



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 19, 1865.

No. 41.

THE TWO MARYS; OR, THE O'DONNELLS OF INNISMORE.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

'I think it better, madam, that the truth should be concealed from Maria,' said Von Sulper, rising as the door closed on the retreating form of her husband...

'Will you, will you?' she exclaimed, sinking on her knees, as she spoke. 'Then, with my last breath, will I, who have not prayed for many years, petition Heaven for you.'

'Be calm, Catherine,' said Von Sulper, raising her from her knees; 'be calm, and I will not forget your request. And I would counsel you to thank Heaven, unceasingly, that the veil has been thus drawn from before your eyes; and time yet allowed you for mercy and forgiveness.'

'That one word, 'Catherine,' had touched a chord in the heart of that hard woman; it told her that that severe countenance, that pitiless voice, masked a vein of gentle feeling; that Von Sulper, whilst he hated the sin, would spare the penitent sinner.'

'Heaven bless you; Heaven bless you, Von Sulper,' she repeated, pressing the hand which now was placed within her own; 'and, as you hope for mercy, be merciful to me, manifold as have been my offences.'

Von Sulper replied not, but hurried from the room, daring not to look on that crouching form which sunk again beside the couch, and, with face buried in the cushions, sobbed so bitterly.

But the closing of the hall door, and each retreating footstep that had preceded it, sounded like a death knell, to the wretched woman, who, rising from her knees, now listened, lest any person should be at hand, her greatest fear being, lest she should encounter her children; and then, when all around was still, she hurried up the wide staircase, crossed the gallery, and was about to enter her own room, when she beheld her husband. She sprang towards him, and, falling on her knees, regardless of the chance she incurred of being observed, she exclaimed, 'Oh! George! say that you forgive me.'

'I do forgive you, Catherine,' he said; and tears rushed to the eyes of the strong man, as he raised his wretched wife from her suppliant posture. 'I do forgive you, but I cannot banish from my mind's eye the form of the unhappy girl, whom we have so foully injured. Henceforth, Catherine, banish deceit from your character; see you not that you have sinned without a cause, for to know Maria was your child, was to ensure a happy home, as far as I could have given her one. But control these feelings, he added, 'equally hurtful to yourself and to me, whom they quit unman. I cannot suffer the girls to see you in this state, and am about now to send them from home for the next three days;—on their return, you will have left London for Fairview, and, I trust, will have become calm and tranquil, when next we meet. Now, to your own room, my dear wife,' he added, 'for I hear some one coming, and would not have you seen with those swollen eyes.'

Not sorry, indeed, was Mr. Montague, to have a plausible pretext for hurrying from her presence, and with a mind somewhat less distressed, the unhappy woman entered her room, and abandoned herself to her own melancholy musings.

But she must have been more than flesh and blood, had she not felt cut to the quick, at her past misconduct. The knowledge that her husband knew, and was shocked to the heart's core, at the way she had behaved; the remembrance of the manner in which she had treated the unhappy girl, who, dwelling beneath her roof, as the governess of her other children, was yet her own daughter; the scene at the Old Bailey; the agonized, and pale face of Maria, standing in a felon's dock, was ever present to her sight, and ere many hours were over, she felt the effects of her mental anxiety in a violent attack of illness, preceded by heavy swoons, recovery from one being but the prelude to relapsing into another. At length she suffered herself to be prevailed upon to call in medical advice; the result of which was, that she was ordered perfect quiet and confinement to her room for the next few days; and when the doctor met Mr. Montague, he bluntly expressed his opinion that some great mental anxiety was pressing on the mind of his wife.

To avoid any disclosure of the painful secret, Mr. Montague simply stated the affair of the robbery; the doctor immediately attributing the sudden and alarming illness of his patient to the anguish of an upright and feeling mind on perceiving that it had wrongfully accused another, and to the excitement consequent on attendance in a criminal court.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE SUMMONS TO HARLEY STREET—THE CONFESSION.

