



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 1864.

No. 45.

THE BENEDICTINE NUN: A TALE OF OUR LADY OF FOLGOET.

A TALE FROM BRITANNY.

(Concluded.)

On his return to the chateau, the messenger was met by Ernest, under whose command he was, and he could not avoid rendering an account of his absence: upon which Ernest took the packet and the key, of which Archaro was the bearer, and timidly mounted the turret stairs. Blanche, eager for her reply, hurried to the door, but drew back in consternation when she saw who it was that bore her answer.

'You are angry, Blanche, at my intrusion,' he said, placing the packet on the table.

'I am not angry, Ernest,' she replied, in a tone at once grave and sad; 'but I am grieved to see you here, and hoped that both of us would have been spared this interview; but since it must be so, what is your will with me?' and she turned calmly towards him.

It was then Ernest fell at her feet, and poured out his whole heart before her, picturing the utter wretchedness or supreme happiness of his future life, according to her decision. Sincerity was on his lips, and his heart spoke audibly in his behalf: the perfection of manly beauty and grace was in every motion. 'Give, O give me but one chance against my competitors, and leave the rest to me.'

Blanche faltered, as she saw all that her heart coveted pleading for more than life before her; her features became fixed as marble, but no outward sign betrayed the conflict within. At length, she said, in a calm but subdued voice, 'Rise, Ernest, nor remain in that position; had I been free, you would have needed no advocate, and I would have wrung from my father an unwilling consent. But I have no choice. Remember there is one whose consent is as necessary as that of an earthly parent—God, the father of us all, and unworthy as I am, he claims me for his spouse. Your faith and generosity will help you to bear patiently till you can rejoice in the sacrifice; and now leave me till to-morrow, when I will make public my determination.'

Ernest yielded in silence, and Blanche, forgetful of her own anguish, prayed earnestly that he might be supported in the disappointment that awaited him.

The morning was now far advanced, and Blanche's attendants came to assist in her toilet, but she required not their services.

There was a portentous silence in the hall of Rohan as the appointed hour drew nigh, but the baron was calm in his great will, assuring himself that his daughter would give way before his unyielding decree. As the clock struck, Blanche presented herself, but she did not take her place as before under the canopy; she advanced a few steps only; a universal consternation seized the assembly, when they saw her clad in the Benedictine habit, instead of the gorgeous apparel of the preceding day. While they were still under the shock of this first surprise, in a clear voice, with great dignity and modesty, she thus addressed them:—

'Honored father, my kinsmen, my friends, and all you who make up this brilliant assembly, which, alas! is but a cloudy scene for me, know that, whilst I was but a child, my infant heart had shot forth tendrils of affection that wound themselves about one youthful as myself; nor knew I of the strength of these first feelings, till I was snatched away, and placed within the convent walls. My heart struggled within me, and oft winged its way back to its cherished companion; but day by day thoughts were led to contemplate another, who was shown to be the only object worthy of my affections. As womanhood approached, my childish sapling paled beneath the shade of this broad tree of love, whose roots, entwined about my heart, shot from the inmost recesses of my soul; and who dare dispute this object of my choice? You are rich, but his wealth is unbounded; you are powerful, but his power has no limits; your love may be sincere, but time will mark its duration. So great, my lord, that at his bidding I would fly to the ends of the earth. Yet he is kind as he is great, and he exacts not this; but only asks that I should quit this dangerous world, and dwell with him beneath the cloistered roof.

'That it may lack nothing in its agreeableness to God, Holy Church asks a parent's blessing on this choice of life; and should it be denied, requires the longing child to wait patiently till Providence shall open a way for the free action of its will; and so it has fallen out; for had my honored father given me no choice, patience would have been my only remedy; as it is, I am free; and may God in His mercy help me; for if He is for me, who shall be against me? In His name, then, I renounce my prospects of wealth, worldly honors, and marriage. I renounce the inmost affections of my heart; I renounce my parents' and I am renounced; I renounce my home and name; I accept my disinheritance; and I invoke the blessing of God on those who shall

replace me; I claim, upon the honor of de Rohan, the decree that has been passed against me, and I turn from the halls of my ancestors full of charity and of love. But ere I pass these gates, let me remind my father, not in inspired nor prophetic words, but simply in those of worldly prudence, that though he has evidence of my brother's fall, he has none of his death; and he may yet return; and I shudder to think that, through me, he might have passed his heritage to another. It may be that an ever-watchful Providence has put the decision in my heart, for the salvation of us all.'

