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THEOBALD;

OR, THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY.

(Written by Madame la Comtesse de la Rochere, and published under the auspices of the Archbishop of Tours.)

(Continued.)

CHAPTER VIII.—MAGNANIMITY.

When Theobald left home in the morning, exasperated by the outrage he had received from his aunt, he had no other object than breathing the open air, and cooling the fit of passion which agitated his whole being. It was mechanically and by habit that he took his gun, and turned into the path leading to the burial-place of his family, and from thence to the Red Cross. He had scarcely walked a hundred steps before the recollection of his violence filled him with shame and confusion.

'Shall I always be the slave of my passion?' said he; 'how could I act in so unseemly a manner towards a woman, and one so devoted, in fact, more ignorant than guilty, my father's sister, whom, after all, I am bound to respect.—When shall I be able to master my feelings? But then, O my God, to what terrible trials I am subjected. Unfortunate being that I am, my own aunt accuses me of cowardice; and without failing in my religious belief, I cannot clear myself in her eyes from this cruel injury. Oh! why may I not die gloriously for my faith, or fight hand to hand with the assassins of my race; neither their number nor their skill would deter me; but to be unable to defy them without wounding my conscience, to hear myself branded as a coward, and appear to deserve the affront, oh, it is a torture above my power to endure, unless Thou wilt aid me to suppress it, O my God. Yes,' continued he after a pause, 'may I live dishonored in the eyes of my countrymen, if it must be so; but let me remain pure in the sight of heaven.'

In pronouncing these words, he reached the burial-place, there his fervent and pious prayers became still more ardent; and when he left the chapel he struck into a road entirely opposed to that leading to the waterfall, where Burcica was waiting for him. After having walked for a long time at random, through rocks and briars, he felt tired, and sat down to rest at the foot of a spreading arbutus. At the same moment the report of a gun was heard, several shot passed through his clothes, and two entered his left hand. Irritated by this attack and the sight of his blood, Theobald, without considering that so small a charge could scarcely be intended for him, darted off in pursuit of the imprudent sportsman; whom he instantly recognised, for it was no other than Giuseppe Fabiano, whose deceitful and savage countenance had remained deeply impressed on our hero's mind ever since he had seen him at the assize court. At the unexpected sight of Theobald, the man threw away his unloaded gun and seized the pistol he always carried in his belt, but whether fear or surprise prevented him taking good aim, or that his adversary sprang aside, he missed, the ball struck and sunk in the trunk of a tree; and Fabiano finding himself entirely defenceless and in the power of his enemy, instantly turned and sought safety in flight; but had scarcely proceeded many yards, when his foot catching in some brambles, he fell heavily to the ground in the midst of the thorny bushes, and before he had time to extricate himself Theobald had come up with him. A violent temptation, such as God alone gives us power to resist, now took possession of the young man; he beheld his father's murderer at his feet, the enemy of his race lay extended before him, the same who had just made an attempt on his own life. Besides, did he not find himself in a state of legitimate defence? By a movement as quick as thought he took aim at his adversary—but by another, more rapid still, he raised the barrel of his gun, and disdainfully so easy a vengeance, which appeared little short of murder, he hastened quickly from the spot to escape another temptation.

Theobald walked long without object, without plan, until at length fatigue obliged him to take repose. His heart beat violently, there was a humming noise in his ears, confused memory crowded his brain; he remembered but one circumstance distinctly, and that stood out in characters of fire—that he had been on the point of killing an unarmed and defenceless man, and he thanked God fervently that he had not stained his hand in human blood. A burning thirst tormented him, he drank copiously at an icy-cold spring, and then endeavored to find his way back to the village. Night came on before he succeeded, and with great trouble he reached home. A deadly coldness had suddenly seized him, to which a burning fever succeeded, and he could scarcely support himself when he met his aunt and sister. They both passed the night by his bed side, for his state was really alarming;—his head burning, his breathing oppressed, and strange words escaping in his delirium; the name of Fabiano, and the words murderer and assassin were constantly on his lips. Clarita was greatly

alarmed, and prayed by her brother's side.—Towards morning the fever abated, and the sick man recovered his senses. During a temporary absence of Annunziata, Clarita, fearing everything from her brother's incoherent discourse, entreated him to relate the events of the preceding day. He complied with her wishes, and concealed nothing, either of his meeting with Fabiano or his feelings on the occasion.

