

A DAY AT A CONVENT.

More years since than it is desirable to remember, or pleasant to recall—for time, alas! has crushed some fair and cherished blossoms in his rushing flight—I was visiting a Catholic family in Essex, in which family was domesticated a priest, whose kind heart and courteous benignity of manners won the affections of all the younger members of the happy party assembled in that dear old house. O the morning walks, the noonday idleness, the gay, gossiping evening rambles amid the pastoral scenery that surrounded us in all the luxuriant leafiness of summer—the mazy maze of our entangled arguments, argued with all the wisdom and experience of twenty years passed in calm and peaceful retirement, undisturbed by care, unexposed to anxiety. How widely is that happy group scattered! One a blithe and bonnie wee thing, all smiling, mirth, and innocent vivacity, the very personification of Thalia, married to the most sedate, dispassionate, calm, cold, calculating of human beings. Another helpless victim of *super-fastidiousness*, that would shriek if a spider but fell on her neck, and horrify our good priest by throwing herself into his arms for protection against the tiniest frog that crossed her path, is now a wife with a large little family in the far off back woods of America. "Another, and another, and yet another," sleep beneath the green turf, or the cold stone; one—only one—with our early friendship unsoftened by time, unchanged by sorrow;—another—but enough of the unquiet retrospect.

Our good priest, who had nothing of the proselyting spirit about him, would occasionally talk to us heretics, of the imposing ceremonies of his own church: its dignified ritual, its touching music, its splendid and sublime paintings, its fragrant incense, and all that characterised it; but it was of convents and their inmates that we loved to hear, "and with a greedy ear devoured up his discourse." One day, after I had in a *tete-à-tete* wearied him exceedingly with my numberless questions, he promised that on some bright day, that should unite all that was desirable, and exclude all that was disagreeable, he would take me and my chosen friend and companion to see a convent that was not more than twenty miles off: a promise with such a contingency, made at this *very now*, I should never expect to see fulfilled, but than I looked forward with the romantic confidence of youth to many such; indeed life was all *couleur de rose*, and blue skies, and bowers of roses, where every gale was perfume, and where "the trail of the serpent" was never to come, were alone put down on my chart of the future.

At length a day that came up to the good priest's idea did arrive; it was a bright sunny morning in September, when not a leaf had lost its freshness and no tint foretold that autumn was nigh, that he handed us with all the politeness of the nation in which so many years of his life had been passed, into the carriage that was to convey us to New Hall, the residence of a sisterhood of nuns who had been driven from Liege by the republican army. Apart from the peculiar interest that we attached to it, New Hall is most worthy of note; it was originally called Boileau; and in 1524, Henry VIII. kept the feasts of St. George there: his arms, finely wrought, adorn the hall, and we were told that the Duke of N— had offered a most magnificent sum for them, which, however, was refused; there were also the arms of Queen Elizabeth, with an inscription in the Italian language. The door was opened by the portress, a comely dame, whose round and comely face displayed no symptoms of fasting. We were shown by a lay sister into the parlour of the Lady Abbess, who advanced to meet our kind introducer, and knelt to receive his benediction with the sweetest grace imaginable; she had only been a few months in her office, and was the sister of Sir William S.— I shall never forget my surprise at the sight of this lady; wrinkled, austere, meagre, on the shady side of sixty, with thin cheeks, hollow eyes, pale and trembling lips, had been the picture that my imagination had drawn of a lady abbess. O how different was the beautiful woman before me! she could have been scarcely thirty, with the most dazzling complexion, the softest eyes, the sunniest smile, displaying the whitest and most even row of teeth I ever beheld; you could not look at her without feeling sure that she was as gentle and good as she was graceful and lovely; and to think of her looking so captivating in her nun's dress of black serge! with a bodice and sleeves of lawn, pure and white indeed as the snow: no glossy tresses escaping from the firmly bound fillet of lawn that crossed and concealed her forehead, passing under her chin, covering her ears, and leaving no part visible but her face; over her head was a black veil that when down must have reached to her feet; she had a rosary at her waist, and a small red cross on her bosom, which I presume was a distinctive mark of her office, for, as far as I recollect, the other nuns had no such ornament. She desired a sister to bring refreshments, which consisted of various fruits, wines and cakes, most delicious to the sight and taste; and conversed with us on various subjects with the most winning cheerfulness, and to our reverend companion of the dear and distant, with deep and tearful emotion. She requested one of the nuns, Lady Elizabeth —, to show us the chapel and other parts of the convent; a request that was complied with, with the kindest alacrity and cheerful good will. In the establishment, beside a hundred nuns, there were, at the time I am writing, sixty young ladies of the Catholic nobility that were educated under the auspices of the sisterhood, and amid all this large number the most quiet happiness seemed to reign; but a day is but a short space to judge of these things. One of the nuns interested us greatly; she was indeed beautiful enough for a heroine of romance, and withal

