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## LIFE IN THE CLOISTER;

OR,  
FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

By the Author of "The World and the Cloister," &c., &c., &c.

### CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.)

'Oh, there now; my dear Miss Craig, don't defend their practices, pray. The idea of a parcel of young women shutting themselves up, and living unmarried, when it is only right and proper for every woman to be married; and then, if half one bears be true, this apparent aiming at a higher virtue, as they take it to be, only leads to after unhappiness, and to some sad—'

'Oh, stop, Mrs. Bowring,' said Marion, placing her fingers to her ears, for she knew that the lady was about to utter that most grievous calumny so often put forth against the spotless purity of the religious state. 'I cannot listen to you, if you are going to talk in such a way;—for, my dear Mrs. Bowring, if it be possible that that which is in itself holy—and what virtue can be more pleasing to God than purity?—can by any possibility be pushed to too extreme a limit, then this might rather be said of the religious state than, the reverse—to such an extreme point of nicety in thought, word, and deed is the love of the most beautiful virtue of chastity carried; but it always strikes me as strange that you Protestants do not attack with half such vehemence the strict enclosure maintained by some of our religious orders, or the implicit obedience of the whole being to the will of another, as you do this most untenable point of all.'

'It is all bad, very bad, *deux* bad,' said Mrs. Bowring, shrugging her shoulders; 'and I cannot think how sensible young women, who might be such ornaments in the world, and make good wives, can take themselves off, and bury themselves alive in this way.'

'But who shall say if these ladies would ever marry, if they were to remain in the world, Mrs. Bowring?' said Marion. 'Excuse me; but you seem to think that every woman may marry if she likes; look around and tell me now, don't you think there is a deal of forced celibacy?—therefore is it in my opinion a very good thing that some of our sex voluntary embrace it; it leaves the field open to others, you see. And even if they did not do things which you think so dreadful—go and bury themselves in convents—depend on it they would not be likely to marry for all that.'

'Ah, well, you'll never, my dear Miss Craig, make me a convert to your way of thinking;—and it is because I have learnt to like you very much that I am all the more sorry you are a Roman Catholic. Well,' she said, as she rose to leave Marion's parlor, 'Maud will be here to-morrow—make acquaintance with her; I should like her to know you, because I admire you, though I don't admire your religion.'

Marion laughingly told her that she should profit of the permission she gave her, and should lose no time in cultivating acquaintance with Miss Bowring, the more especially as she was in some sort an outcast from her family.

On the following day Maud Bowring arrived at Torquay. She was an unaffected, amiable young woman, with little to boast of in the way of personal charms; but in her frank open countenance there was such an expression of good nature, that it made ample amends for the want of beauty.

Mrs. Bowring introduced her daughter to Marion, remarking that, as Miss Craig had the additional misfortune of being a Roman Catholic, and also was designing at some time of her life to enter a convent, she doubted not but that they would soon become the best of friends.

Now Mrs. Bowring really was partial to Marion; virtue always has a powerful influence with others; and this violently-prejudiced lady really admired Marion Craig, yet, by a strange perversity, never asked herself what influence it was that directed her daily actions, and made the governing principle of her life. How it was that she was always cheerful and contented under the toils of her hard, hard life—that she bore so patiently the infirmity of her aged parent—that, intellectual and highly accomplished, she could yet descend to the coarse drudgery of domestic life—feel her social position so different to what it ought to be, and yet not murmur. Poor Mrs. Bowring, she was so very prejudiced that she really could not bring herself to believe that the wonder-working power of religion could do this; that Marion—*and*, poor soul, she was no saint after all, but a weak, imperfect young woman—owed it to the governing influence of that faith which more than any other exercises a powerful control over the ordinary actions and daily occupations of its members. She was certainly, too, a *rara avis* in Mrs. Bowring's mind. 'She is not at all what I thought very religious Catholics were,' she would say to herself; 'she is working

