



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 1866.

No. 43.

LIFE IN THE CLOISTER; OR, FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

By the Author of 'The World and the Cloister,' &c., &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.)

I have forgotten to mention the habit of the regular canoness; it is composed of the coarsest white serge, with a picturesque looking rochet of white linen, with a habit of a finer white serge beneath it, for the rochet does not come down to the feet.

'On, mercy on me!' said Mrs. Bowring; 'you surely don't mean to say that the poor nuns have no fire in the depth of winter?'

'Yes, but I most certainly do,' rejoined Lucy; and it was somewhat penitential too. But you forget their vow of poverty, my dear madam, as well as that this order of the great St. Augustine is considered very self-denying and austere; remember, too, that the vow of poverty made by a nun allows her to use nothing superfluous or that can by any possibility be done without; she can receive no presents save for the community at large; her clothes are well worn and mended; she cannot be said to possess even her own habit or her own books, as at any time they may be exchanged for those of another; indeed mine is a word never heard in a monastery, ours being the term in fashion in these cloistered asylums.

'And, dear Miss Arlington, do tell me what you mean by the word cell—what sort of a place is it? it's a horrid word, I think.'

'A tiny room, of dimensions just large enough to hold a very small bed, little larger than one's coffin will be, that is all, with sheets of serge, uncovered boards, a chair, a prieu-Dieu, a table, a wash-hand basin and water-ewer, and a glass just large enough to enable a nun to fix on her veil properly, that is all; and yet, believe me, these cloistered ladies rise in the early morning far more refreshed than a dissipated lady of fashion when she leaves her bed of down.'

'Are they not very dull?' asked Mrs. Bowring.

'Quite the contrary; I was not half a day in the convent before I was asked if I were of a cheerful disposition, as if not, 'My dear child,' said mother prioress, 'you will not suit us; I found them, in fact, the very reverse of dull.—Religion was put forth in a pleasant aspect. I was not amidst the Puritans of old; and the religious of the Catholic Church know that a deep-seated feeling of religion is not incompatible with a good flow of spirits—oh, no; believe me, I have heard full often a merry ringing laugh in that happy cloister, and have seen, on their various fetedays, the good nuns, old and young, like a throng of gay, light-hearted girls—and why not?—surely, if properly viewed, nothing but a sour asceticism would forbid a joyous spirit.'

'I have forgotten, too, to mention that much charity is dispensed from the convent gate, and this not only to the poorer classes, but also to the genteel poor. Take it for granted, Mrs. Bowring, that this vow of poverty is good for their neighbor, at all events; and well would it be for England now, and England's genteel poor, who are unmercifully harassed and threatened with executions when their poor-rates fall into arrears, if there were now richly-endowed monasteries and abbey lands instead of poor-law unions; but John Bull lets his bigotry run away with his common sense, and does not see in his own ignorance how little he or the country has benefited by the change.'

'I have not yet spoken of the vow of obedience; you will bear in mind that it is entire in the full sense of the word. A nun lives by her rule, and the superior is also guided by the same; her voice is but as the reflection of the rule, and she has to see that it is duly observed. You will, however, understand that they are perhaps, with scarcely an exception, the beloved and venerated friends of their attached community.—They are elected by the votes of the Religious, in many orders not for life—in the convent of which I am speaking only for three years at a time; though they may be re-elected. The presentation order is regulated much in the same way with many others, had I time to call them to mind; and a novice is always admitted to her religious profession in the same way—by the votes of the sisterhood.'

'That which received me was a happy and united community, founded at the time of religious persecution in England, and when the penal laws were in full vigor. It has ranked amongst its inmates the daughters of several of the most influential of the English Catholics, and is rarely without one or more members of their leading families; and it is but due to them to say, that I found amongst them examples of the most exalted virtue—generous, kind, and charitable. I was perfectly unknown to them, till introduced to their notice by a mutual friend, merely as a young lady who, desirous of entering religion, had no means to carry that desire into effect, and was about to earn her maintenance by teaching. I met with the affection we generally receive only from attached and well-trying friends during hours of tedious sickness, and which, after several months spent in the convalescence, occasioned my return to the world, and was but the prelude to a very long and almost fatal malady. I remember now with gratitude the kind attention and care I received at their hands, care such as can rarely be bestowed in the world, save when persons have a comfortable competency; and,' added Miss Arlington, her eyes humid with tears as she concluded her narration, 'I have become familiar with many of these much-maligned ladies since then in England and Ireland and Scotland, and certain am I that all are leading holy and self-denying lives, of which the world knows nothing, or knowing, could ill appreciate the motives from which their actions proceed. I have, I think, but a word or two more to say, lest I should have misled you, Mrs. Bowring, by the idea that money has anything to do in the matter of after employment in the community; it has nothing. Had I taken two thousand pounds for my portion, it would still have been the same; I should have been, in all probability, placed in the school, in which ladies of birth and high position already taught, who had taken their fortunes to the cloister.'