Blanche immediately quitted the hall alone, for the suddenness of the change, and the menace of the baron, paralyzed all, and none, not even her attendants, dared to follow her.

Long and deep was the silence that reigned after her departure. At length astonishment gave way to feelings of pity, sympathy, and admiration. The last words of his daughter had struck deeply in the heart of De Rohan. Was it possible that his son still lived? Yet he felt bound by a fatal and false honor to abide by his decree. His disappointed guests refused his proffered hospitality, and went their several ways—hence the Chateau de Rohan, the nucleus of all that was gorgeous and great in Brittany, became silent as the tomb.

Blanche, unattended, save by Him whose cause she had espoused, was on her way to the Convent of St. Iva; her heart was great, her resolution firm, though many a tear fell upon her feet as she hastened on her solitary journey.

Anticipating the result of the day, the Lady Abbess had sent some attendants to a height commanding the road for some distance, in the direction of the Chateau de Rohan. At the moment Blanche distinguished this welcome escort, her ear was arrested by the sound of stifled sorrow, which a too sensitive instinct told her was from Ernest. She stopped, but turned not, and said, in a tremulous but under tone, 'Ernest, farewell!' adding, with more firmness, 'Go, and do thou likewise.' It was, indeed, he, for the hope was dead within him, he determined as a last tribute of affection, to follow and protect her at a distance unseen, and then to take a silent farewell for ever. The sudden appearance of those sent to meet her surprised his resolution, and his anguish became audible, in spite of himself. Blanche continued her way, but Ernest turned and fled upon his footsteps, as though he feared to trust his resolution at a slower pace.

Night had set in as Blanche and her attendants approached the gates of St. Iva; the sound of music in solemn chant was heard, and the Lady Abbess, attended by the whole community, came to meet her, for the safety of whom they had so earnestly offered up their prayers. The long procession wound its way into the chapel, where, after a short pause, all burst forth in a hymn of joyful praise and thanksgiving, at the end of which, Blanche, exhausted with fatigue and anxiety, fell into the arms of the Lady Abbess, near whom she had been standing.

For some days she was not permitted to leave the chamber that had been prepared for her. Nothing could exceed the care and tenderness with which she was nursed; at length, however, the fever subsided, and she urged her desire to enter upon the duties of a novice. When she had sufficiently recovered her strength, she was conducted to the cell of Sister Cyril. This in the eye of the world was but a poor and gloomy abode; the walls were almost as circumscribed as a tomb, they were bare of all ornament, except a crucifix, an image of our Blessed Lady, and a little picture of St. Cyril, the patron saint of the tenant of this little cell. From an opening in the wall, at the end of a long avenue, could be seen the great crucifix of the cemetery; on a little table lay a chaplet and an illuminated book of hours. Raising herself somewhat from her mattress, Sister Cyril, addressing Blanche, said, in a voice, the weakness of which was compensated by the extreme deliberation with which she spoke—'Our good mother, the Lady Abbess, has confided you to my care; though unworthy of the charge, confident in the help of heaven, and being assured of your docile co-operation, I undertake it in the spirit of holy obedience, and for the honor and glory of God. Look not back on that which you have left behind; remember that you give the past for the future, and let your first sacrifice be your last, so shall the Lord take the weight upon himself. You will henceforth bear the sweet name of Mary, in honor of our common mother. If you have received great graces, remember this is a cause for greater humility on your part. We must press forward towards the goal of perfection in the practice of charity, in prayer, mortification, and abnegation; in fine, the virtues and merits of a religious life, offered in the wounds of Our Saviour, for ourselves and for others. And what, my child, can be more glorious than to pass our lives in carrying such a cross in the ensanguined track of Our Saviour's feet, in humble atonement for our sins and the sins of others, and for