It was a happy party which Herr Von Sulper beheld assemble on that evening following the day of the trial in the mansion of Mr. Mainwaring; and perhaps, Von Sulper was the only person whose joy was tinged with sadness; he could not forget the cruelty of Mrs. Montague's desertion of her daughter, and when he looked at Maria, though a fervent thanksgiving escaped his lips, for her all but miraculous escape, he could not but think with horror of the unhappy woman, who had so deeply wronged her.

As to Maria, herself, it was with difficulty she could meet her friend, at dinner, to such a pitch of mental excitement had her mind been wrought up; first, by intense fear, lest sentence should be passed against her; secondly, by an overwhelming joy, at the sudden appearance of her father and Von Sulper; and then, by her acquittal and deliverance from the shameful position into which the wickedness of others had cast her.

The affectionate daughters of the good Squire with Mary, never left her, and we may safely say, when she looked around on the faces of her kind friends, the dear old Flohrberg amongst them, that an excess of happiness followed the excess of misery into which she had been plunged.

The servants having withdrawn, conversation became more free, and Von Sulper found it hard to parry the remarks of the Squire, on the sudden illness of 'that wicked woman,' as he termed Mrs. Montague; he, however, succeeded, and then addressing Flohrberg, said:—

'You have not, I am sure, Mein Herr, betrayed my secret, but have left me, as I requested, the pleasure of divulging it myself.' Then, turning to Maria, he said,

'You see, my dear child, I claim a greater interest in you than you can possibly imagine.—As the young protegee of General O'Donnell, well, I felt interested in you, and would have hastened to London, to reclaim you from your perilous position; but, as your uncle, Maria, as the brother of the Frau Flohrberg, I claim a livelier interest still.'

'My uncle?' ejaculated Maria, in astonishment, better conceived than described; but she saw the good Flohrberg smile; and yet but scarcely realising the truth of what she heard, received, on her forehead, the affectionate salute of her new relative.

Enquiries poured thick and fast upon Von Sulper, not only from the ladies of the company, but even from the generally silent and taciturn barrister, who had so ably carried on Fraulein's case; and as our readers know already, all that Von Sulper has to say, we shall leave him to tell his own story in his own fashion.

It was very late ere the happy party broke up, and would have been much later, but that Maria now showed symptoms of positive illness, so that she was enjoined late hours the following day, by all kind friends, Von Sulper and Flohrberg, telling her that they should not see her probably before the following evening.

Maria no longer had visions in disturbed dreams of courts of justice, prisons, and all the unutterable horrors which of late had been crowding so thickly upon her; her repose was calm and tranquil, and when she awoke, the morning being advanced, it was to the unspeakable happiness and consciousness of perfect security and to the joyful remembrance that Herr Von Sulper was allied to her by the ties of kindred and also, that he had whispered in her ear, the previous night, a bit of intelligence, making known to her, that she would never have to seek a strange home again, for that the good Von Sulper intended to devote part of his large fortune, for the benefit of his sister's family.

Though much recruited by her night's rest, Maria had faithfully intended to carry out the injunctions of Mrs. Mainwaring, and devote this following day exclusively to rest both of mind and body. Such, however, was not to be the case.

A delicate and tempting breakfast was brought by a maid into Fraulein's chamber, on the tray; beside it, lay a letter, in the well-known handwriting of Mrs. Montague.

A deadly faintness crept over Maria's already weakened frame; all the horrors of the past rushed again before her mind, and her hand shook violently, as she opened the carefully sealed, and dainty note, written on the perfumed paper tie lady generally used. It was couched in the following words:

'Will the Fraulein Flohrberg grant a few moments' conversation to Mrs. Montague? In

doing so she may rest assured, that she will meet one who is deeply penitent and grieved for the injury she has inflicted, and who can know no rest till she has received the forgiveness of the injured Maria Flohrberg.'