'Oh, my poor brother, how much you have suffered,' cried the poor girl, 'but at the same time how acceptable to the Almighty must be the victory you have so nobly gained over yourself, and of what graces will it be the source?' A cry of indignation and rage burst from the doorway—it proceeded from Annunziata, who having returned unperceived, had heard the whole of Theobald's recital, and his sister's reply. The thought that so good an opportunity had been lost, and the still more painful conviction of utter hopelessness of ever obtaining what she so ardently desired from her nephew, excited her to fury. She was about to overwhelm him with reproaches, though in her secret soul she could not forbear admiring his noble conduct;—but the state to which he was now reduced, obliged her to contain herself, and she accordingly went out of doors in order freely to indulge her grief and disappointment. Several neighbors had called to inquire after Theobald. Mademoiselle Loncini, in giving them the necessary information, could not avoid showing the disappointment and regret she so deeply felt. A few words of discontent, some half-confidences, which escaped in her bad humor, were maliciously interpreted. The story told by Fabiano, and repeated by his friends, contributed still more to throw a shade of suspicion on Theobald's conduct; and it soon circulated in the village that the last of the Loncins had not inherited the courage of his forefathers. Fabiano did not possess sufficient nobility of mind to publish his enemy's magnanimity; perhaps, indeed, he could not understand the feeling, and he only thanked his stars for having preserved his life in meeting with him. For several weeks Theobald's state caused his family serious alarm;—Clarita would not leave him night or day, exhorting him to patience, paying him unremitting attention, and lavishing on him the tenderest cares. At length youth and a strong constitution triumphed over the severity of the attack, and a happy change took place; our hero's strength returned by slow degrees, and in a short time he was able to leave his bed. The summer was now drawing to a close, the sun had lost its extreme ardor, and autumn, charged with fruits, presented its choice offerings. Theobald, free from anxiety, and perfectly happy, enjoyed the return of health to the utmost. Leaning on his sister's arm, he had made several turns in the garden; the hues of health began to re-appear on his sunken cheek, and he had already talked of the necessity of recommencing the studies which had been so unfortunately stopped by his illness, so that Francisco might find her still more interesting on his return.

One morning that he had awoke more calm and happy than usual, he perceived Clarita kneeling at the foot of the Madonna, her eyes raised to heaven and bathed with tears.

'What is the matter, my beloved sister?' asked Theobald with anxiety.

The young girl arose, embraced her brother, and forcing a smile, replied—

'Nothing. I could have no real grief now, for I am so happy to see you in better health.'

'And I—I insist on knowing all that interests you, Clarita.'

'You shall know nothing,' said she, endeavoring to assume a playful tone; but there were tears in her voice.

'And why not tell him?' interposed Annunziata, with bitterness, for she had just entered the room. 'Must he not sooner or later know our shame?'

Clarita cast an imploring look at her aunt, but the inflexible, hard-hearted creature, drawing from her bosom an unsealed letter—

'Read that,' said she to her nephew, 'and then tell me if I am peculiar in my feelings, or have such extraordinary ideas, as you have often reproached me with.'

Theobald took the paper and read as follows:

'Mademoiselle—I highly esteem your character, and your niece suited us in every way;—but never shall son of mine enter a family whose chief is suspected of cowardice. Believe me, mademoiselle, that it is with extreme regret I feel myself obliged to withdraw my promise, and that nothing but so powerful a motive could induce me to renounce an alliance which insured my own interests, as well as the happiness of a beloved son.'

'I have the honor to remain,
Your faithful servant,
'PERONCELLI.'

