

A VICTIM TO THE SEAL OF CONFESSION

A TRUE STORY BY THE REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S. J. CHAPTER XI.

THE EXAMINING MAGISTRATE.

Day broke at length. The first rays of the sun, rising in all its rosy splendour behind the heights of Brignolles, lit up a Spring landscape of rare loveliness. All the numerous villages and hamlets lying in the valleys between the plain and the hills were enlivened with plum and peach trees in full bloom, like a bridal wreath. Amongst the delicately tinted blossoms the bees were already busily at work, while thrush and blackbird filled the air with their song. Here and there a church bell announced to the villagers the hour of Mass, and a few aged parishioners and groups of school children might be seen wending their way towards the church; the laboring population went in companies to their accustomed work in the gardens or vineyards.

In Ste. Victoire, however, the wheel of daily life stood still. Scarcely had the householders been opened at dawn of day before the tidings of the murder spread throughout the village like wildfire.

"Have you heard the news, neighbor? Poor Mrs. Blanchard has been murdered, the dear old lady!" an aged crone called across the street.

"You don't say so! It cannot be true!"

"It is true though, and the worst of the story is, they say Father Montmoulin stabbed her with his bread knife," said a voice from another window.

"My God, how can you say such a horrible thing! Do you not know that you are committing a mortal sin?"

"Why should it not be true? The clergy are not a bit better than anybody else. Was not a priest guillotined some years ago, for stabbing the Archbishop of Paris in a church? Besides I heard it from the maid at the Golden Rose; she had taken up breakfast to the convent in a hurry for the mayor and the lawyers. The mayor and the notary and the town-clerk—she was his sister you know—spent the night up there and found out everything."

"Let her talk! You will not make me believe that our pastor, such a good and pious and kind gentleman as he is, could be guilty of such a crime. Not one of those Government officials ever goes to Mass, or to his Easter duty. No doubt they will try and fasten it on him, he has been in their way for a long time." So spoke a stout, sturdy matron, doubling her fist, and shaking it ominously in the direction of the mayor's residence.

"Take care, do be quiet," urged a timid looking little woman, who had stood by in speechless horror, "if what you have been saying were repeated, you might get put into prison by the mayor."

"He had better try that on, a villain like him, who cannot even keep a faithful to his wife, who—"

The good woman's indignant speech was cut short by the exclamations of those around her, for a small body of mounted police appeared, coming down the street, besides a carriage drawn by two horses, in which some important-looking personages were seated.

"Look, look, those must be the magistrates! The police are going to arrest our pastor! Well, there must be something in it after all. Let us run up to the convent, and see what is going on."

"Go on then, you silly fools. I do not want to see the poor man dragged to prison. And nothing will ever convince me that a dear good priest who does so much for the sick and the poor, has murdered anyone, not if the mayor himself swore he saw him do it!"

Thereupon Father Montmoulin's lusty defender threw her window with a bang, and hastened into the scullery, where she vented her annoyance on the pots and pans, and confided to them her opinions.

A crowd soon collected on the terrace before the convent, discussing the sad event, after the wont of the excitable southerner, in loud and animated tones. Though his window was closed, the voices reached Father Montmoulin's ear, and he heard several, to whom he had shown nothing but kindness, passing a harsh verdict upon him. Thus it is with unstable human hearts; always more prone to believe evil than to believe good of their fellow men. The multitude love a scandal, especially when it emanates from a class above them, and whoever the supposed culprit may be, the populace now as of old is ready to cry "Crucify him!"

Men of education, who in such times of excitement would put in a word for the accused, and who would be grieved by the fall of one who would have enjoyed a spotless reputation, do not mix among the multitude on such occasions.

"String him up to the olive tree here, before the police come from Aix," said a stalwart youth, looking about him with complacency. "If he gets into court, you see if some rascally lawyer does not get him off with his oily tongue. Here too, we could all see him kick better than if he were to be guillotined."

"No," answered a butcher, "never fear, they have such proof that the first barrister in the land could not get him off. His cassock is soaked with blood, and the carving knife is all stained too, that he stabbed her with. I should not have credited the little man with as much pluck."

"There was no particular pluck needed. The old woman would not offer much resistance. Besides, all the lot of money he took from her would have given many a man courage for the crime. They say it was upwards of \$500."