I can never meet this woman, was her first thought. But her surprise was great, on perusing this letter. She had never expected such an act, deeply as she had been injured at the hands of Mrs. Montague, and many were the tears she shed over it, for her affectionate heart could not long bear malice to a living thing. If the first thought was 'I cannot see her,' the next was, 'I will go and be reconciled.' She partook hastily of her breakfast; she could think but of one thing, and that was, to meet her, who had been her deadly foe, with the kiss of peace.

She dressed herself hurriedly, but, before leaving the house, carried her letter to Mrs. Mainwaring and Margaret.

The two ladies perused it; then Mrs. Mainwaring looked at Maria's pale face, gravely shook her head, and said,—

'I question, were the gentlemen here, Maria, whether they would give you permission to approach that woman's house, so enraged are they all at the narrow escape you have met with, setting quite aside the public exposure and stain cast upon your name and character; were it not well to defer your journey, love, till my husband returns home, which will be shortly; or, till your father and uncle call, in the evening?—Meanwhile you can write, and assure her of your forgiveness.'

'I think I would like to go now, if you, dear Mrs. Mainwaring, have no decided objection,' replied Maria. 'Divines would not scold me, would they, for strictly carrying out the Gospel precept? Let me meet her half way. I know it has cost her much to make this advance.'

'Go, love,' said Mrs. Mainwaring; 'and you will take God's blessing with you; but I am not quite sure, though I know you are right, whether our irascible gentlemen will hold me excused, for giving my consent, especially Herbert.'

'Well, Maria,' said Margaret, 'I would never again see that wicked woman, who has worked you such deadly wrong, whatever was the consequence. Forgive, indeed; I wouldn't forgive her in a hurry.'

'Ah Margaret, Margaret, there is a great deal of hay and stubble in that otherwise fine character of yours.'

'Ah, hush, dearest,' said Maria, placing her finger on her lips; 'there is this Gospel precept, you know, and it must be obeyed, though flesh and blood may rebel; so, adieu. In an hour I will be back again, and the gentlemen need not know I have seen Mrs. Montague, unless we like to tell them ourselves.'

A few moments more, and Maria was on her way to Harley Street; and a very little later Mr. Mainwaring returned home.

'Has Maria left her room? I wish to see her,' was the first question he asked his wife.

'She has had a letter from Mrs. Montague, begging her to come to Harley Street, at once,' rejoined the wife.

'She has not gone?' he replied. 'At least, I trust not. What will Herr Von Sulper think of this?'

There was such an expression of alarm on the usually good humored countenance of the Squire, that his wife gazed in blank astonishment. It was turned into horror, when Squire Mainwaring, approaching her, said, 'Wouder not at the pain I feel that Maria has gone to Harley Street; her bitterest foe has proved to be her own mother!'

With a trembling heart Maria knocked at the door of the house from which she had been so ignominiously expelled, and was met in the hall by Mrs. Somers; a smile of recognition, and a warm pressure of the hand, was all that passed between them, save that when her hand was on the chamber door, she whispered the words, 'she is very ill; you are so very good to come here.'

Everything seemed desolate and cheerless.—No one was moving about, and Maria felt convinced that her former pupils, and their father, were absent from home. It was painful enough to Maria to come at all to this house, every step she took being marked by some painful recollection. The moment, however, had arrived when again she must face the woman, who had well nigh been her destruction, and she approached the bed, the heavy draperies of which were closely drawn, with a trembling step.

Little prepared, however, was Fraulein for the startling change which had taken place. Mrs. Montague's eyes were closed in sleep, but the dark lines beneath them, the haggard expression of the face, the convulsive twitching of the muscles around the mouth, all told a tale of terrible mental agony.

