

self, how could a crime have been committed by a man in whom he could never discover even the shadow of an evil thought. and what could have been the crime which required so terrible a penance! These reflections would pass through his mind in spite of him, even when in company with the stranger. One day the Penitent perceived what was passing in his mind, and said to him. If you were not a priest, I would long since have related my whole history to you. It is an example which you could any day make use of for the benefit of such blind and insane young men as I have been. This cup of shame I would be well satisfied to drink, that I might offer to God an additional atonement. But you are a Priest; such a confidential revelation would have all the characters of a Confession, and the Pope has forbidden me to approach any sacrament during the whole course of my penance.

The Pope? interrupted Stephen.

The Pope himself. It is to him I have revealed my crime. He alone has sufficient power to give me absolution to whom it was said, through Peter: Whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in Heaven.

But, said Stephen, the absolution of any Priest who is possessed of jurisdiction would be sufficient if you truly repent of your sins. However, if his Holiness has made your crime a reserved case, you certainly cannot be absolved without jurisdiction from him, unless in the article of death when the church in her mercy imparts a power to every Priest to absolve the dying sinner. But how did you see his Holiness?

The Penitent related all the circumstances of his interview with Pius VII. in Paris. When I entered his Palace, said he, I was pale and trembling like

an assassin who is stealing to the couch of his victim. I was introduced to him and I fell instantly on my knees. And when we were alone—

He suddenly stopt. A cold sweat ran down his forehead. He looked at Stephen in the face, and for some moments there was a solemn silence between the two.

I am not able to tell you, resumed he in a stifled voice, what passed during this interview. It is enough to say that after having heard my confession, the Pope revived for my case, the most severe penance of the primitive Church. He ordered me to renounce all,—my parents, friends, fortune, to bury myself in a corner of France, and to follow the penitential course which you see me practice. Perhaps, said he, on these conditions we may one day give you absolution. I did not dare to hope for so much, and I made an effort to kiss his knees, but he shrunk back.

You will write to me once a year said he to me, in a severe tone, and you will render me an exact account of your employment of your time. I will believe your words, because I believe in the sincerity of your repentance. You will receive a letter signed with my own hand, when the justice of heaven shall be appeased. Then, and only then, can you enter the Church, or approach the holy table.

A month after I snapped all the chains which bound me to life. My family imagine I am dead; and so I am effectually to them.

And your penance has continued for ten years?

Ten years: and is it not very brief?

But have you ever heard since from the Holy Father?

Never!

Stephen's countenance fell. Unable to utter a word, he clasped the hand of the penitent, and retired.