the obtaining of grace for the salvation of their souls? This is what we propose; receive the truth courageously, and prepare for the combat, for you have an enemy to contend with who will dispute the victory inch by inch, and hour by hour; pride is in his ranks, your bucklers must be humility. Be on your guard against all delusions. Humiliation is the royal road all the saints have travelled, and it is paved with gold; we must commence by bearing it, continue by seeking it, and conclude by loving it, and this for Christ's sake. This road commences with what is meanest on earth, and terminates in heaven.—Have always in your mind the Holy Family at Bethlehem. The humble dwelling of the mother of God, where the King of Kings and sweet St. Joseph dwelt, has been preserved to us by repeated miracles, whilst the contemporary palaces of kings have not one stone left upon another. Endeavor always to imitate the virtues of her whose dear name you bear; and when you do aught for one of your sisters, think of the love, and care, and patience with which Mary wore the seamless coat in which Jesus suffered. Let nothing discourage you, for the fire of grace will burn within the heart in proportion as the members suffer; and that spirit is transparent with light which staggers under the cross. In every sister, nay, in the humblest servant, you may daily detect some virtue which to edify and instruct yourself—in one it will be charity, in another patience, in another zeal; gather all these flowers, and carry them in your bosom, that their sweet odor may refresh and encourage you on your way, and may God be always with you.'

When Sister Mary raised her eyes they were bathed in tears, and, embracing the feet of Sister Cyril, with a look of ineffable love and veneration, she withdrew silently and meekly from the cell.

On Ernest's return to the chateau his hours at first almost insupportable; his heart was desolate, and his only consolation was in thinking over the past and considering whether there was yet anything he could do to be agreeable to the memory of Blanche. One reflection took entire possession of his mind, and summoning Archaro he desired him to prepare immediately to accompany him on a long journey.

At the break of day, well armed, and each with a belt of gold pieces round his waist, they left the chateau. Ernest was mounted on a stout horse, but Archaro set out on foot, scorning all other modes of travelling.

Meantime, under the particular guidance of Sister Cyril, Sister Mary made rapid progress in the duties of religious life, and when the twelvemonth of her novitiate had nearly expired she was pronounced sufficiently prepared to take the vows required by the Benedictine rule. It was at this epoch, as the shades of evening set in, that a small cavalcade approached the convent gate; they bore a litter, and asked hospitality for a wounded man. The necessary accommodation was quickly prepared in the building set aside for visitors. The leader of this band having carefully seen that his charge was comfortably provided for, rode on to the Chateau de Rohan. Great was the joy of Sister Mary to discover that the suffering tenant of the litter was her brother. His faithful attendant Archaro related to her the dangers and hardships Ernest had gone through in fulfilling what he considered a sacred mission from her, and which ended in her brother's discovery and ransom. The latter now suffered more from weakness consequent on his imprisonment and long journey than from the effect of his wounds.

Sister Mary, however sensible of this last act of devotedness so honorable and so disinterested on the part of Ernest, allowed no human sensibility to take possession of her feelings—at the same time she fully appreciated his motives in thus avoiding an interview. From this moment she made it one great object of her prayers that he too might enter the holy gates and seek peace where alone it was to be found.

The rejoicing at the chateau may be well imagined; the Baron de Rohan trembled at the abyss from which he had escaped, and was truly grateful to God for thus preserving him.

In the meantime the day for Sister Mary to take her religious vows arrived; her brother was sufficiently recovered to be present, and her father led her to the altar and resigned her into the hands of the ministers of religion, and her mother could now give vent to her long-stifled feelings of pious joy without fear of reproach. Ernest, too, was changed; his great passion had become consumed in its own fire; the grace of resignation had been given him, so that he could bear to be present at this ceremony; soon after which he had the happiness to enter a religious order himself.

Sister Mary made such progress in wisdom and piety that at the death of Sister Cyril, she was chosen to replace her, and after a long life of edification to all, she at length died in the odor of sanctity.