very hard all day—first at one occupation, then another, flying about the house in the morning in her neat print dress, looking as pretty as she is good; then if I poke my head in at the kitchen door, there she is with her white hands kneading bread or making pastry, or cooking the dinner. Ah, by the way, there is a flaw in her character; for when she was frying our soles the other day, I ran in unawares, and I saw her flush up to the very eyes, as if she was ashamed of her occupation. There was a little pride there, I warrant me; however, let me see, there in the afternoon she sits mending up and altering her dresses, and they are all the worse for wear too; she has only had one new one since we have been here, and that was a cheap muslin which she made herself; and let me see, four, five, six weeks,' said Mrs. Bowring, counting on her fingers. 'Why, she has eighteen pounds from me; she must have little to depend on then beyond what this miserable lodging-house brings her. But let me go on, I have got over the whole day but the evening, and her only recreation seems to me to be a walk about the cliffs with that poor, infirm old man leaning on her arm. Well, she is very good, no doubt. I could not bear quietly such a life, for certain.'

No, indeed, Mrs. Bowring, I do not think you could; but then there is a sustaining, a governing principle, as I have already said, by which persons like Marion live, of which you, poor lady, are quite ignorant.

And what was this, but that one necessary offering in the morning of the works of the whole day; that holy remembrance which should exist in the heart of every faithful child of the Church, that no action is mean or little which is done for God. Yet, our Marion could blush when caught at any servile employment, as Mrs. Bowring had sagely remarked; ah, yes, but don't be too hard upon her; for, like you and I, who are often trying to be very good and as often fail, Marion, if weighed in the balance, would, good as she was, have been found wanting at times.

As might be expected, Maud Bowring and Marion soon became excellent friends, so much so that, the second evening after her arrival at Torquay, old Mr. Craig not being well enough to accompany Marion on her usual evening stroll, the young lady craved permission to go with her instead, and they wandered together to the beautiful rock walk overlooking the splendid bay.

The day had been very sultry; but a refreshing breeze had sprung up, and they rambled on for a long while, occasionally bending over the steep overhanging cliff to admire the beauty of the scene, and the gorgeous sunset, shedding a roseate and golden glow over the deep, blue waters of the bay, and then wandering on again, talking of their past, and what their future might be.

Maud, you see, had a shadow around her, spite of her father's wealth: it was a shadow which, unhappily, has stolen around many—unhappily, we say, only in one sense, and that because, in our boasted land of religious toleration, such things should never be; her shadow was the loss of her father's love, because she had joined the Catholic Church.

Maud knew not why it was, but she was wonderfully drawn to this new acquaintance, this Miss Craig, of whom her mother had spoken in several of her letters.

It was not long before she had begun to speak of the shadow which her adoption of the Catholic faith had thrown around her path; then of her wish to enter a religious house, but her utter ignorance how to set about the work, as also the kind of life led by those who entered the more contemplative orders, threw an insurmountable obstacle in her way.

'I can obtain you every information,' said Marion, 'if you will accompany me to Beausite, a pretty villa amongst the cliffs yonder,' she added, pointing with her parasol to the spot she wished to indicate. 'There lives in that villa the orphan daughter of a naval officer, who, with a great desire to become a religious, but with no means to enable her to take the customary pension required for her future maintenance, was resigning herself to plodding through life as a governess, when she mentioned her wish to a good priest then on a London mission; the result was, that she was ultimately admitted, portionless as she was, to a community of English nuns of high standing established in the Netherlands.'

'And did she commence her novitiate immediately, Miss Craig, and after all return to the world?' inquired Maud Bowring.