'Hark! she murmurs in her sleep; and Mrs. Somers's benevolent countenance becomes dis-

tressed, as disjointed words ever and anon fall upon their ears, such as people utter in their delirium, and which are but too often not merely the expressions of a disordered fancy, but manifestations of the hopes and fears of their more rational moments. 'Nay, it is not true,' she says, 'I cannot, will not believe it. Do not bid me see that man; he will destroy me with the tale he has to tell.' But she turns in her uneasy slumbers; the eyes, so preternaturally glassy, open, and are fixed on the pale face beside her, already bending over with a kindly soothing expression; and Mrs. Somers, as if agreeably to instructions already received, leaves the room, and Maria is now alone with the woman, who, but one short day since, looked so pitilessly upon her, as she stood in that shameful dock.

She covered her face with her thin white hands, and Maria could see the big tears stealing through the long fingers, while convulsive sobs shook the bed whereon she lay.

This was a show of feeling for which Maria was ill prepared; it distressed her, and she exclaimed,

'Mrs. Montague, I am here, as you did request me; but do not, I beg of you, give way like this. Ah, see, liebe Frau, Maria Flohrberg forgets the past, as she does hope God will forgive her.'

The thin hands were removed from the face as Fraulein thus spoke. The invalid strove to raise herself in the bed, and Maria passed her arm round the waist, and adjusted the pillows, thinking that all she desired was to rest more easily; but, as she supported the sufferer's form and whilst the head reclined upon her shoulder, the face of poor Fraulein was drawn down to hers, and a passionate kiss imprinted on her cheek.

Fraulein returned the embrace, and returned it with her whole heart, but she little dreamed the lips of a mother had pressed her own.

Then the hand was placed upon the heart, and she signed to Fraulein to bring her a restorative she had at hand; then motioned her to be seated, and said, or rather whispered, for the words came very slowly and feebly too.

'Dear Maria, I was reared, like you, a Catholic, but, since I left the hills and dales of my mountain home, in Ireland, I have never submitted to that part of our church's rule which enjoins confession. You, Maria Flohrberg, must listen, first to the history of my life, I owe you reparation; then I will carry my burthen to the feet of the minister of Christ, for my reconciliation must be entire.'

Maria would have interrupted her, for she felt some strange awe about to come forth, though dreamed not it concerned herself, and she replied,

'Dear Mrs. Montague, do not distress yourself thus; to your husband or your children, but not, oh, not to me reveal the past.'

'Yes, to you, and you alone,' was the reply. 'Now, listen carefully to all that I shall tell you. Thirty years since, when twenty summers had scarce passed over my head, I left my home, in Ireland, as companion to an English lady; my head was turned with foolish vanity; my beauty had been praised when in my Irish home, and I panted with desire to raise myself above my humble lot, as the daughter of a small Irish farmer, and be known and admired in the great world. Without a tear I bade farewell to the pastor who had instructed me; to the widowed mother, who had loved me, and borne with my many failings; and to the little sister, Ailey, whom I might never more behold. The lady with whom I travelled, made the tour of Europe, and finally settled for many months in a village in Bavaria. There I met with the brother of the Herr Von Alstein, or, Von Sulper, as he calls himself.'

Here Maria started; had then Mrs. Montague known her uncle, when in Germany.

'We married, and resided for some time in a little cottage, from which the Alps might be dimly seen in the distance.'

Here a shudder crept over Maria's frame.—What was the meaning of the vision that seemed to pass before her eyes? in which there was a dim recollection of grey mountains, clad with snow, rising one above the other; of another face than that of Ida Flohrberg; yet, along with the fancy, if such it was, ever came the idea, that the features of Mrs. Montague had been seen before; and she then remembered the painful, unpleasant impression she received on the night of her first meeting.