"More than that! More than that! Two thousand! Four thousand," one and another of the bystanders called out.

"I tell you what," whispered the cobbler, "it is a fortunate thing for Loser, the sacristan, that he went off to Marseilles on Sunday evening, and had not come back. Had he been there,

suspicion would certainly have fallen on him, not on the priest."

"Oh yes, you say that because you hate the man, and would like to have been made sacristan instead of him," retorted a neighbor.

"There is something though in what our cobbler there said," answered the butcher. "I should sooner have thought that Loser would have done it; he learnt that sort of business in the war. I heard him say he put an end to a couple of dozen Prussians with his own hand. Had he been there—"

"Listen to what Daddy Carillon is saying," was at that moment shouted on all sides. For the host of the Golden Rose had appeared in the doorway, and all present pressed forward to hear the news from him, and if possible, to get inside the building, which was locked against intruders. "Stand back, my good friends," the innkeeper began. "No one will be allowed to cross this threshold until the officers of Justice have thoroughly investigated and examined all which we have discovered and searched into this night—this night, the most terrible I ever passed through! I say so, because I too, my friends, have done my little part towards avenging innocent blood and punishing crime, and our mayor—a man of uncommon enlightenment, of whom we may justly be proud—insisted on my humble name being added to the protocol we have drawn up, which will mask the atrocities of which the clerical are guilty, pillories them publicly, and one may say, brings these wolves in sheep's clothing as a class within reach of the hangman. For if our priest, one of the best in the land, is capable of committing this bloody deed, what may not be expected from the others? It is well that this should have occurred before the election, for now the veil of hypocrisy, wherewith they shrouded their evil deeds is rent asunder. The whole county, the whole country will hear of this. The light kindled in our village will be seen all over the land, and will illustrate the truth of what the great Gambetta said: *Le clericalisme, voila l'ennemi!* These clerical are what we have most to fear. Any one who votes in their favor at the approaching elections is a traitor to his country. Down with the Priests!"

The gib tongue of the loquacious innkeeper would probably have run on some time longer, for the benefit of his hearers, had not the officials from Aix at that juncture appeared upon the scene. The mounted police drew up on each side of the doorway, and the carriage stopped in front. Mr. Carillon hurried forward instantly to open the door. A gentleman dressed in black with blue spectacles and a white mustache alighted first. He raised his hat slightly in acknowledgement of the profound obeisance of the innkeeper, and asked: "Have I the honor of speaking to the mayor?"

"No sir, my name is Carillon, at your service, the landlord of the Golden Rose. Your worship will see my name among those who signed the protocol. The mayor is upstairs, with the accused, I might rather say the convict. Your Worship will find we have prepared all the preliminaries. Allow me to show you the way upstairs. Meanwhile the police will prevent the people, who are naturally exasperated, from entering the convent, lest in their just indignation they should lynch the murderer."

The examining magistrate was accompanied by an agent of police, and a clerk carrying a large portfolio. Without answering a single word to Carillon's speech they followed him to the priest's apartments, where the mayor introduced himself and his companions. Then the magistrate, whose name was Mr. Barthelot, expressed his wish to be briefly acquainted with the facts of the case. His request having been complied with, the mayor added:

"At first we thought that the lady had met with an accident as she was leaving this rambling old building, and wondered to find the priest so very backward in assisting us, when we proposed to make the necessary examination of the corridors and passages. In fact the crime had evidently been perpetrated, and a handkerchief on which it had been wiped, all secreted in the kitchen."

"That is undeniably very weighty, almost overwhelming evidence. Allow me to congratulate you on having discovered so much. What does the accused say for himself?"

"He stoutly denies his guilt. In fact he boldly asserts his innocence and has the effrontery to call God to witness. Do you wish to see him? He is in the next room under the surveillance of a constable."

"Not at present. The next thing will be to look through the report which I am told you have drawn up, with the Inspector of Police. Then we must make a thorough inspection of the scene of the murder, and all the other parts of this building. Has the medical officer been called in? Very well, we shall hear what he says. And the money the sum that was stolen, has that been found?"

"Unfortunately it has not been found. Our surmise is that the priest has concealed it in some part of this spacious structure."