'No, no, not so fast,' replied Marion, laughing. 'The good priest, who did his best to help her, knew well that sometimes a sudden fit of enthusiasm may lead persons to the cloister who have rather an attraction to the quietude and repose of such a life than a vocation for its self-denials, and therefore wisely restrained Miss Arlington's eagerness. He would, she thought, settle everything almost immediately for her reception, either into this convent or the Sisters of

Notre Dame at Brussels; but he had left England; and weeks lengthened into months, till nearly a year and a half had elapsed ere matters were brought to a conclusion by his return home. Lucy had before this fallen into a weak state of health, but nothing could turn her from her purpose; she would still go on. Perhaps change of air—above all, the life she so desired to embrace might conduce to her cure; at any rate, she would make her trial, and she accordingly left England, to return again, after many months passed in the novitiate, unable to remain on account of her broken health, but encouraging for twelve long years the delusive hope that she should succeed at some future time, perhaps in a milder and more active institute, but obliged at last to abandon it; yet still cherishing in her heart of hearts the fond and affectionate remembrance of the holy lives of the gentle sisterhood who had loved and tended her in the hour of sickness, and whose hands, ever open to succor the afflicted, have never forgotten to succor her;—but here we are at Beausite; now you shall hear what Lucy has to say on the matter—you could not have a better authority.'

For one moment Maud looked up, as if irresolute, at the little white cottage perched upon the cliff to which they had ascended by means of an almost interminable flight of steps; then, just as Marion's hand was raised to push open the gate, she said,—

'Not this evening, dear Miss Craig; such an interview as you are about to procure for me should not be lost upon my dearest mother; will you let her accompany us to-morrow evening?'

'By all means,' replied Marion; 'the thought never occurred to me. We will turn our steps back this evening, and see if we can induce Mrs. Bowring to join us.'

The following evening the lady, with very good will, accompanied Marion and her daughter to Beausite, in which place Miss Arlington was spending a few weeks on a visit to some distant relations.

Maud had expected to meet with a very young lady, forgetting that Marion had told her that more than twelve years had elapsed since Miss Arlington had left the novitiate; she was for a few moments, then, surprised to encounter a person perhaps about thirty-five years of age, bearing in her, notwithstanding, cheerful countenance the undoubted marks of ill-health; dressed very simply, in short, as any lady of slender means would dress—not in close crimped cap, and coarse black stuff gown, and large rosary hanging at her side, but attired in a pale blue muslin robe, with a simple linen collar fastened by a small brooch; whilst her chestnut hair, wreathed here and there with a few white threads, was braided over her thoughtful brow, the index of a mind which, at least spoke of frankness and candor.

Miss Arlington, you see, eschewed singularity, which, whatever certain persons may fancy, is never the accompaniment of an unostentatious piety; she was no admirer of the fancy which some devout ladies living in the world take into their heads, who dress like Religious, and think it a sin to don a colored ribbon or a flower.

In the days of her early womanhood, which she had passed in the cloister of Nazareth, the good sisterhood had taught her that it was always best to avoid singularity; so that when she returned to the world she only wore her black dress as long as it was doubtful what her future would be; and when the long lapse of years, and still no cure, told Lucy Arlington that that future must be spent in the world and worldly duties, she at once resumed the simple garb of any other lady in her own position of life.

Lucy was just the proper match for the strongly prejudiced Protestant lady whom chance had thrown in her way.

Marion had repeated to Mrs. Bowring what she had told Maud on the previous evening concerning this lady; and Mrs. Bowring had gone full charged, resolved to attack Lucy on all those points which she considered most assailable.

'O Lucy, Lucy, how will you get on? Do you not tremble at the thought of things which you can't explain?—so many things, you know, which Protestants are cognizant of, by some strange freemasonry, far better than we, the children of the Church.'

Lucy knew immediately what sort of person she had to contend with, for the moment the necessary introductions had taken place, the lady exclaimed,—

'I am very glad to see you, Miss Arlington,—glad to see any lady who has been in a convent, and had strength of mind enough to return to the world. I shall feel grateful if you will let my foolish daughter into some of your convent secrets, perhaps it will make her change her mind about leaving the world.'

Lucy bowed, and with a smile expressed her willingness to give any information that Mrs.

Boring might wish for, as far, she said, as one particular order—that of the canonesses of Saint Augustine—was concerned; and this would form a general outline of every other order.

