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TE LUCIS ANTE TERMINUM.

TRANSLATED BY CHARLES KENT.

Thee, God, before the close of light, Thy clemency and care we pray, That through the darkness of the night Our hellish foes may scare away. Hence evil dreams that torture sleep, Hence fancies of voluptuous guilt Our souls in deadening slough to steep, Our forms with visioned sins defile. My suppliant voice, O Father, hear! O Son, my wants, my wishes cease! O Paraclete, now grant the prayer My heart adoring lifts to Thee! —Ave Maria.

Blandine of Betharram.

BY J. M. CAVE.

(American Messenger of the Sacred Heart.)

(Continued.)

When asked who had saved her, Blandine had promptly answered, "St. Joseph." St. Joseph's face must, therefore, have been beautiful, calm, mild, pensive, and yet strong enough to inspire confidence. The little Jesus must often have read these features, and always found in them all that childhood expects, for St. Joseph was created for Jesus. S. the Abbe Island, for Blandine found in his face what she was accustomed to find in the face of St. Joseph, and the Abbe Island's head was encircled by an aureole of snowy hair, soft, wavy and abundant, that fell over the collar of his rusty scapular like ripples of liquid silver. In his large blue eyes was a reflection of the blue of the sky. His skin was white and looked soft as that of a child. His fine features were an immense contrast to his chopped and knotted hands. As to his feet, if the footgear was any indication of his fee, they must have been extraordinary, to say the least. And yet the Abbe was by no means tall, rather below than above the medium height. Those immense boots must have been a load to lift, let alone to wear, yet none less clumsy would the Abbe consent to have. He had no right to wear that rattle with its edges piped with white, the distinctive badge of the secular clergy. He should be rather invested in the gown of one of the great religious O derv, for he had once worn such with honor and served that Order well, even while very young. This is how it was.

Jaques Island had been left without kith or kin, a bright lad, a protegee of every one in his parish, yet claimed by no one in particular, till a good old farmer and his wife took him to themselves, resolving to give him an education. Jaques' thirst for learning was great, and the desire to be a priest had been born in him. The farmer and his wife had a son of their own who wanted to be a soldier, and would be a soldier in spite of his parents and in spite of fate itself. So they had to let him go. They said: "Let us take Jaques, the acolyte. The curate says he would do it himself if he had not two of his own nephews to provide for. Make him what he wants to be, a priest, and he will protect the girl." They meant their only daughter, a willful, spoiled child. So they labored and saved, both the farmer and his wife, putting their savings in the lad's schooling first, then the seminary, then the priest's outfit. O, but it did cost a mint of money! But they would not accept other help, though they might have had it, for Jaques was a very brilliant lad. They thought: "If he gets anything from others he will be nothing to us, but if we labor for him he will always be a brother to us." And this the youth promised over and over again, when he came, year after year, proudly displaying his prizes that they cared less for than for his fidelity to them, which shone out brighter and brighter as the years rolled on. But there came a day when he yielded to his desire under the best and most trusted advice and entered the Order he loved. They let him go with despair in their hearts. They said: "We have labored in vain. He will be sent far away. He will be alone. He will forget. If we die, who will look after her?" The soldier did not so much as write a letter to tell whether he was alive or dead; but the young priest wrote continually, and urged his benefactors to greater faith in God. He hoped Hortense would have a vocation for a religious life yet. If not, that she should marry some good man. But the pretty, giddy girl had no vocation, and the farmers' sons were too boorish for her tastes. She knew she would have the farm all her own some day, and foolishly thought that the value of it in ready money would allow her to follow her desires and live according to her liking. The priest was a true priest, wholly given to God and his duties. To forget the sacrifice that had been made for him was not in his nature. As years rolled on he reproached himself for

the pain he had caused his protectors. It was a struggle, indeed, this love of his Order and his sense of obligation. When sorrow came to the inmates of the old home, and when the farmer wrote the first words of reproach he had ever heard from him, upbraiding him as the cause of their misfortune, the priest's heart was well nigh broken. "I am dying," wrote the old man. "My son is a deserter, my daughter I have disowned. Her mother has been in her grave these many weeks. No hand to help, no heart to feel. If you can forgive yourself, do so. As for me, I am ready to curse the hour in which I was born, and so die."