"That is not improbable. At any rate a strict search must be made from garret to cellar. Mr. Pecard, you will have the goodness to undertake this important task, with your men. We will meanwhile inspect the spot where the crime was committed, and all that is connected with it."

When the magistrate had concluded his attentive perusal of the minutes, the mayor conducted him into the kitchen, and showed him the knife and the handkerchief, and the place where they had been discovered. "It seems

very remarkable," the magistrate observed, "that these things should have been so badly secreted. It looks as if they had been thrust in there purposefully, in order that they might be found. Certainly one has met with instances in which the culprit acted in this way, intentionally, in order to say: Had I been guilty, I should not have been so imprudent as to incriminate myself. Did the clergyman say anything of that nature when the knife was found here?"

"I think not. He feigned astonishment and asserted his innocence."

The next step was to examine the blood stained cassock. "How does the priest explain the presence of these stains?" the magistrate inquired. And when he heard the mayor's answer, he added, shrugging his shoulders: "The man could not have done a more foolish thing, if his explanation was the correct one. Had he left the cassock alone, it would have been easy to ascertain whether the spots were congealed blood; now that he tried to wash them out, it will be almost impossible to decide whether they were fresh blood or congealed."

The mayor then conducted his companion through the dark corridor to the tribune, informing him that, according to the priest's own testimony, the murdered lady was in the habit of going out that way, in order to pay a visit of adoration to the Blessed Sacrament, and then descend by the winding staircase. He lighted a taper, and showed him the way down to the landing place, on which the inner sacristy-door opened. "This is the spot where it was done," he said. "The assassin must have stood in this corner, behind the half-open door, awaiting the coming of his victim."

But how could the priest have got here, if according to his own declaration and your supposition, he parted from her up there at his own door?"

"By one of two ways: either by going down the principal flight of stairs and through the cloisters and coming up by this staircase, or by quietly slipping past her while she was praying in the tribune, by the way we have just come."

"Or he might have accompanied her, and attacked her in this very favorable spot," added the magistrate.

"One thing is however certain: no one who was not perfectly familiar with the plan of this house, and with the habits of the deceased lady, could have committed the deed."

"He must also have known that she would be passing this way at that particular time with a sum of money in her possession. Who but the priest could have known it?"

"You are right. These are undoubtedly strong grounds for suspecting him. Would you open the door, if you please?"

The magistrate stood in the doorway and contemplated the body as it lay concealed under the pall. "Of course you spread that grave-cloth over it," he said to the mayor.

"No, no; that is precisely how we found it; we only lifted up the pall sufficiently to enable us to identify the deceased, and make sure that life was extinct."

"That is very remarkable. An ordinary murderer would scarcely have done that. I think the priest betrays himself there," rejoined the magistrate. "Leave it just as it is, until the doctor has seen the body, and the inquest has been held. Now tell me, how did the clergyman behave, when you discovered the corpse?"

"I believe I told you he took us down another way first, though he knew all the time that this was the way Mrs. Blanchard went. When he was obliged to pass by her with us, he gave a very peculiar, timid glance at this door; I am certain of that, for it was that very look that induced me to open the door—and at that same moment his lamp went out."

"Did he blow it out?"

"No, at least I did not see him do so. I think it was draught that extinguished it. But what struck us all was that he at a single glance recognized the body, while we saw nothing more than that ghastly pall. Then before we could get another candle he knelt down by the corpse there and began to recite some prayers."

"He seems really to have knelt in the blood on the floor here, so perhaps we may accept his explanation of the bloodstains as correct. But that does not establish his innocence. Look up the room for the present, and let us go upstairs again."

"I believe. Ah, an idea has just struck me—"

"And me too," interrupted the magistrate sharply.

"You mean she may have taken the money with her, and so there is no chance of our finding it here."

"That might be so, if we had not the receipt here, signed by the unfortunate lady."

"What he made her give him a receipt? That strengthens the case against him. He could easily get her—a goddaughter old soul—to put her signature to the paper by some little stratagem, such as for instance, saying he had the money locked up in the sacristy and would put it in her hands when she got down stairs. You told me Mrs. Blanchard went down to the sacristy to get the money, to avoid having to go back, and on her way down got a stab in the side instead of her money. What do you say to such a supposition?"