'Well, then, first of all, you cannot deny that everything is made enchantingly easy, in order to ensnare a number of enthusiastic girls, who, when too late, may repent of their folly in pronouncing those three irrevocable and shocking vows which are taken in the cloister,—you cannot deny this, to begin with, Miss Arlington,' said Mrs. Bowring, whose face was flushed with exultation at her marvellous discovery.

'I do most emphatically deny it,' replied Lucy; 'it is a preposterous assertion, reiterated again and again by persons without the Church, and as frequently denied by ourselves.'

'Oh, but I know it is so,' replied Mrs. Bowring; 'I have read articles in public papers and in books, all of which assert the very same thing.'

'Well, my dear madam,' said Lucy, 'it is of no use, then, to ask me for information, if you already know more than I do myself. It is, unfortunately, but too true that the most false and shameless assertions are paraded against us in the public press, and equally true that persons are found credulous enough to believe them; and, excuse me; but also prejudiced enough not to believe what we have to say for ourselves; so between the two we have no chance of a fair bearing.'

'Oh, well, I am sure I am always ready to listen, Miss Arlington; but really I have heard so much that is awful about these places, and read—not only in the columns of the public papers, but even in books written by persons who have taken the veil, and then made their escape—so much that is dreadful and revolting to common sense, that one cannot do otherwise than believe persons who do not merely speak from hearsay, but from their own personal experience.—Poor things, they have been known to marry after leaving the convent, and then they have spoken of the fascinating and alluring arts which the nuns have had recourse to, and by which they were inveigled into so miserable a way of life.'

'Very likely, Mrs. Bowring,' replied Lucy; 'we must not forget that amongst the twelve apostles there was a Judas—small wonder, then, that amongst thousands of women there should occasionally be found some false to their vows, and who, with falsehood on their lips, traduce the holy life which their virtue was too weak to follow. Again, you express your pity for these "poor things," as you call them. Now you would think it very dreadful, I feel convinced, and would refuse to continue acquaintanceship with any married woman who broke her marriage vows, and then gave her heart elsewhere, yet you think it right in the perjurer woman to break the solemn vows she has uttered to live ever for God alone; however, if you really feel inclined to listen to the truth, and will give me a patient hearing, I will just describe, as briefly as I can, all that came under my notice during my nine months' novitiate in the cloister in the Netherlands, to which I have already alluded.'

'Oh, I assure you,' said Mrs. Bowring, 'I am quite open to conviction, Miss Arlington; and shall be but too glad if the unfavorable opinion I have always had of those odious institutions can be in any way changed; and as to Maud,' she added, 'I am sure she will lend a ready ear.'

Now Lucy Arlington very much doubted the truth of Mrs. Bowring's assertion that she was open to conviction; but wishful to do good, if there was any chance whatever, she commenced as follows:—

'I entered the novitiate when I was in my twenty-second year, the pension, which was eight hundred pounds, having been freely abandoned in my favor. It was towards the middle of an intensely cold day in January, in the year 1850, that I arrived in the old-fashioned town of ——. I had journeyed by rail from Ostend, and a short twenty-minutes ride in a fly brought me safe to the convent—an extensive building, surrounded on three sides by a spacious courtyard.

'I was immediately shown into the apartments of the prioress, a spacious room with uncarpeted floor; a long wooden table, a few rush-seated chairs, a couple of *prie-Dieux*, various pious prints adorning the walls, and several shelves filled with books, made, as far as I can remember at this space of time, the chief objects in the room.

'The prioress was tall of stature, with a pleasing expression of countenance, soft hazel eyes, and a winning gentle manner, which at once enlisted my affection. Doubtless our Protestant neighbors would have asserted that this beloved friend who opened her heart to receive the portionless English stranger, was already laying her snares to entrap an enthusiastic girl, though in what way she or her community were to be the better for receiving one without the customary dowry, it would be hard to say. However, it is certainly the case that, ere I was long in her

company, I found her one of those persons to whom we are drawn by an irresistible impulse.—Before I had been many weeks in the cloister, I was obliged to own to myself that though particular friendship was forbidden,—and a very proper rule too, by the way—there would nevertheless be a little corner in my heart in which the gentle lady who had received me would hold perhaps more than her due share.