'I thank you very much,' Miss Arlington, said Mrs. Bowring, 'for the information you have so kindly given me; though, I suppose, the effect it will have on my daughter Maud, and my friend Miss Craig, will be to make them more anxious than ever to become nuns, unless, indeed, you have frightened them by what you have told us about the trials of the novitiate.'

ed virtue—generous, kind, and charitable. I was perfectly unknown to them, till introduced to their notice by a mutual friend, merely as a young lady who, desirous of entering religion, had no means to carry that desire into effect, and was about to earn her maintenance by teaching. I met with the affection we generally receive only from attached and well-trying friends during hours of tedious sickness, and which, after several months spent in the convalescence, occasioned my return to the world, and was but the prelude to a very long and almost fatal malady. I remember now with gratitude the kind attention and care I received at their hands, care such as can rarely be bestowed in the world, save when persons have a comfortable competency; and,' added Miss Arlington, her eyes humid with tears as she concluded her narration, 'I have become familiar with many of these much-maligned ladies since then in England and Ireland and Scotland, and certain am I that all are leading holy and self-denying lives, of which the world knows nothing, or knowing, could ill appreciate the motives from which their actions proceed. I have, I think, but a word or two more to say, lest I should have misled you, Mrs. Bowring, by the idea that money has anything to do in the matter of after employment in the community; it has nothing. Had I taken two thousand pounds for my portion, it would still have been the same; I should have been, in all probability, placed in the school, in which ladies of birth and high position already taught, who had taken their fortunes to the cloister.'

'I thank you very much,' Miss Arlington, said Mrs. Bowring, 'for the information you have so kindly given me; though, I suppose, the effect it will have on my daughter Maud, and my friend Miss Craig, will be to make them more anxious than ever to become nuns, unless, indeed, you have frightened them by what you have told us about the trials of the novitiate.'

Marion and Maud only laughed at the idea, Miss Arlington saying,—

'That is not at all likely to be the case, Mrs. Bowring. The young ladies, we must presume, seek a cloister in order to aim at a higher state of virtue than they might perhaps attain in the world; and will not be afraid of seeking it by the way of penance and self-denial, remembering the words, 'Take up thy cross, and follow me.'

The harvest-moon was just beginning to rise, shedding its pale silvery beams over the distant cliffs, and lighting up the little parlor in which the ladies were seated. It was a moment for thought and reflection, when the busy tumult of life was over for a time, and the passions lulled and subdued. Mrs. Bowring was wrapt in a reverie; Marion and Maud were meditating on the future that lay before them; Lucy inwardly prayed that the seed might take root, and that some of her simple, truthful words might have touched the heart of her very prejudiced hearer, and at the very least work for good in her daughter's behalf.

At the lapse of a few moments the lady rose to take her departure, shook Lucy warmly by hand, and bade her farewell, telling her she should be very glad to see her in Exeter, adding, 'I will just own the truth—you have softened down my prejudices a little. I really did not think, from all that I have heard, that the nuns lived such lives as you describe; but then, you see, I never met till now with any one who had been in a convent.'

Ah, and how many are there who think and speak like Mrs. Bowring, imbibing all their prejudices from the calumnious writings of such women as Henrietta Caracciolo and Maria Monk; and yet they are good souls after all, open to conviction, should they happily meet with any one able to inform them on a point upon which they have been all their lives most cruelly misled; for never have they had it placed before them that our Lord Himself bequeathed these counsels of perfection. So it is, so it will be; there is no human institution under the sun which may not have its abuses, and be abused, either from faulty members within, or a calumnious world without. And the history of past ages, the records of days gone by, and also our present experience prove to us the truth, that there is no state so holy, no system so pure, but that scandal may creep in; and that there is no way of life, however exalted, which the harshly-judging world will not decry and condemn, forgetting the words, 'Go sell what thou hast, and follow Me.'