Theobald read over this fatal letter twice, as if to find a less unfavorable meaning. What passed in his mind would be impossible to de-

scribe. His natural pride, his attachment to Clarita, his mind and heart all suffered at the same time. However as long as Annunziata remained in the room, watching the effect of the letter on his countenance with a look of rage and contempt, he had sufficient command over himself to affect a calm very far from his real feelings.

But when the two women had left the room, and he could freely give vent to his feelings, he groaned, rolled on his bed, and sobbed like a child. To feel young, robust, full of energy and courage, and to be accused of cowardice for having gained a most difficult victory over his passions; to lose by magnanimity of conduct, and a scruple of conscience, all that was dearest to him on earth, his own reputation and the hope of settling his beloved sister—in truth, it was a terrible situation. If he could but defy Giuseppe, and then instantly demand satisfaction for the deep injury he had just received from Peroncelli, with what ardor would he seize his arms, even were he certain of losing his life in avenging his offended honor! But the same divine laws which had withheld him hitherto, were always the same, inflexible in their charity and peace; and he wept like a child. Poor Theobald! he wept that he could only shed tears instead of blood.

'Oh, my beloved Clarita,' cried he in his despair, 'I swore to my dying mother to be a father to you, and far from contributing to your happiness, I am the sole obstacle to it. Without me, without the fatality that pursues me, you would have become the happy wife of Francisco, of that excellent young man, whose virtuous principles and amiable qualities suited so well with the modesty and gentleness of your disposition, of that young man, who in your angelic candor, you loved already, no doubt, and whom you must now renounce for ever.'

But while he lamented in this manner, a noble idea suddenly crossed his mind, joy sparkled through his tears, like a ray of sunshine after a storm; he had just found a legitimate way of establishing his reputation, and of repairing the involuntary wrong he had done his sister. This thought, for which he thanked Heaven, looking upon it as a divine inspiration, was a balm to his wounds, a refreshing cordial to his soul; it dried his tears, colored his pale cheeks, made the blood circulate more freely in his veins; he welcomed it with that youthful confidence which rarely doubts of success, or to say better, with that lively faith that can remove mountains. It was necessary for him to establish a reputation for bravery, on such a firm and solid foundation that no man could doubt or hesitate to believe well merited; he would accordingly embrace the military profession, as eminently calculated to furnish opportunities for the display of courage—he would become a soldier, for he had passed the age for admission to a military college; besides his ambition was not to become anything great, but to distinguish himself as soon as possible in the eyes of every one. Much constancy and courage would be necessary, but neither would be wanting; favorable opportunities were also indispensable; but heaven would assist him and create them; for it is above all in God that he places his trust, and his confidence will never be deceived. A light tap at the door of his room now interrupted his reveries.

'May I come in?' asked a soft voice.
He rose to open the door, and Clarita entered, calm and smiling.

'How happy I am to see you at length quite recovered,' said she, remarking the crimson tint that now covered his cheeks; 'we will recommence our studies, our evening walks. You cannot imagine what charms these occupations have for me. Let us pass our lives in this manner, Theobald. Why would you marry me so soon, and separate me from you whom I love so dearly? Are we not happy together? It is so sweet to understand each other, to excite each other to virtue, to have but one heart and one mind. As the Peroncellis have given me up, I will not listen to any other proposals of marriage. Is it then necessary for me to marry? How many thousands holy women renounce marriage for the love of God? Can I not live with you as Annunziata did with your father! and when you marry, your wife will be a sister and another friend for me. I will take care of your little children, and I shall be so happy.'

'My dearest Clarita,' said Theobald, kissing her on the forehead, 'let us form no more plans of happiness. God alone disposes of our destiny. Pray for me, and for yourself, too, poor young girl. Pray and hope, let what will happen.'

Having said thus much, and fearful of letting his secret escape, he went out of doors. During a whole fortnight the young man considered the best means for carrying out the project he had adopted. With his usual prudence, he maturely weighed all his chances of success, well resolved to neglect none of them, and acting after the wise maxim—*Aide-toi, et Dieu t'aidera*. 'Help yourself, and Heaven will come to your aid.'

