

A VICTIM TO THE SEAL OF CONFESSION.

A TRUE STORY. By REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S.J.

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CHAPTER VI. AFTER THE CRIME.

Now that the terrible deed was done Loser's rage subsided, and the fictitious courage imparted by his potentia totality deserted him. He trembled from head to foot, and averted his face, not daring to look at the corpse which lay stretched at his feet, and which he hastily concealed by throwing the pall over it. Then he snatched up the basket and was about to fly with the price of blood when he checked himself. Whither should he fly? To be seen with it in broad day light would be madness, and everywhere in St. Victoire he would be recognized. He must keep out of everyone's sight until night-fall, he must not leave the convent until he could do so under cover of the darkness. There was no safer hiding-place than the one he was in, but how could he stay there with the corpse? All his fine theories about not leaving the door, and believing in the immortality of the soul or in a future life, afforded him no support at this crisis.

Crouching in the farthest corner of the apartment, Loser saw the basket door before him. The knife with the crimson stain was still in his hand. He wiped the blade on a corner of the handkerchief in which the money was wrapped, and threw it into the basket with a shudder. Then he unlocked the handkerchief, thinking the sight of the money would comfort him, but it did not have the effect of allaying his terror.

Involuntarily his eyes wandered again and again to the outspread pall beneath which the outline of the lifeless body was plainly discernible. A thin stream of blood from beneath it was trickling slowly. Slowly in his direction. Why should it take that direction? Every moment it came nearer, and every moment the man's agony of fear increased. Presently it reached a crack in the boards, a few inches from his feet, and began to drop through, on to the stone vaulting of the chamber beneath. The stillness was so perfect, that he could distinctly hear each drop fall, as could count them one by one, and the sound of each one seemed to burn itself into his brain.

"I wish I had not done it," he groaned. "And as for another life, it is by no means proved, so certainly as in these days some are pleased to assert. I fancied I had done away with all belief in it, but I must own, nay, in my heart, of hearts I have always known it to be true. And if we are to receive the reward of our deeds—"

The thought of this, with the body of his unfortunates victim before him, was more than the murderer could bear. He bitterly repented of his crime, through fear of punishment, and the horror and apprehension he felt nearly drove him wild. At length, as the long weary hours of that terrible day drew to an end, and twilight closed in, he resolved to unburden his conscience of its intolerable load by means of confession, and to do so at once. The sermon of the preceding day decided him to accuse himself to Father Montmoulin himself. "He will not," he cannot betray me," he reflected. "The dreary, not so though his own life were at stake," he said to himself with his own lips, and I believe him too, he is no deceiver."

It was more than twenty years since Loser approached the Sacrament of Penance. In preparation for a good confession after so long a time, humble prayer to Almighty God is indispensable in the first place, to obtain help to make a proper examination of conscience, and to awaken true contrition, based on supernatural motives, besides a firm purpose of making reparation wherever this might be possible. Loser did not pray nor did he attempt a retrospect of the past; the one fatal act committed that day engrossed his mind, and in its hideous magnitude, overshadowed and obliterated from the memory every other sin. If only he could wipe off this one black deed, he thought, all else would be of little moment. Nor was there anything supernatural about his contrition; it was fear, nothing but a frenzy of fear, that drove him to the presence of the priest.

As soon as it was dark, he acted on his resolution. Taking up his boots and the basket containing the money, he left the room, unable to resist, as he crossed the threshold, casting one more glance at the pall with its awful secret. As he did so, a flickering ray of light from the church fell up-

on it; Loser almost shrieked, for he fancied he saw it move. Hurriedly shutting the door behind him, he mounted the stairs with all speed; every where out of the darkness he seemed to see the eyes of his unhappy victim gazing at him with the expression of terror they wore when he first attacked her. A cold sweat in drops stood upon his forehead, when at last he knocked at the priest's door.