CHAPTER XIX.—THE SHADOWS OF THE GRAVE.

The little party enjoyed their homeward walk as they descended from Beausite, the moonbeams touching with their silvery rays the trees and shrubs, and playing on the calm waters of the bay. Mrs. Bowring was unusually taciturn, and Marion could not help thinking that Lucy Arlington's simple narrative of her own experience as to convent life had had some little influence on the good lady's mind. They had returned home in good spirits; Marion hastening immediately to her father, who had been left unusually long to himself, save by the occasional visits of the servant, who told her that when she last entered the room he was asleep. Marion entered gently, fearing lest she should disturb him, and stood for a moment beside the couch mournfully contemplating the change in his features, a change traced more by sickness and care than by the hand of time. She had started as she stood beside him, so unusually ghastly did his always male features appear, lighted up as they now were by the silvery light of the moon. He was breathily light, so lightly that she bent low enough for her hair to rest upon his brow before she could catch that faint gasping breath, and satisfy herself that the sickly, ghastly hue of his countenance was not the impress of death.

She drew gently away, the fears which had paralysed her had passed away, and she was stealing softly from the room when she heard him speak, murmuring her own name; she drew again towards the bed, believing him to be awake, but found him rambling in his sleep, and the following words fell upon her ear:—

'Yes, it is very hard work, hard work to struggle on: but the end will come. Yes, I have been selfish and worldly in the days that are past, and Marion, dear child, has been the sufferer; but she will have her reward, and I shall not be with her much longer.'

All was again silent, but the sleeper turned uneasily on his bed, and Marion, unable to keep back her blinding tears, still lingered, not liking to leave him by himself. Then there was a struggle, as if the hard breath would only come with so much difficulty; and as Marion stood yet irresolute whether she should not call for a light, the stifling gas again seized the sufferer, and noting the agony he endured, she tenderly passed her arms under his head, with the idea of relieving and arousing him from his painful slumbers at the same time.

Was it really the shadow caused by the pale and fitful light of the moon, or was it the gray shadow of death, which imparted to her father's countenance that deathly hue? and surely never had Marion seen the rays of the moon impart so ghastly a tint before. And now alarmed, fearing the worst, though scarcely daring to express it to herself, she withdrew her arm with the intention of calling for assistance; but no, she cannot leave him, though the face becomes more rigid, and the eyes, preternaturally bright, are fixedly gazing on the daughter of his love; he bids, he implores her not to leave him, and his cold hand grasps her own with a tenacity which death only will relax; whilst the words, 'Bless you, bless you, my own dear Marion, fall like an ice-berg on her heart. 'Nay, do not leave me; I am sleepy, darling; let me sleep. So, so,' he said, laying his head upon her bosom. 'Pray for me, Marion, my child; but do not leave me.' And so, still rambling on in broken, incoherent sentences, he fell asleep; and that sleep was the sleep of death.

For a few moments Marion stood irresolute. Did he sleep? did he really sleep again? and bending down her head, she listens to catch the faintest breath; but no; she listens in vain. O God, could she but hear once more his querulous chiding as of old; then she bends forward, and kisses the marble brow, damp with the sweat of death. She knows the fatal truth; the silvery beams of the fair harvest-moon, shedding a refulgent radiance on all around, play upon those fixed and rigid features, on which no soul could look and fail to know that the angel of death had spread his wings over that still, quiet form.

She knows the truth now, there is no longer room for doubt; she gazes for a moment horror-stricken, full of awe, on the features of the dead; and then staggering to the bell-rope, and pulling it with frantic vehemence, falls senseless on the floor.

Mrs. Bowring, alarmed at the violence with which the bell had been rung, was the first to enter the room, followed by her daughter and the maid. One glance at the silent form on the bed, and then at the prostrate figure of the unconscious Marion, told her the truth; and kneeling beside her, she raised her head, applied the usual restoratives, called her 'own dear Marion,' reminded her of the lost one's pains and infirmities, and strove to soothe with those kindly offices which strike home to the hearts of the trouble-minded.