It seemed to Father Laland that there was but one thing to do, to fly to the desolate father, to comfort his last days, to save his soul. But he did it without the consent of his superiors. "It was a flagrant act of disobedience and worse," he said, when telling his bishop the cause that brought him a beggar to the door. "I am to blame."

The bishop's eyes were full of tears when he heard the story. "You have certainly done wrong, my son," he said. "You wrong now being represented matters more fully to your superiors, and obtained their consent. But I shall intercede, and since the work you have undertaken may engage you some time, live for a while in one of my parishes, until you are either released from your vows, or return again from your monastery."

"The work I have to do may keep me wandering for years, perhaps." Here followed a lengthy account of his engagement so far as he could make it known to the bishop, after which he begged: "Have I your approval and blessing in doing it?"

"Yes, both the one and the other. And when it is done, come back to me. If it be in my power, you shall be placed here. Meanwhile, go labor in God's vineyard. Here are the letters that will be a testimony to your good standing wherever you go."

The priest kissed the hand that blessed him and went forth. Today he is an old croquemort, nothing more. But what of that? He has had the consolation of strengthening his benefactor's shaking faith; of preparing him for a peaceful death; of blessing his grave and offering the Holy Sacrifice daily for his soul. He has the joy of having brought back to God the wandering daughter of the lawless son, and he deems the years of labor that earned for him this joy well spent. Although he is "only an old croquemort," his debt is diminished by so much.

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brings a smile to his lips and a new light to his eyes, when Nan cries, as she does whenever she sees him: "Cheer up, old croquemort! you will die, not only within the gates, but within the walls of the mother-house, and be laid in the little graveyard with your brothers." And he half believes poor Nan's prophecy through force of wishing, though it is founded only on the wishes of a grateful heart. What then! He who reads the secrets of all hearts, may take pleasure in granting this very one, improbable as it now seems to him and to us.

There he goes on his way to the villa. All questions will be answered at the convent, they tell me. It is but a step, so the old man turns cheerily to the well-known entrance. He is more accustomed to convents than to villas, and is not sorry that his business can be transacted in the former rather than at the latter. But not to-day can the Abbe be received by the Superior, for she has just driven away. Look! In that direction! Did he not see the convent carriage pass as he came up the road? No, the Abbe had not seen it. But he sees a little wagon now being driven furiously along the same road. The dust follows it in clouds. He thinks of Rand and Nan, and fancies the brother is impatient and breaking his patience on the dumb animal. Nan is not there, though she is in sore need of his prayers at that same moment. It is Rand driving away alone.

When Margaret and Blandine issued from the Church of Betharram that eventful morning, they met Sister Noella hastening towards them, alarm and agitation in her voice. The story of the attempted abduction had reached her at the convent; she saw by Margaret's look that something very serious had passed, as well as by Blandine's pallor. Only when they reached the villa could explanation be given.

"St. Joseph saved her," was all Blandine knew, and "he said he was a priest, and told her not to be frightened."

"The child is right," said Sister Noella, "I believe I know the very priest whose description tallies with what she tells us; he might easily be taken for St. Joseph, or the Cure d'Arx. A saint indeed, is the old Abbe Laland, and he is at Betharram, I can readily believe he would have acted just as did the stranger. I have not seen the Abbe since the epidemic, at that time he was tireless among the fever stricken poor."

"Should you see him," said Margaret, "you will, I know, find a way to thank him. I owe him a great debt."

"It is my debt, as well," said Sister Noella, "and I am only too glad to be able to combine these two debts with the others we owe the good servant of God, and seek a way to do him real service."

And Margaret and Blandine, with a little band of Grey Nuns are now on the iron way, speeding towards Moulins, their first halting place on the road to Paray-le-Monial, while the Abbe is again at the convent gate. This time he is ushered quickly into the presence of the Sister Superior, who meets him with outstretched hands. "Abbe, my Sisters and myself have been seeking you for many a day, for many a month. Why did you vanish from our midst so suddenly? Why did you ever leave us? Had you no faith in my word, that you should be as one of our own?" "I had to be about my Master's work, good Sister."



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