possessed the indispensable look of tender melancholy with which they are generally invested: her beautiful eyes, with their long dark lashes resting on her marble-like cheek, with the look of a lovely downcast penitent, seemed as if there was a silent sorrow and unimparted grief brooding at her heart. We were conducted by our fair guide to the entrance of a long and spacious corridor, at which she paused and said it was called the Gallery of Silence, and the laws of the convent enjoined its observance; a wise regulation, I suspect; for fifty or sixty of the gentle sex, even if they happened to be nuns, would produce a considerable clamour in a quiet establishment. On each side of this gallery of Muta were the cells of the nuns; the bedsteads were of iron, with curtains of a coarse material, and of a dark blue colour: a chair, a table, a confessional, a crucifix, and an hour-glass, with one or two pictures of saints, completed the furniture. All was scrupulously clean, and possessed, in spite of its homeliness, an air of comfort, though of a solitary kind. Each room had a window, looking out on scenery that would make almost any solitude delightful. At the end of this gallery was the representation of the sepulchre of our Saviour, with his figure resting on it; the effect of which was most striking, though somewhat startling, coming on us as we emerged from the dimly-lighted corridor. The nuns are of the Sepulchra order. From thence we proceeded to the chapel, which is effective and impressive, and most judiciously arranged; it is a hundred feet long, fifty wide, and from thirty to forty in height. But when did a woman stop to calculate number or measure feet? The altar was adorned with the rarest and freshest flowers, and otherwise splendidly ornamented. A nun was kneeling at it as we entered, but she appeared so absorbed in devotion, that she remained undisturbed by our approach. Some most rare and exquisite paintings hung from the walls.

After attending us thus far, Lady Elizabeth — resigned us to an older nun, with whose family my companion was on terms of intimacy. She conducted us through the beautiful grounds surrounding the convent, and, seated in one of the many temples with which it was studded, asked us a thousand questions of the world she had for so many years resigned. She was an exceedingly lively, intelligent woman, and related to us the difficulties and perils the sisterhood encountered in their escape from Liege; their chief anxiety was manifested for the security of the relics, the ornaments of the altar, pictures, &c., which were let down, in the darkest of all dark nights, from a window, into a boat where one of the holy fathers was stationed to receive it. On the walls of the temple were written numberless quotations in pencil, in a variety of hand-writings, all in praise of a life of retirement. The only two I remember I transcribe as they were written.

"In these deep solitudes and lonely cells
Where heavenly pensive Contemplation dwells
And gentle Charity for ever reigns,
No tumult can disturb the vestal's veins!"

BEATRICE.

"How happy is the blameless vestal's lot,
The world forgetting, by the world forgot!
To her unknown the anguish of a tear,
Save that she sheds upon a sister's bier!"

MONICA.

At the very primitive hour of two, we dined with the priests belonging to the establishment; beside these, there was a lady in the gay garb of the world, who presided, and two lovely girls who had abjured their early faith, and taken refuge with the nuns. All the dishes were French, and the dinner throughout served in the true Parisian style, and never, in that proverbially gay country, was there a gayer party, or a greater display of that peculiar kind of wit that makes a social dinner so pleasant. After coffee, which it were worth going a pilgrimage to sip, we attended vespers, at which all the pupils were present, as well as the nuns; though the latter were not visible, except as their dark forms were faintly discerned through the high screen behind which they sat. O! the melody of that sweet voice that sang the Evening Hymn to the Virgin!—the silvery sounds seem now to float upon my ear. We felt it could only proceed from the lovely mouth that had given us so kind a welcome in the morning; it was the lady abbess, who thus finished the enchantment she had begun. After the service, we went with our good priest to make our adieus to this beautiful woman. With her blessing she gave us a small ivory cross as a token of her good wishes, and as a memorial, as she said, of the day we had passed at a convent: a privilege that few have to record.