At last poor Marion recovered; and then, first dragging her weary limbs to the bed, she knelt down to pray for the soul's repose of one so dear to her, who after many long years of free-thinking had but since his residence in Torquay made his peace with God.

Then she insisted on herself rendering the last sad duties almost unaided. And with her own hands covering the face of the dead with a sheet, having first bedewed it with her tears, she went to her solitary little parlor to think 'how she should bury her father.'

'Charity never faileth,' Marion: it is one of the works of mercy to bury the dead.

'First, there is poor Lilian to write to,' she says to herself, as she places her writing desk before her and begins to scrawl, almost unintelligibly, a few hasty words, but pauses and shudders as she thinks of the thing overhead, no longer of this world; then she remembers that she must have black wax and black-edged paper, and she pulls the bell with such haste—so unlike to her own quiet, gentle way—that Maud runs in, in fear lest the hour 'by herself,' which she has begged to have, should have ended in another swoon.

But no. 'I am quite calm, dear Maud,' she says—her soft eyes raining showers of tears, by the way, quite contradict the truth of her assertion. 'I will write to dear Lilian on this paper, and put it in a black envelope when Martha has purchased some; and then again alone, and almost blinded by the tears which blister the paper as she tells her sad news, she finishes her letter to her sister; but bethinking that the evening post is out two hours since, she calls to Martha and sends her with a message to the telegraph office, so that Lilian, if Lilian indeed have the money to travel with, may be there to-morrow night.'

Three letters Marion wrote to persons whom she thought would help her in her heavy trouble, one of these was to Lady Evelyn, the lady whom she had been told had remembered her in her will.

Then, about eleven o'clock, she went to her room, first creeping in, in her loneliness and sorrow, to the bed of death. She had paused at the door of the chamber, shuddering at the thought that she was about to enter that room alone, then she reproached herself—'What could hurt her there?' Is it not strange that we thus feel awe-stricken at approaching those whom we have so loved in life? 'It is a sacred duty,' says she, 'to look again on his dear features before I go to rest; and then she softly opens the door and passes into that dread presence, kneels while she breathes a *De Profundis* for his soul, withdraws the sheet, and presses her lips on the marble brow, reverently replaces it, and steals shudderingly away, to pass a sleepless, tearful night of nervous wakefulness, keeping her light burning from a childish fear even of the ghastly moonlight; and, shall we own the truth; glad that Martha tapped at the door, and with pale face and trembling form asked, 'would Miss Craig allow her to pass the night in her room, she felt so nervous and frightened like?'

The presence of the girl, who soon forgot everything in slumber, was nevertheless a comfort to the solitary mourner, and about daybreak she wept herself to sleep; but the horrors of the dread awakening—ah, those only can tell what they are who have suffered very deep grief, it rustes so upon us as we open our eyes to our renewed suffering.

At eight o'clock she heard the postman's knock; the letter was for her, and bore the Manchester postmark; she tore it open with trembling hands; it was from Mr. Gilmour, and it told her of the death of her good friend Lady Evelyn.

She sat for a few moments transfixed with this fresh blow; her letter was now on its way, asking for assistance from her who, five days since had paid the debt of nature.

Then came the natural thought—'Was Mr. Gilmour's information correct? if so, she is gone whose generosity would have helped to smooth his passage to the grave.'

Shall she ask Mr. Gilmour to aid her, should her other friends fail? The good-natured Burkes would receive a letter the next morning, also the gentlemen whose daughters she had taught at Clapham.

Yes, try him, Marion; he has a large family, but he is tolerably well to do in the world; perhaps it will please him to have a part in paying the last token of respect to the memory of his old friend.

Then Mrs. Bowring called for her on an undertaker, arranging about all those painful details which it was Marion's lot to discharge.—And very wearily the hours passed away, till Herbert and her own darling Lilian made their appearance in the evening.

They had a little money, not much, but just a few pounds. 'It would help to bury dear papa, love,' said Lilian, as she stood weeping beside the still uncoffined remains; and Herbert is sure to get on soon—we can manage.' Marion had just five shillings in the house, that was all, and Lilian had forgotten, as she threw her seven pounds into Marion's lap, that they should all wait mourning, and sighed heavily as Marion reminded her her of this expensive requirement, but added, 'Mrs. Bowring has called on a draper in the town, Lilian, he will send all that we shall require in the morning, and I can pay him as soon as I get the money.'