"I admire your acuteness, sir; it all fits admirably!"

"Experience teaches one that sort of thing. When a man has been on the bench as long as I have, he makes acquaintance with the dodges of criminals, and thanks to your able assistance, we have what I may call a solid basis of operation. Now we have to act upon it. The first thing is to send a telegram to Aix, to enjoin the police to keep their eye upon Mrs. Montmoulin. You know her address."

"Unfortunately I do not. Nor do I know anyone who could inform me of it except her own son himself."

He will tell us, no doubt. Now we must, for form's sake, hold a brief examination of the servant and the old man who rang the bell; then comes the turn of the accused."

TO BE CONTINUED.

A HUMBLE INSTRUMENT.

Miss Gilmour had invited a few of her special cronies, the pleasant, jolly, little over her shoulder and merely drank a cup of coffee, looking so bored and tried that the company were glad to get away, feeling the evening to have been a failure from first to last.

To Basil's silent, brooding figure at the fireside had come that supreme moment, a cross-road which beckoned two ways—the old path, pleasure, custom, ease; and another, straight, thorough, step.

God and His guardian angel watched the silent struggle.

He saw himself—a little boy again—sitting near his mother while she sewed, listening to those pious stories she had meant to influence his life.

It was only to-night that he had remembered them; then his college life, its warning lessons, its feasts, its retreats, and the great preparation for his first Communion.

Twenty years ago—years how potent? Strange how distinctly the words of the preacher of that day came back to him.

"Ye are henceforth enrolled, my dear boys, in one of two armies—that which follows Christ, or that which opposes Him. There is no half-way course. He Himself has said so. And which of you will wish to be the recreant soldier who leaves the battle to the others and is ever the saggard in the rear?"

against the fierce winter weather, against every kind of privation, against heartrending discouragement, to win these souls which they want for God."

Most of the congregation listened perfunctorily as people who had been enticed into church under false pretences, to a great many, weary of a twice-told story, looked as being disinterested, and very perceptible undercurrent of whispers crept through the church.

But—some listened.

Miss Gilmour turned to her companion with lifted, protesting eyebrows—but found him, to her surprise, gazing up thoughtfully at the preacher and with profound attention.

It was not a new story he was telling; most of the listeners knew, vaguely at any rate, of the sufferings of the missionaries abroad on their work of salvation, while they slumbered in ignoble ease; and were content to accord them all the praise such usefulness deserved, and carelessly derided themselves for their lukewarmness.

But into this plain, simple little priest an angel seemed to have entered to-night, and to be speaking with his voice—an angel who called on some souls at least to hearken, and to take up their share of the cross.

"Ye sluggards!" it seemed to say, "why not ye, as well as these?"

The little service over, the congregation streamed away homeward—Miss Gilmour pausing to rally her party at the church door, and to invite them home to a tiny last night supper; just an oyster or two over the chafin-dish, so as to make up, she said, apologetically, for the disappointment they had had and the penance they had gone through in listening to that tiresome sermon.

All gladly accepted the invitation, with the exception of Basil Stockton, who, making some excuse, went quietly homeward, thus unconsciously taking his first step in that path of grace which he was henceforth to tread, while Katherine Gilmour grumbled not a little over her supper and merely drank a cup of coffee, looking so bored and tried that the company were glad to get away, feeling the evening to have been a failure from first to last.

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"Men's souls kindle at the thought of the soldier toiling up the mountain side, in the teeth of shot and shell, gasping out his life, as he falls on the height, beside the banner he has died to save."

"Oh, promise to day, like that soldier, to follow your leader, Jesus, upward, upward, through temptation, discouragement—martyrdom, if need be—to the gates of heaven."

SUPPORT OF PASTORS.

SERMON DELIVERED IN ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, GRAND HAVEN, BY REV. HENRY P. MAUS.

Michigan Catholic.

"And Tobias called his son and said to him: What can we give to this holy man, who has come with thee? And young Tobias said to his father: Father what wages shall we give him or what can be worthy of his benefits? He hath conducted me to itages, the city of the Medes, he hath brought me safe home again. He hath cured me, he has a wife, he gave joy to her parents. Myself, he delivered from being devoured. These also he hath made to see the light of Heaven, and we are filled with all good things through him. What, indeed, can we give him sufficient for all these things? But I beseech thee, my father, desire him to accept a half of all the things that have been brought."