Father Montmoulin had spent the whole afternoon in bed, as he felt far from well. Towards evening, however he got up, in order to say his Breviary. He was perhaps ill enough to be dispensed from the obligation, but he would not miss Vespers and Compline. He was sitting close to his reading lamp, in the act of reciting the 90th Psalm, when he saw so beautifully of confessions in God and the protection of His holy Angels in danger and distress, when a knock came at the door. He thought it was old Susan, come to see how he was, and without raising his eyes from the book he answered, "Come in," adding, "In a moment, Susan, I have just finished."

What was his astonishment, when on entering his Breviary and looking up, he beheld Loser standing before him? He could scarcely believe his eyes, and lifted the green shade of the lamp to see the man more distinctly. "Who is he, you Loser?" he inquired, immediately adding, as he remarked the usual paleness of the man's countenance, as he stood trembling in the circle of light thrown by the lamp, "Is the perspiration from his brow? For Heaven's sake, what is the matter? Has any misfortune happened to you?"

"Yes, Father, something has happened to me—rather to some one else—and I have come—I want to go to confession."

"One can imagine the surprise of the good clergyman on hearing this request, for he knew how long the sacristan had neglected his duties. He cast a grave, searching look at the man, who divulging his thoughts answered "I am perfectly well, Father. I tell you something, has happened—something very terrible—and I remembered your sermon yesterday, and have come to you to confession. It is first tell me one thing supposing the Confessor could or would not give the penitent absolution, would the seal of confession in this case still be binding on the priest?"

"Undoubtedly," the priest answered.

"Very well, now please hear my confession."

"Most willingly—Have you prepared yourself for it?"

"I have the gift of nothing else," the whole answered.

"Then kneel down on this hassock, I do not feel at all well this evening, but the joy of reconciling to God a soul who has so long resisted grace is the best medicine I could have. First let us invoke the light of the Holy Spirit, and the help of the Mother of God, the Refuge of Sinners."

"Had you not better hear me in the bedroom?" asked Loser, glancing timidly towards the door. "I do not want to be seen, and you will not tell anyone will you, that I have been to confession?"

"I promise you that I will not. Under certain circumstances it might even be a violation of the seal of confession were I to do so." Thereupon Father Montmoulin carrying the lamp went into the inner room, followed by the man whose strange conduct mystified him more and more, and locked the door after him. Raising his heart to heaven, he fervently invoked the enlightenment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, for he foresaw that no easy task was before him. Putting on a stole, he motioned to the man, who stood trembling like an aspen leaf, to kneel down beside him. "Courage, my child," he said, "even if your sins be red as crimson—"

"Red as crimson! who told you that?" interrupted Loser with a shudder. "They are red, red as blood! I must make a clean breast of it, or I shall have no rest! Yes I have shed innocent blood and it cries to heaven for vengeance. This very day, in this very house, I murdered Mrs. Blanchard, there she lies down in the luncheon-room. Her blood lies on my soul, it burns me like fire. Now absolve me, Father, I have told you all!"

It is impossible to describe the horror Father Montmoulin felt on hearing his confession, wrung from the murderer by an almost frantic terror.

He waited for a moment to recover himself, before making a reply, and inwardly besought assistance from on high. Then he endeavored to soothe the man's excitement; he said he was indeed guilty of an awful crime, but even the sin of murder could be forgiven, if it was confessed with sincere contrition of heart. The blood our Lord shed upon the cross had power to cleanse from that, and yet more heinous crimes. Did he not remember that the Redeemer when hanging upon the cross pardoned one of the thieves crucified with Him, although he had been a highwayman and had probably committed murder. After thus seeking to inspire him with confidence, he told the penitent, he must now complete his confession; he must accuse himself of all other mortal sins, wherever he had been guilty, since his last valid confession, mentioning as far as he could remember, their nature and their number.

Loser answered impatiently that twenty years had elapsed since he last went to confession. How could he be expected to confess all the sins of those past years? "God requires nothing that is impossible of us," the clergyman replied. "He is satisfied, we accuse ourselves of all the sins we can remember after a strict examination of conscience." Besides," he added, "I will help you with questions."