Yes, 'blessed are the merciful,' Marion was not forgotten in her great affliction, for Mr. Burke and Mr. Gilmour each sent her a check for ten pounds, and her Clapham friends sent her

five, and material for her best dress, so that the great trouble caused by want of money was spared them; and ever striving to save, the two sisters worked very hard to make up their own mourning.

And at last the day arrived when the remains of the once rich Mr. Craig were laid in a simple grave in the Torquay churchyard, the sisters and Herbert taking care to purchase the spot, so that it should not be opened for any other person; and a little later, when Herbert and Lilian were better off, they raised a small marble cross to his memory, on the face of which were the only words,—

'Of your charity pray for the soul of Archibald Craig. Aged 78.'

Requiescat in pace.

CHAPTER XX.—FAREWELL.

Eight weeks have passed away; Torquay has lost its charm now for Marion; Lilian and Herbert have been obliged to return to London, the furniture of the cottage is all going to be sold by auction, and Marion will shortly go to Namur.

The bubble has burst, the will-o'-the-wisp, which, like *ignis fatuus*, lured Marion on, has turned out to be either a mischievous invention, a gross falsehood on the part of one to whom Marion was perfectly unknown save by name, or, if true, then Lady Evelyn, venerable in years, and long an invalid, had revoked her charitable intentions in Marion's favor, and expunged her name from her will at a later period. 'Troubles never come alone,' says the old adage.—You see death was not the only one she had to contend with; it was such a *finis* thing for a young woman who had not a 'son' in the world to look to, to hear that on the death of an aged lady there would be two thousand pounds for her to receive, that she could hardly be blamed if sometimes she had encouraged a hope that the story was true; nor could she resign all hope, till a friend had applied to one of the executors, who speedily informed her that Miss Craig's name was not mentioned, in any way whatever, in the late Lady Evelyn's will.

'Well,' thought Marion, 'I suppose trouble is making me very apathetic. I could not shed a single tear at my disappointment now.'

It was a good thing that this was the case.—Excess of trouble sometimes seems to paralyse, as it were, our mental faculties, so it was with Marion; her speculation at Torquay had been an unfortunate one. So that whatever her furniture realised would have to go to clear various little outstanding debts, and thus the nuns would have to receive her entirely empty-handed or not at all. There was no doubt but that in this case of Marion's, as in many others, the convent would not be benefited by receiving a novice whose affairs, in a pecuniary point of view, were in so terrible a predicament.

The evening before the day fixed for the sale of poor Marion's goods and chattels she spent with Maud and her mother at their new lodgings, and they accompanied her in the farewell visit she was about to pay to Miss Arlington.

Marion had observed that the prejudices of Mrs. Bowring had subsided wondrously since the meeting with Lucy; so great is the power of truth, if the ignorant and prejudiced could but be brought to listen to it. The meeting was somewhat melancholy, as might be expected, for Lucy had learnt to love the patient, unrepining Marion. This, too, was the last time most probably that they would meet on earth, so something may be allowed for human feeling; and you know, reader, as well as I do, how hard it is to say that one word farewell, to look your last, and then tear yourself away from one you have fondly loved. Well, this falls to the lot of all of us sooner or later in our path through life, even before the great separator, death, tears from us those whom we have dearly cherished.

The moment came at last; Marion was the first to rise, when Maud exclaimed,—

'Dear Miss Craig, you were telling me that Miss Arlington had written some verses about that convent in the Netherlands; do not forget that you promised to ask for a copy of them.'

'I have a mind to ask you, Marion, for talking about my poor attempts at verse,' said Lucy. 'they are not worth to be paraded forth I know not where.'

'Nonsense, Lucy; let Maud have them at once,' said Marion. 'Who knows, some one of these days Mrs. Bowring may yield her consent; she added, with an arch glance at that lady,—

'and Maud may go tripping off to this convent of Nazareth, so much endeared to you. The cloister of Nazareth, what a pretty, sweet name,' she continued. 'If they would have taken poor me in your place, Lucy, I should have liked to make that my haven of rest; but that Namur, dear, dear Namur is waiting for me.'