How often has all that passed on that day risen unbidden to my waking thoughts, and haunted my night visions! The noble hall—the tapestried parlour—the quiet cells—the magnificent chapel, with all its rich and beautiful tracery—the mellow light streaming from its painted windows—the incense—the altar—the pealing organ—the hymn to the Virgin—the stately trees—the classic temple—all throng on my memory with resistless force and undecaying interest.

"Well, dear sir," said my companion, as we travelled homeward in the soft twilight, too much pleased and enchanted to be talkative, "would you recommend me to become a nun?"

"No my child," replied the good padre, "I would not condemn you to a seclusion from the world, but would assign you the more difficult, though more honourable task, of walking uncorrupted and unsullied through it."

E. S. F.

MR. THOMPSON,

SIR—I have again selected another of E. Cook's pieces of poetry, for your "Pearl." Should you approve of it, please insert it; and if agreeable to you, I will now and then copy one for your paper. Being myself a great admirer of her writings, I may perhaps overburthen you with selections without being aware of it. Should this be the case, a line in your notice "To Correspondents," will make me aware of it.

W. H. R.

SONG OF THE RUSHLIGHT.

O! scorn me not as a worthless thing,
Nor turn with contempt from the lay I sing;
'Tis true I am not suffered to be,
On the ringing board of a wassail glee,
My sickly beam must never fall
In the gay saloon or lordly hall:
Yet many a tale does the rushlight know,
Of secret sorrow and lonely woe.

I am found in the closed, and curtained room,
Where a stillness reigns that breathes of the tomb,
Where the breaking heart and heavy eye
Are waiting to see a loved one die;
Where the dotting child with noiseless tread
Steals wearily to the mother's bed,
To mark if the faintly panting breath
Is fluttering yet in the grasp of death.

I am the light that quivering flits
In the joyless home, where the fond wife sits
Waiting the one that flies his hearth,
For a ribald crew and drunkard's mirth.
Long hath she kept her wearying watch,
Now bitterly weeping, now breathless to catch
The welcome tread of a footstep near,
Till she weeps again as it dies on the ear.

Her restless eye, as the night wears late,
Is anxiously turned to the dial plate,
And a sigh responds to the echoing sound
That tells the hand has gone its round.
She mournfully trims my slender wick,
As she sees me fade and wasting quick,
And many a time has my spark expired,
And left her still the weeping and tired.

I am the light that often shines
Where the fretful child of genius pines;
Where the God-like mind is trampled down
By the callous sneer and freezing frown;
Where want is playing a demon part,
And sends its iron to the heart;
Where the soul burns on in the bosom that mourns,
Like incense fire in funeral urns.

I see the hectic fingers fling
The thoughts intense that flashingly spring,
And my flickering beam illumines the page
That shall live in the fame of a future age.
I see the pale brow droop and mope
As the breast turns sick with blasted hope,
Till the harsh cold world has done its worst,
And the tortured spirit hath groaned and burst.

I am the light that's doom'd to share
The meanest lot that man can bear;
I see the scanty pittance spread
Where children struggle for scraps of bread;
Where squalid forms and faces seem
Like phantoms in a hideous dream,
Where the rich may look with startled awe
On the work of poverty's vulture claw.

Oh! many a lesson the bosom learns
Of hopeless grief while the rushlight burns;
Many a scene unfolds to me
That the heart of mercy would bleed to see.
Then scorn me not as a worthless thing,
Nor turn with contempt from the lay I sing;
But scorn as ye will, or smile as ye may,
Ye cannot revile the truth in my lay.

ELIZA COOK.

Snow.—Flakes of snow examined by a microscope, appear to be regular crystals. Ninety-six varieties have been noted. The air contained in snow prevents it from being transparent, as is the case with other crystalized substances. Snow has been seen near the north pole of a red or salmon colour, and when falling has sometimes a luminous appearance. Accumulating in mountains, snow feeds the streams by gradually melting and running into the valleys. The air from snow capped mountains cools the excessive heat of southern latitudes, while farther north the snow preserves vegetation from destructive frosts.