

THE PEARL ABOVE PRICE.

"Indeed I and how came you to renounce the Greek schism?" inquired a benign-looking, elderly gentleman of a Russian nobleman, with whom he had been travelling the last few hours, and engaging in friendly chat.

"Why do you ask?" said the Russian, pleasantly.

"Because," rejoined the genial questioner, "I am a missionary, and I like to have fresh and interesting examples wherewith to entertain and edify my audiences. You converts generally have a little 'story,' something striking, if not romantic, in connection with your conversion."

"That is so," replied the other; "and my story is a little singular."

"I was sure of it; so pray gratify me."

The nobleman, wrapping around him a mantle a good deal the worse for wear, and placing himself in a comfortable position, said: "I had just quitted the College of ———, in St. Petersburg, when my widowed mother requested me to set out for Paris. I had letters of introduction to our ambassador at the court of Napoleon III., and to other celebrities with whom she wished me to make acquaintance. But as I was an entire stranger in the great capital, I resolved not to be in a hurry about presenting my letters.

"During my rambles through the city I became interested in the churches, and finally I began to reflect on the differences that exist between the Roman Catholic worship and the religion of my mother. She had carefully instilled her peculiar tenets into my mind, and had taught me to love and practice her faith; moreover, she had kept a strict eye on me, in order to chase away or keep from me temptations to fall into negligence.

"On the recommendation of a fellow-traveller—a Frenchman—I had taken lodgings in a very quiet, orderly hotel, and had resolved to tarry there awhile. My mornings were spent in rambling through the art galleries, visiting churches, libraries, etc.; my afternoons in the perusal of various magazines and some selected volumes of more solid reading. As it was still early summer I used to roll my arm-chair close to a window that overlooked the well-kept garden of the hotel, and another very neat one with long serpentine walks, that was separated from it by a high stone wall, covered with a luxuriant growth of budding ivy. I was frequently forgetful of what I meant to read, and occupied, instead, with a number of grave, scholarly-looking men, whom I saw walking or sitting in the neighbouring garden. One day when the valet entered my parlor I called him and said:

"What sort of men are those I see in the garden running parallel with that of the hotel?"

"Jesuits, sir. That is their residence—Rue de Sevres."

"No—is it possible! Jesuits! You don't say that those are real Jesuits!—are you sure?"

"Quite so, sir. That tall gentleman walking along is Pere P——, the Superior; that one reading his breviary is Pere M——, etc. Why, sir, they are all well known in this quarter."

"The attendant withdrew, and I became lost in thought. Jesuits! I had come to Paris to see wonders, and if you knew, sir, all that I had heard against those men, you would not be surprised at my belief that I was beholding the eighth wonder of the world. I watched them day after day, I studied their various movements; and my imagination became so filled with them, and what was attributed to them, that I fell into a train of thought something like this: What if I could contrive a plan to make their acquaintance, then shrewdly find out some of their political and religious plots, and, by revealing these to the world, be the instrument of banishing them not only from Paris, but from all the capitals of the civilized, the Christian world! You smile, nevertheless, that took such possession of my excited brain that I never prayed more humbly and fervently than I did during those few days to be guided aright in an enterprise that seemed to promise me honour and fame, as well as the gratitude of all Christendom.

"One day I enquired of the same valet whether any secular persons were ever admitted into the Jesuits' house.

"O, yes sir," he said, "gentlemen often go there to make spiritual retreats."

"Retreats? What are retreats?"

"Why, I believe they are something like a mission in a parish church, only each one follows the exercises alone. The young men stay there, some eight and some even thirty days."

"Young men?" said I, eagerly, "I wonder if I could get in there?"

"Why, certainly, sir."

"Will you carry my card and a note to the Superior?"

"Willingly, sir."

"He did so, with seeming pleasure, and brought me back a very polite answer, to the effect that I might come over any evening that suited my convenience, to begin my retreat."

"No doubt," said I to myself, "come one, come all." Ah, I thought, if my 'orthodox' mother only knew how near I am to fame! I fancied that the series of investigations I was about to make into the dark ways of the Jesuits would result in great things. I rejoiced, fancying I was going to undertake a very honourable and important duty. That day I watched the dark-robed figures more closely than ever. When one of the Fathers walked about in a meditative mood or manner, I was certain that he was leisurely contriving a hideous plot against civil or even religious government. If one sat down, I concluded he was some tired secretary of an arch-member of the mischief-making confraternity. If the brother porter summoned one of them from the garden to the house—"So," thought I, "there must be a telegram, or some important communication of a successful machination," *et cetera*.

"Next day I filled a valise with requisites for a long or short stay, not forgetting a brace of pistols!

"The porter answered my pull at the door-bell of No. — Rue de Sevres, and conducted me into the presence of a very urbane, kindly-mannered gentleman. We chatted a few minutes on the commonest topics, and then he touched a bell, and another fine-looking priest showed me into a small, neat apartment, furnished exactly like that of the prophet of old. Not a picture relieved the plain walls, not a book tempted curiosity; a bed draped in white calico, a crucifix, and a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the desk, were about all the four sides of the room enclosed. I laid out my writing materials, took an observation of the garden, listened in the corridor, and heard—*nothing*. All seemed as quiet as the grave."

"After some time a young priest came to my door, and handed me a printed sheet entitled 'Preparatory Exercise,' and politely informed me that at certain hours he would present the subjects of the meditations for the eight days' retreat on which I had agreed with the Superior.

"Preparatory Exercise!" I said, with a tone of real hate, striking the desk with my fist. "Aha, sirs, this time the spider shall not get the fly!"

"I read over the instruction laid down with fixed attention, noticed that each preceding theme depended on the one following; in fine, that there was a chain, and the links were not to be separated. It was all clear to me that this retreat was a man trap—that a train of false reasoning led the unwary into the adoption of such maxims as 'the end justifies the means,' and all others attributed to Jesuitism. I resolved to pursue the course diligently, make all the extracts that I might require in future, and without unnecessary delay produce a literary work that would render me a benefactor to mankind.

"My soliloquy was interrupted by an invitation to supper. I was so absorbed with my project that I did not attempt to converse, and the lay brother did not volunteer one unnecessary word. They are all trained adepts, I thought, and on returning to my room I immediately began to take notes. At 9 p. m. the young priest who had brought me the 'Preparatory Exercise' invited me to night prayers, which included the Litany of the Saints. As that prayer, at once lowly and grand, rose in a chorus of male voices, I thought: This appearance of devout fervor, is eminently calculated to win the unwary; yet how base to use the cloak of pure religion for such despicable malice! And I prayed, too; I begged God to hear my earnest petition, and help me to find out these men and their methods, and—and—to annihilate them!