

Take care, Sir. Life is a gift of God, and we must respect every thing which he bestows.

When I shall receive the absolution which I expect, life will be only a burthen to me. I shall never conceive the thought of taking it away. But, will I be guilty of a crime in asking God to call me to himself?

Stephen was silent. It was not the moment to give either instruction or comfort to the penitent. He hoped, moreover, that he would make the attempt at some future time with better chance of success. He enquired what kind of work would suit him best, so as not to interrupt his habits of silence and retirement. He offered him an engagement to copy manuscripts, and it was accepted.

From that day forward a closer intimacy grew up between the Penitent and the young Vicar. Stephen shewed so much affectionate care, so much paternal tenderness, that the penitent was at last powerfully moved; and he whose soul seemed closed for ever against all human affections, began to open itself to friendship.

He said on one occasion to the young Priest, I made it a rule not to speak to any one during my penance, and I have kept this resolution for more than ten years. Since I have seen you I have found it impossible to maintain this silence any longer. But, how could I have inspired you with the interest you feel for me? How could you suffer

your hand to clasp mine? How could you, who are pure and spotless before the Lord, approach a miserable sinner like me?

Stephen replied: It is because the robe of repentance is nearly as white as the garment of innocence—because we are all sinners, and full of weakness; and besides there is no virtue which God loves to see practised on earth more than charity.

Do you know a thought has crossed my mind, in spite of me, said the Penitent, that God would not have sent you in my way unless he had an intention of forgiving me one day. You are in my regard, like the dove which brought the olive branch to the ark as a proof that the deluge had ceased. You are an angel whose mission is to sustain me to the end of my pilgrimage.

No, said Stephen, I am a man like yourself. I love you, and I sympathize with you.

And then they prayed together. The penitent imagined that his prayers more easily penetrated the skies when they were mingled with those of the Vicar. Although this good priest concealed his visits as much as possible, the report of them soon spread through the town. Public curiosity revived, and people began to wonder what sympathy could exist between two such men. In a short time, however, this curiosity again died away.

Often, on leaving the penitent, Stephen would fall into an involuntary reverie. He would frequently ask him-