He wrote to the Baroness D——, and to his friend the Abbe Dubamel, telling them frankly all that had happened to him since his arrival in Corsica.

Their replies soon followed. Both gave him excellent advice, useful instructions, and several letters of recommendation for different officers serving in the African army. During this fortnight, Theobald was more than usually respectful to his great-grandmother, more tender towards Clarita. He carefully avoided all disputes with his aunt, and did not return to the woods, being fearful of some disagreeable meeting.

We will ask our reader to dwell for a moment on what must have been for our hero's feelings during this fortnight. We have endeavored to show the joy and delight he experienced on returning to his native island, also the excellent sentiments by which he was actuated; we have also seen how very little peace and quiet he was allowed to enjoy in his home, and we shall now see that his prospects in life were completely changed, that he had to forsake his home and family, and all this unhappiness was caused by the hateful passions of a woman acting on a barbarous prejudice peculiar to Corsica. The day before that fixed for his departure, Theobald bid a long and melancholy adieu to the family burial-place, asked the blessing of old Madame Loncini at a moment when he was alone with her, embraced his sister and aunt, and rising very early the following morning he found a peasant who agreed to attend him, to bring back his horse.

He then threw himself into the saddle, gave a last lingering look on all he was leaving, perhaps for ever; sighed deeply as he thought of Clarita's grief at his sudden departure, and then took the high road to Ajaccio, where he waited the passing of the diligence. Clarita, on her return from church, was about to seat herself as usual at work, when she perceived a letter addressed to her, and placed conspicuously on her table. She opened it instantly, the writing being familiar to her. It contained these words:

'Happiness, it appears, is not of this world, or we should perhaps purchase it by great sacrifices. I expected to find it in my family and with you, my gentle, excellent sister; but as I have been so often told, I had forgotten my country! to remain with you, I must either become criminal or live dishonored; both are equally impossible to me. Tell Annunziata she will not see me again until I have proved that the inheritance of the Loncins has descended to me intact, and that their ancient and acknowledged bravery has not degenerated in my person. I implore her to watch over you, my dearly-loved sister, as a mother over her cherished daughter, and that she will continue to take charge of the affairs of our house with that devotion and marvellous aptitude she has already shown. As to you, my dearest sister, continue your care of our good old mother, accomplish your noble task, and if my departure causes you to shed tears, seek help at the source of all consolation. There can be no very bitter grief for a mind so pious and so resigned as yours. A day will come, I fondly hope, when we shall both have cause to rejoice in the results of our temporary separation; but if the hope proves fallacious, and we do not meet again in this world, remember there is an abode of delight and happiness where we shall be reunited for ever—my dearest sister, we shall meet in Heaven.'

PART III.—CHAPTER I.—CONTRASTS.

Loncini took the road to Ajaccio, in the hope of finding a ship in the harbor which would take him direct to the coast of Africa, besides he was not sorry to avoid Bastia, and the remarks of Monsieur Caffarelli. He passed two days in the capital of Corsica, which contains a population of only 2,000 inhabitants, and has no commercial resources. He visited the museum, the house in which the great Napoleon was born, and also the fine nursery gardens for which Ajaccio is justly celebrated. He admired the elegance and modern regularity of the buildings, the good taste of the edifices, the parallel streets, and above all, magnificent gulf on the borders of which the town is built. Theobald could not immediately find a vessel bound for Algiers, and was therefore obliged to embark in one plying from Ajaccio to Marseilles, and from the latter city he set sail for Africa. Our hero had seen in the Bastia Journal, some time previously, the promotion of Commandant de Belmont to Lieut.-Colonel of the 49th Regiment of the line, actually serving in Algeria. Our readers will remember that this officer was father of the little boy whom Theobald had saved from drowning, when he fell overboard from the steam-vessel La Liamone; and this circumstance determined his choice. He had no doubt of obtaining the kind interest and protection of Monsieur de Belmont, and his hopes were not deceived. The Lieut.-Colonel esteemed himself very happy in being able to serve the preserver of his son, and neglected no opportunity of showing his gratitude. Besides,

Theobald, who had brought excellent letters of recommendation to different persons in the regiment, had much to recommend him. He was brave, intelligent, full of ardor and good will, far better instructed than the majority of officers; he possessed, in fact, every possible chance of success and promotion.