PASTORAL LETTER OF H. E. THE CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER,

Enjoining the Collection for the Building of Churches and Schools in the Arch-Diocese, on Trinity Sunday, 1864.

Nicholas, by the Divine Mercy of the Holy Roman Church, of the title of St. Pudenciana Cardinal Priest, and Archbishop of Westminster.

To our Dearly Beloved Children in Christ, the Faithful of our Archdiocese, Health and Benediction in the Lord.

The recurrence of Trinity Sunday brings before us the repetition of an annual and most important observance, that of exhorting you to contribute towards the fund for erecting churches and Schools in this Archdiocese.

No day could be more appropriately devoted to such a purpose than this. For, as we may not lay any other foundation under what we build for the religious teaching of our flock, than that which our Lord Jesus Christ has laid, the Mystery of the ever Blessed Trinity, the fundamental doctrine of all true Christianity, may be well considered the very groundwork of our intentions and desires, of our suggestions, and of our co-operation.

It is a topic on which we might, indeed, flatter ourselves that we need not address you; for nothing that we may say, can bring this sublime doctrine more vividly before you, or more enliven your faith in it, than the daily and almost hourly declarations of it, which your religious practices elicit from you.

You open your eyes each day, and you close them every night, by the sign of the Cross, 'in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'; you begin every prayer under the same invocation; every litany, and the most solemn act of your worship, the Sacrifice of the Mass, commences with the same profession of your faith: Baptism, Confirmation, and Penance are administered with this triple invocation. In fine, the main scope of every creed is to teach distinctly, and inculcate the solemn and sacred principle that this doctrine, 'is the Catholic Faith, without which one cannot be saved.' (Athan. Creed.) And the summary declaration of this dogma, with that of the Incarnation, constitutes, principally, your familiar 'Act of Faith.'

Not only, therefore, is the divine doctrine kept always before you, but you make such constant profession of it, that it may seem unnatural rather than superfluous, for us to address you on the necessity of fidelity to this belief. Yet it is too true, that a feeling necessity, 'the charity of Christ presseth us' to do so.—(2 Cor. v. 14.)

Blessed, indeed, are you, poor and little ones of Christ, to whom the Father has revealed those sublime truths, 'which He has hidden from the wise and prudent ones.' (Luke x. 21.) You, in the simplicity of your hearts, accept the faith which your fathers held before you, and repeat the profession of it, without a blush on your faces, or a doubt in your hearts.—Your walk on a path, which, if rugged under your feet, is serene over your head; on which the sun of truth and justice shines unclouded, fighting and guiding you athwart all snares and perils, till you knock at the gate which opens to the pass-word so familiar to your lips, the invocation of the Adorable Trinity.

Pardon, and pray for us, ye faithful, guileless souls, if secure of your Faith, we turn ourselves to-day, rather to those who, in worldly knowledge more instructed, are thereby more exposed to dangers in their belief.

We do not allude now, dearly beloved children, to fanciful theories of theological doctrine, which with alluring baits, try to draw us away from our firm reliance on the Holy Apostolic Church, as the only divinely appointed Teacher of revealed Truth. To sacrifice Faith to Charity seems, at first sight an impossibility; the two virtues are inseparable on earth. Yet it has been insinuated that the Church might surrender part of her invariable teaching on the dogma of the Blessed Trinity, out of kindness to schismatics, whom this suppression of her doctrine might reconcile to her communion. And if this is deemed not too great a sacrifice, we may easily imagine how readily lesser obligations to unity are contemplated.

This, however, is not the suitable occasion for addressing you on this grave subject. We feel now a more urgent necessity to speak on present and sensible dangers.

We cannot shut our eyes to the aim or tendency of modern science; which is, to demand not equality but supremacy, not a fair balance but a loaded scale, whenever it seems to come into competition with the claims of revelation. The moment the two appear to contend, in disagreement, for the belief of man, science at once exacts that all else should give way; and unfortunately, too many yield immediately and surrenders at discretion.