Thus my friends, did young Tobias render the gratitude, love and esteem of his heart to the "holy man" sent by God, who conducted him to itages, the city of the Medes and brought him safely home again. He recounts all the favors which he had received from him, and is very grateful. Then he asks: "What wages can we give him, or what indeed is worthy of all his benefits? I beseech you, father, desire him to accept a half of all the things which have been brought."

I suppose my friends, after the sermon last Sunday, (in our last issue) on the Fifth Precept of the Church, you said to yourself: "Thanks be to God, that finishes the money question! That sermon was quite enough." My friends this is an interesting and very pertinent question, I must ask your indulgence, just once more, on this important subject. What is our duty, what is our obligation, in good hard cash for the support of the pastor and his pastors? Last Sunday I spoke to you on your duty to the support of the Church. This morning I wish to speak to you on your duty to the support of its pastors.

Some people, you know, are very hazy, misty ideas of how a parish is conducted—how all the expenses are defrayed. If they contribute \$5 or \$10 a year, sometimes less—sometimes nothing at all—they wonder where all the money goes? Bless their little hearts they cannot understand. Bill bills may run up to hundreds of dollars to keep them warm; school bills, to as many thousands to give their children a good Catholic education; improvements, repairs, may be going on at every side; the poor priest may be "tolling and moiling" to make ends meet—and I doubt if there is a more devoted lot of men on the face of God's earth—and yet you will find in every parish those who because they give \$5 or \$10 a year—sometimes less sometimes nothing at all—wonder where all the money goes. "They cannot understand." I was talking recently to a gentleman of a neighboring city; he is a good, practical Catholic and employs a great number of men. He told me, while standing near by, he heard a certain Catholic severely criticize his pastor as being a "money man." "Father," he said, "to my certain knowledge that man has not paid a cent to the church in years, and even now has three children going free to school." I was very angry and told him if he gave less to the saloons he would have more to give to his parish; that if he didn't have the honesty, manhood, to bear his share of the parish burden, at least to have the common decency to hold his tongue. I myself was once criticized for not having hardwood floors in my new house which I built up north. The man who criticized me had given but 50 cents. I suppose other priests could tell you much more. Friends, I can tell you, and every priest can tell you, it is not those who give ungenerously who complain and say unkind things; it is those who should have the least to say.

But now, my friends, since priests are obliged sometimes to beg, Sunday after Sunday, to meet expenses, what about the statement that priests are "money men"? Do they as a rule, love money? Do they, as a rule, have any? Do they work for personal gain? I venture to say there is not a class of men who personally care less for it—not a class of men who leave less behind. Not a class of professional men who are so poorly paid. The fact is this: when you pay every 100 a comparatively poor, unless they have a little insurance to cover their debts they invariably die without a cent. I once heard a dear, old saintly priest called a "money man" who, when he died, a few years after, they were obliged to sell his books to give him a decent burial. You are assessed each year to contribute to the "Infirmary Priest Fund." Our own congregation pays the magnificent sum of \$10. Friends, do you know what this for? It is to keep poor, old, decrepit and sickly priests from starving. Those who have worked in your very midst, waited on your spiritual wants night and day—intellectual, brainy men, second to none—after they have spent their lives for you, on the most meagre salary, now when they can work no more, a few little, paltry dollars, sometimes grudgingly given, are doled out to them to keep body and soul together. My friends, I have always maintained this shameful neglect of poor old priests is the crying shame and disgrace of Catholics here in America. We provide for the poor little orphans—God bless them! We find a place for the old people left homeless in the world; we have a harbor of refuge for the fallen; we are agitating now clubs, rooms for our young men. Friends, all very good; but, my friends, the poor old priest who has been to you very backbone of all these charities, is all but forgotten. When he has spent his life at the altar of God—sacrificed himself for barely a living—when he can work no more—to be cast aside like an old plough horse, unprovided and forgotten—I say this is a shame and disgrace. This is the condition here in America to day. Friends in spite of all this, you will find in