'My union was an unhappy one; my husband was violent in temper, and but little inclined to bear with the failings of the woman who had become his wife. I repented of the choice I had made; and even the birth of a child failed to knit closer the bond that subsisted between us. In an evil hour I exasperated him, as only our sex can exasperate, if they choose to yield to their own misgoverned tempers. He struck me, and the blow fell, also, on the innocent babe at

my breast. I laid my child in the cradle, and vowed, that ere eight-and-forty hours had passed I would separate from him for ever. Ere the sun had set Fritz was taken alarmingly ill; his life was despaired of; he received the last rites of the church; called me to his side, and begged me to forgive him. I feigned a reconciliation, for in the interim since our quarrel, I had stolen away to the lady whose companion I had been. She was, that night, to return to England. Now, listen, Maria Flohrberg, I was to go with her; to break forever, before death should break them, the bonds that bound me to Von Alstein. He was better, but still in danger; yet, when night had cast its shadows over the purple mountains, I stole from his sick room, raised my little girl from the cradle, kissed it again and again, then replaced my wailing child, and stole like a thief from my husband's home; and ere the noon-day sun glistened the mountain tops, I was far from my family, never, never to return. Arrived in England, I passed the next year in uncertainty, as to the fate of my husband and child. Then I heard that I was a widow, and that my child had been adopted by my husband's family. I steeled my heart against parental feeling; never betrayed the place of my abode; and, accepting the hand of my present husband, raised myself, at once, to opulence and wealth.'

'Now, listen, Fraulein,' continued Mrs. Montague, and her voice trembled as she spoke.—Fritz, my husband, and this Heinrich Von Alstein were twin brothers, and strikingly alike; judge of my horror, when his still well remembered features met me yesterday. I thought I had been misinformed, and that Fritz yet lived, to confront me in a court of justice, and then before my husband; then I was borne insensible from the court. But Fritz, indeed, is dead; Von Sulper, as he now is called, came to tell me this. But, oh, horror of horrors! Fraulein Maria, listen, the wailing babe, whom I deserted lives, lives!—Oh, just Heavens, what a retribution! She lives in the person of her whom I have persecuted, of her whom I drove forth to infamy; in the person of yourself, my daughter!'

A mist passed before the eyes of Maria, a tremor seized her whole frame, scarce less inanimate than the insensible form she now stretched forth her arms to support; she reached a stimulant from the table which she forced beneath the closed lips of her unhappy mother.

'Oh, fearful revelation! This my mother! Not the gentle Frau Flohrberg! Ah dear Frau Flohrberg, ah, dear Frau; how deep a debt of love and gratitude do I then owe to you. This my mother! Her whom I have leared to see, when the governess of my own sisters.—This my mother! Who has persecuted me for theft. But yet, nature will speak out. She is my mother, and my heart yearns for her embrace.'

And so it was, that when those eyes re-opened once so cold to Maria, they met her own gazing on her with a look all of love and tenderness, and the head reclined on that gentle bosom, and the words, 'my child, my child; yet again, yet again, fall on her ear, as she embraces, once more, once more, that daughter found too late.'

It was not then an idle fancy, that vision that had passed before her eyes; no, infant as she was, Maria had retained a vague, indistinct recollection of the cottage home, with the Alpine mountains looming in the distance, and of the features of her mother.

But ever, ever, even in the midst of loving converse, comes back the memory, not only of the deadly wrong and of past little unkindly acts, and officious supervision, on her part, which cut her to the heart, for she remembered how gently the stranger, as she deemed her, had borne with want of courtesy; nay, with sometimes studied affront, but the soft eyes look lovingly down, and wipe away the tears; and then Maria leads her to talk not of the sad and unrecalable past, but of the present, of the future, of her next meeting with Alice, and Millicent, though small affection can the gentle Fraulein ever owe the latter; and Mr. Montague, too, she artlessly enquires, 'does he know who I am?'

'Yes, and he could not meet you, my child, for his great sorrow at your sufferings; but happy days we shall pass at Fairview, yet, shall we not, Maria?'

And Maria answers with another embrace.—And after a good two hours, spent beside her sick couch, bated at her necessary return to Cavendish Square, adding, that she would call again in the evening, and would spend the whole of the morrow with her.

She then called Mrs. Somers, who, with much surprise, stood by and failed not to notice the warmth of the parting between the two ladies; her curiosity was excited, but she was a well-bred person, who knew better than to make any remark unless her mistress were the first to speak.