The boldness of assertion, the doubtfulness or inadequacy of proof, the crudeness of theories, the vagueness of conjecture, the contradictions of solutions, the monstrous fabulousness of com-

putations, the fanciful co-ordination or subordination of assumed facts, the hasty adoption of unverified observations, the inconsistent combination of all these together, are pressed upon us, as composing an argument or a system of belief, which not so much sets aside as overthrows the whole of Christianity, and makes it become a mere heap of antiquated, almost antediluvian formation.

The stump of a fossil tree, the bones of an extinct animal, a broken skull found in some inexplicable place, but requiring a solution equally from our assailants; nay, a potsherd, a sea-shell, the piles of a lake village, the rudiments of stone instruments, all things—anything is heavy enough to turn the scale in favor of what is called reason.

And we are ridiculed as fearing, or opposed to, science, as narrow-minded and hoodwinked bigots, for not at once adopting this confused mass of immature *geognosy*, and sacrificing, in honor of our acceptance, whatsoever has been to us venerable, whatsoever holy, whatsoever truly whatsoever of good fame, whatsoever true and just, whatsoever has been hitherto to us the light of our eyes or the joy of our hearts, what has made us and kept us virtuous, hopeful, consoled, happy through our dark or rugged way on earth, and has sustained our heads above the billows, and our souls above the troubles, and anxieties, and the anguish of life.

We pause in vain. We are calmly and composedly placing in the opposite scale many and dear considerations. We have before us a prescriptive authority in records of several thousand years ago, discussed, disputed, and always victorious, running down a channel that seemed scooped out for it through primeval rivers, lined with monuments, beyond which man has left no articulate memorial—cuneiform or hieroglyphic; all marvellously attesting, by consenting and concurrent testimony, the accuracy of those sacred volumes; then interwoven with what the West considered ancient, and the East modern, the annals of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, till the stream of primitive history, with its evidence of prophecy still in course of verification, drops silently into that deeper, nobler, and more magnificent cistern, where it mingles with the living waters of a new dispensation, thence to issue with all the new qualities—evidences, proofs, and applications which are concentrated there.

And this great current of anterior witnessing strengthened by every ancient tradition, even by the semi-historical fables of savage tribes in both hemispheres, comes to us only as preparation for that newer revelation which opens another dispensation to the world, moral, social, civil, international and religious, and remains unconquered, amidst enemies, till the present day.

Here we meet with such a strange superhuman overweight of proof, as seems to master every possible objection, and to leave no alternative for a second solution. For, in addition to all, that miraculous works and prophetic sayings, and new moral precepts, a fresh philosophy, theology, and social code issuing from illiterate men, in the midst of a most brilliant age,—and accepted, can give of evidence; we have to throw into the balance the vastest empire ever known, subdued when at its greatest might; the entire world reformed, transformed into a new condition by a new legislature, promulgated by ignorant men, propagated by weak men; proved and pressed on acceptance by men in prison and in the stocks, under the scourge and the knife, on the rack and the gridiron; till the whole empire and the entire globe rolled spontaneously to the feet of a Galilean, crucified on the Janiculum.

Strange evidences indeed, and unrivalled, of Truth! To which we may add the brilliant examples of a virtue, a purity, and a saintliness, unknown before this new law of men; the splendid renovation of society and the civil state, the later, the new learning, new arts which it elicited from whatever was worth preserving in previous civilisations.

Then comes, in corollaries and deductions from the principles, either discovered, or for the first time grasped by this new system, professing to be divine and not human, the complete recognition of mighty claims, and rights before unknown; the sacredness of the kingly guardianship of public interests; the legitimate and indefeasible prerogatives of the subject; those more tender, of woman and of the family; the recognised place of the poor and the unfortunate in society; nay, the inalienable human rights of the delinquent, the captive, and the slave.

Now all this, and much that we omit, as testimony to the truth and certainty of the primitive records of man. For they who have transmitted them to us as such have given, in all that we have said of them, their pledge of veracity; the evidence of their inability to lie. And this veracity has been severely tested, by scepticism from Julian the Apostate to Voltaire; and yet it has been believed in, and its teachings have been ac-