Scarcely had he entered on his new career than he felt a decided taste for his profession; but he did not lose his religious principles, and accomplished the duties they imposed without ostentation. The first time his comrades saw him kneeling at his devotions, several very unpleasant jokes assailed him; but his piety had already triumphed over too serious perils to be overcome by foolish bantering. He only replied by a disdainful smile, assuring them he would be as faithful to his duties on the field of battle as he was to God in all the actions of his life. And truly he kept his word. In short, his bravery, his obliging temper, his exactitude, soon attracted the friendship of his comrades, as well as the esteem and good will of his chiefs.

During this time, the melancholy Clarita was weeping the loss of her cherished brother. Life appeared monotonous and disheartened, now that he was no longer there to impart a charm to her leisure. Still, she would have been less unhappy had she known the fate of Theobald; but the mystery he had maintained in his projects was far more alarming than the revelation would have been. She lost herself in conjectures, being utterly ignorant of the designs and hopes of her brother; and this uncertainty filled her with terror. With what feverish impatience she sighed for another letter from him.

A second letter arrived at last, but it contained little information on the life he was leading, or the plans he had formed for the future. At the same time, other griefs overwhelmed the poor girl. Her old relative breathed her last in blessing her dear Clarita.

Madame Loncini died almost suddenly, without illness of any kind. In fact, she expired like a lamp when the oil is consumed. When the poor child had closed the eyes of her ancestress and she had been placed with all the customary ceremonies in the family vault, it appeared to Clarita that "her occupation was gone,"—that she had nothing more to do on earth, abandoned as she was by her brother and affianced husband. Her solitary position alarmed her, for she could have no sympathy or companionship with her aunt. On the one hand, Annunziata inspired her niece with more love, with more respect than confidence, although she really loved the young girl in her way. On the other, grief was bowing this mighty being to the earth with its leaden weight. Deceived in her dearest hopes, trembling that one day or other she would see the name of her humbled family altogether extinguished by the death of her nephew—a stranger to the consolations of religion, and consequently without resignation, without strength from above to enable her to support her trials,—this woman, hitherto so energetic, exhaled her trouble in complaints, in murmurs, in outrageous abuse of the nephew she still loved.

Clarita suffered greatly from this unjust conduct, and, in a timid voice, she endeavored several times to take her brother's part; but Annunziata became furious at the least contradiction. Her terrible eyes shot forth lightnings, and her impetuous only became still more vehement. The young girl then resigned herself to suffer this new affliction, and only sought relief in prayer—in offering up for this much-loved brother a thousand more petitions to the throne of grace than Annunziata vomited abuse.

Clarita's tears did not flow long without consolation. The Almighty vouchsafed that peace and hope should re-enter her soul. She consecrated more time to the exercise of piety; she created new occupations to fill the void that poor Madame Loncini's death and Theobald's departure had made in her existence; she found amusement in pursuing these studies which she had commenced with her brother; she redoubled her cares and attentions to old Cati, her pensioner; and in this life of innocence and good works recovered, if not happiness, at least that peaceful calm of the soul which for a time had forsaken her.

A prey to deep melancholy, Annunziata's beauty faded rapidly. A blue circle surrounded her eyes of fire, and her raven was streaked here and there by silver threads; the energy of her character appeared to abandon her by degrees. She allowed her old servant to arrogate a kind of authority in the house affairs, which was altogether new; and the flocks of the shepherds browsed the young trees of the enclosures with impunity. A secret design appeared exclusively to occupy her mind. Resolved to accomplish her vow to the Madonna, she went on a pilgrimage to Bastelica, as she had planned on the day of Theobald's absence, and wounded her naked feet with the stones and brambles on the road. This misguided and erring soul knew not that acts of devotion must be accomplished with faith