'Taking me by the hand after half an hour's conversation, she led me down two or three spacious corridors till we reached a gallery which gave ingress to the Church, a beautiful little building, in the choir of which, unseen by the lady, the nuns could perform their devotions.

'Down each side of the choir were the stalls of the religious, and just at the entrance, one on either side, were those of the prioress and subprioress. The stalls were made of carved oak; and at the end of the choir, surmounted by a large crucifix, was a low screen of a kind of filigree-work of brass and iron, standing near which, one looked down into the beautiful little church beneath.

'The church is a light and elegant building, the floor composed of black and white marble, the altar a fine mosaic, the whole of the back, up even to the dome, being composed of richly variegated marbles.

'From thence the prioress took me through the convent itself, leading me down the choir staircase to the chapter-house beneath, where pensioners, or young lady pupils, gay and fashionable girls, the daughters of the *elite* of Paris and Brussels, hear mass daily. To the left, as we left the chapter-house, runs a spacious corridor leading to the school, an extensive building under the same roof, yet apart from the convent, and forming as it were, two distinct establishments. However, the mother turned her steps to the right, and we entered the cloister of a vast and spacious corridor paved with squares of white and black marbles, and arched overhead. On the left hand were the various offices of the convent; to the right several pointed windows, similar to those we see in our English churches, looked out on the church beyond; whilst immediately before you lay the little graveyard, long since disused for a quiet corner in a distant cemetery, but in which many of the canonesses were formerly buried.

'I was then shown the noviceship, or apartment of the novices, a long room furnished with the greatest simplicity, similar, in fact, to that of the prioress, but boasting, for the use of the novices, an excellent piano from the firm of Broadwood & Co.

'This room looked out into the garden, about three acres in extent, and abounding in fruit and vegetables. Here the novice spends great part of her time whilst necessarily remaining under the jurisdiction of the novice mistress—in all not less a period in this convent than six years and a half, the first six months as postulant or candidate for the veil; then, if she perseveres, she receives the white veil, and becomes a novice; and at the expiration of one year pronounces her final vows, and still remains another five years in the novitiate. And I assure you, my dear madam,' added Lucy, 'that so far from there being any ground for truth in the ridiculous assertion, that young ladies are entrapped by the insinuating arts which novelists and the press speak so much about, on the contrary, nothing is left undone thoroughly to test the temper and dispositions of the novice, who is tried in various ways, in order to prove to herself and the community whether her desire to join them has proceeded from what is termed in the Church a vocation for the life in question, or is merely the result of a passing fit of enthusiasm. If the latter, she will scarcely remain to conclude the lengthened term of her probation, and should she do so, and be afterwards unhappy, certainly she has only herself to thank for such a calamity, for every precaution that human prudence and foresight can take has been taken to guard against the possibility of such an error; and if, on the contrary, she has a real vocation for the life in question, the trial she has to undergo in order to testify her fitness for the life she desires to lead; both for her own future wellbeing and that of the community, will not cause her to return to the world. Do you think, my dear madam,' continued Miss Arlington, 'that I have painted the novitiate in such glowing colors that a young lady would be likely to be entrapped now, because she stands in any danger of being petted and spoiled, and her little passions and failings—and the best amongst us, you know, have them—yielded to, instead of being thwarted and resisted in every possible way?'

'Heaven help us, Miss Arlington! what a picture you have drawn of the novitiate!' exclaimed Mrs. Bowring; 'a nice time these "poor things" must have of it; why, I should turn out before I was three days in their novitiate.'

'Well, I am only telling you the simple, unvarnished truth, Mrs. Bowring,' replied Lucy—