Lucy yielded somewhat reluctantly to the wish of our friends, and disappearing for a few moments, returned, bringing with her a copy of the following simple lines:—

five, and material for her best dress, so that the great trouble caused by want of money was spared them; and ever striving to save, the two sisters worked very hard to make up their own mourning.

And at last the day arrived when the remains of the once rich Mr. Craig were laid in a simple grave in the Torquay churchyard, the sisters and Herbert taking care to purchase the spot, so that it should not be opened for any other person; and a little later, when Herbert and Lilian were better off, they raised a small marble cross to his memory, on the face of which were the only words,—

'Of your charity pray for the soul of Archibald Craig. Aged 78.'

Requiescat in pace.

CHAPTER XX.—FAREWELL.

Eight weeks have passed away; Torquay has lost its charm now for Marion; Lilian and Herbert have been obliged to return to London, the furniture of the cottage is all going to be sold by auction, and Marion will shortly go to Namur.

The bubble has burst, the will-o'-the-wisp, which, like *ignis fatuus*, lured Marion on, has turned out to be either a mischievous invention, a gross falsehood on the part of one to whom Marion was perfectly unknown save by name, or, if true, then Lady Evelyn, venerable in years, and long an invalid, had revoked her charitable intentions in Marion's favor, and expunged her name from her will at a later period. 'Troubles never come alone,' says the old adage.—You see death was not the only one she had to contend with; it was such a *finis* thing for a young woman who had not a 'son' in the world to look to, to hear that on the death of an aged lady there would be two thousand pounds for her to receive, that she could hardly be blamed if sometimes she had encouraged a hope that the story was true; nor could she resign all hope, till a friend had applied to one of the executors, who speedily informed her that Miss Craig's name was not mentioned, in any way whatever, in the late Lady Evelyn's will.

'Well,' thought Marion, 'I suppose trouble is making me very apathetic. I could not shed a single tear at my disappointment now.'

It was a good thing that this was the case.—Excess of trouble sometimes seems to paralyse, as it were, our mental faculties, so it was with Marion; her speculation at Torquay had been an unfortunate one. So that whatever her furniture realised would have to go to clear various little outstanding debts, and thus the nuns would have to receive her entirely empty-handed or not at all. There was no doubt but that in this case of Marion's, as in many others, the convent would not be benefited by receiving a novice whose affairs, in a pecuniary point of view, were in so terrible a predicament.

The evening before the day fixed for the sale of poor Marion's goods and chattels she spent with Maud and her mother at their new lodgings, and they accompanied her in the farewell visit she was about to pay to Miss Arlington.

Marion had observed that the prejudices of Mrs. Bowring had subsided wondrously since the meeting with Lucy; so great is the power of truth, if the ignorant and prejudiced could but be brought to listen to it. The meeting was somewhat melancholy, as might be expected, for Lucy had learnt to love the patient, unrepining Marion. This, too, was the last time most probably that they would meet on earth, so something may be allowed for human feeling; and you know, reader, as well as I do, how hard it is to say that one word farewell, to look your last, and then tear yourself away from one you have fondly loved. Well, this falls to the lot of all of us sooner or later in our path through life, even before the great separator, death, tears from us those whom we have dearly cherished.

The moment came at last; Marion was the first to rise, when Maud exclaimed,—

'Dear Miss Craig, you were telling me that Miss Arlington had written some verses about that convent in the Netherlands; do not forget that you promised to ask for a copy of them.'

'I have a mind to ask you, Marion, for talking about my poor attempts at verse,' said Lucy. 'they are not worth to be paraded forth I know not where.'

'Nonsense, Lucy; let Maud have them at once,' said Marion. 'Who knows, some one of these days Mrs. Bowring may yield her consent; she added, with an arch glance at that lady,—

'and Maud may go tripping off to this convent of Nazareth, so much endeared to you. The cloister of Nazareth, what a pretty, sweet name,' she continued. 'If they would have taken poor me in your place, Lucy, I should have liked to make that my haven of rest; but that Namur, dear, dear Namur is waiting for me.'

Lucy yielded somewhat reluctantly to the wish of our friends, and disappearing for a few moments, returned, bringing with her a copy of the following simple lines:—