Loser rejoined that he had made an attempt to look into his past life, but he had only thought about his crime committed that same day, and for this he was sincerely repentant. Would the priest tell him at once whether he would give him absolution or not? he had not a moment to lose, he could, in fact, be already far away by that time.

To his infinite sorrow the good priest recognized from these words that his penitent was lacking in the dispositions requisite for the valid reception of the absolution he desired. He began to exhort him, and entreated him by all that he held most sacred, to think seriously of the state of his soul, and to finish the confession he had commenced. He would help him, he said, to examine his conscience and would meet a sturdy girl his absolution as soon as he had obtained the necessary faculties, and the penitent had confessed, not only the crime but all other mortal sins with sincere contrition, and shown himself ready to make all the reparations which lay within his power.

Loser rejoined, "I must be on the other side of the water, I was a good man, what reservation, what regret, can be made? I cannot recall the deed to life."

"Unfortunately, that is quite impossible," the priest responded. "But if I understand you aright, you killed poor Mrs. Blanchard in order to gain possession of the money she had with her. As a matter of course you must return the money to the Guild, it was collected to build a hospital. And besides—"

"What, I am expected to give up the money? And what besides?"

"It is quite possible that some innocent person may be arrested, and even sentenced to death for the murder. In this case you must be prepared to deliver yourself up to justice."

"That is quite enough," exclaimed Loser, springing to his feet. "I am to hand over the money, and finally give myself to the law! I am not the first, you take me for. The wisest plan would be to silence your tongue forever! Who knows what subtleties there may be in your vaunted seal of confession? I wish I had the courage to do it, but I have not!"

So saying, the unhappy man rushed to the door with an oath on his lips, unlocked it, and disappeared in the deep shadows of the corridor. Entering the little kitchen, where he had temporarily concealed the basket, he struck a light. Thrusting the blood-stained handkerchief and knife under the dresser, he stuffed the banknotes into his pocket-book, filled his pockets with the gold and silver coins, and hastened away down the other staircase by which he reached the kitchen on the ground floor, and through it escaped into the garden. By a circuitous route he avoided passing through the village, and having got into the road to Marseilles, ran as fast as his feet could carry him through the darkness until day dawned. Then he crept behind some bushes to rest; and before night he found himself in Marseilles, where he arrived just in time to go on board a vessel bound for Montevideo.

(To be Continued.)

entirely ignores the names submitted, though this course is not usual. And while the matter rests, thus, out comes a retailer of gossip and announces that "it is understood" that such and such persons will be appointed!

It is easy to see that this is the height of discourtesy toward the Holy See. It is moreover most unfair to the persons whose names are used, and who, while their names may possibly have not been submitted, are placed in an awkward position in case others are chosen. But it is most discourteous of all to the Bishops by whom the recommendations were made, and who, while there is no possible rule forbidding them to divulge the name, always regard it—and this for grave and obvious reasons—as a point of strict honor not to do so. These rumors then, while they are in fact the merest conjecture, imply (falsely of course) that that rule of honor has been violated. Their publication is in every way unseemly and unfair."

WHEN THE ROD WAS KING.

Mr. Robert Ellis Thompson under the caption "Shall we return to the rod," gives the following lively reminiscences of the days when the rod was used without remorse, in schools. "Corporal punishment as an instrument of school discipline, he writes, has died within the last half-century, not through any regulation being established against it, but because of the growing feeling against it within the teaching profession. The development of the marking and examination method also has worked to stop flogging, by supplying a means of pressure in favor of work, which supplants the rod. In the days of our youth the marks were made upon the boy, not upon the roll-book, and the examination he had to undergo was to ascertain whether he had protected himself in any forbidden way against the rod. This stands, for a vast amount of cruelty done away with, for the rod was a terror to timid and beside children, which made their life a very hell on earth. The first school-master I was subject to was just such a character as George MacDonald describes in his *After Burnham*. He flogged, for the pleasure of it, and embraced every occasion of inflicting a whipping as relieving the monotony of school life. He invented new and more painful methods of flogging, such as beating boys with a heavy ruler over the backs of their hands, or over their shoulder-blades, or even on their heads. He would take a boy by the hair and knock his head against the floor. I have seen him go leisurely down the school-room to the corner where the very small children sat, and proceed to flog them one and all, for no offense alleged by him or known to us. He seemed to enjoy their crying. Such lovers of torture were by no means rare in the teaching profession in that day, and it is said they are still to be found.

IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS of England such whippings were inflicted, and still are so, for offenses distinctly venial, and with the deliberation, by the head master of the school. Generally all the boys who have earned a flogging report for it after the morning roll-call and before the regular work of the school begins. One Eaton head master, finding a row of boys waiting for him at that hour, proceeded to name them, and had got half-way through when one little fellow gasped out: "Please, sir, we did not come to be flogged; we're the confirmation class!" In our American schools, as I knew them, there was no such careful routine, but flogging was kept in reserve for grave offenses, especially rebellion against the orders of a teacher.

It is well to be rid of the rod, and yet it also is well to remember that there are more cruel punishments. I have known boys in a modern school subjected before their classmates to a humiliation which was prolonged for over six months. It would have been far less cruel to have given them a whipping in the first place, and a teacher can sometimes give more cutting strokes with his tongue than he could with a rod, and inflict keener pain. There may be worse things than the rod.

Under the law of compulsory education it hardly will be possible to avoid the use of the rod in our schools. There will be many boys in them not bad enough to commit to a school prison—politely called a reform

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school—who will have to be coerced by vigorous measures. As their parents do not want them to attend school, there will be no reinforcement of discipline at home. As they have no ambition as to their standing in the class or their promotion to a higher grade, they will not care what marks they get on paper. It is to be remembered that all schemes of compulsory education in Europe have the rod in place for the refractory boy. We cannot copy one-half the scheme without the other.

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DOWN BY THE SEA.

More than once we have drawn attention to the fact that reliable Catholic news of importance is rarely to be had in the secular press. It is almost always necessary for the Catholic organs to correct mis-statements, erroneous reports, and unfounded rumors. We have recently had an example of this in connection with their Lordships' Bishop Rogers of Chatham, and Bishop Sweeney, of St. John, in the Maritime Provinces. The former was consecrated on Aug. 15, 1880, the latter on April 15th, 1868—consequently both are pretty well advanced in years. Rumors concerning the appointment of coadjutors in both these dioceses, were given circulation through the press, and even the names of the priests to be chosen, or likely

to be chosen, mentioned. In an exceedingly able article the Antigonish Casket says: "Despite this fact—and it is well that this should be understood—these statements are mere floating rumors, without any solid foundation. Their publication in the press is a gross breach of decorum; and all that can be said in extenuation is that the actual publication is generally made by persons who, even if they recognized such a thing as decorum, are not aware of the fact that they are encouraging it in making use of names on the authority of idle gossip." Then the Casket proceeds to relate the exact facts and to discuss the propriety of having made public the statements referred to. We quote the remaining portion of the article as it contains a most salutary lesson, if

taken to heart. Our contemporary says: "The facts are that their Lordships the Bishops of St. John and Chatham, having each worthily discharged the onerous duties and borne the grave responsibilities of the episcopate for nearly forty years, recently petitioned the Holy See, each on his own behalf for the appointment of Coadjutors with the right of succession to their respective dioceses. The petition was granted and his Grace the Archbishop was asked to convene a meeting of the ecclesiastical province for the purpose of submitting three names for each place. This was done three weeks ago, and these names had probably not even reached Rome when the newspaper rumors began to appear. The appointments, it is to be remembered, will be made by the Holy Father after consideration and report by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, which may not reach these cases for months. The Holy Father may, in making the appointment

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