of St. Joseph's, now one of the most valuable properties in the town, together with a generous offering to

the building fund. At the dedication of the church, her father's gift was the high altar, and two memorial windows; and on her parents' death, Miss Tallon and her brothers and sisters, all married but herself, had given a beautiful marble altar, in keeping with her father's earlier gift, to the Lady Chapel.

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