



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1866.

## CLARA LESLIE.

### A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.—Continued.

Mr. Wingfield said he must be going, and excused himself. Poor Clara again turned very pale as he bid her good by. She felt that it was good by forever, and saw that it was better that others were in the room. There was nothing more to say, and all attempts at parting kindly were useless. She followed him with her eyes till the door closed behind him, and then turning to a window, looked after his tall figure down the street, till the tears completely blinded her. Catherine, however, soon came after her, and drawing her hand with a smile within her arm, attempted to lead her away.

'Father Raymond won't misunderstand your tears,' said she, half sadly, half playfully. 'We all know it is very hard to part with our Anglican directors.'

If any thing could have reassured Clara at that moment, it was Father Raymond's kind look of sympathy; but it would come out, and though she suffered Catherine to lead her to the sofa close to him, she wept without restraint.

'It is so hard to be misunderstood by those one loves best,' said she sadly. 'It is all self-will,' all excited imaginations; 'it cannot be God's work; and some day I shall see it as they do.'

'Yes,' said Father Raymond; 'it is the hardest part of the sacrifice God calls you to make; but it is not also a wonderful privilege to be thus invited to share one of our especial sufferings of our Divine Lord? Some day, on the contrary, they will see that it is God's Hand that is leading you; and Mr. Wingfield will himself be restored to Catholic Unity.'

'Not Mr. Wingfield,' sighed Clara sorrowfully; 'he is so bigoted, I was going to say; he is so sure of his position.'

'It depends upon you,' replied Father Raymond, smiling; 'if you only pray enough for him, he will soon be converted.'

'Clara has yet to learn the force of Catholic prayer,' said Catherine; 'it cannot be learnt before one is a Catholic. She will feel it soon enough afterwards.'

'He will resist upon my believing Father Newman is dissatisfied,' said Clara. 'He says he has read "Loss and Gain" over and over again, and there is a spirit of unsatisfied yearning after what he has left running through the whole book.'

Father Raymond could not resist a smile, and Catherine laughed outright.

'Who will they say is dissatisfied next?' said she. 'Poor Mr. Wingfield! But they are all alike; they see everything through a medium of their own.'

'I think you may put your mind at rest about Father Newman being dissatisfied,' said Father Raymond; 'his last volume of Sermons speaks—too plainly to be misunderstood even by his quondam Puseyite friends—those simple words which are the index of his heart: "I have sought, and I have found."'

'But do you know,' said Clara, looking anxiously up, 'that he will not allow the validity of this trial of six months without my never going to Mass during that time; never writing to Alan, or having any communication with him; never seeing a Catholic priest, or a Catholic friend, or even a book? So that I feel as if I were doing a forbidden thing even in talking to you.'

Father Raymond smiled; but he did not seem inclined to move or change the conversation.

'Your mind is then quite made up?' said he, a slight flush crossing his features.

'Oh, I forgot that you did not know it,' replied Clara, with more cheerfulness; 'but,' she added, looking inquiringly at him, 'I have promised to wait till I am of age—till the 8th of December next—in consideration of my family and friends, and to prove to them that these convictions are the work of God and not of my own imagination; but I had not calculated all Mr. Wingfield's requisitions.'

'Yes,' said Father Raymond; his tone was doubtful, half kindness, half sadness; 'do you think you will be able to wait so long?'

'It will be very difficult,' replied Clara; 'but I believe it is what God requires of me.'

'I suppose you could not go to Mass while you are in your brother's house?' said Father Raymond; 'and as to seeing Catholic priests, of course, if there is any necessity, you will not think yourself bound not to see one?'

'Oh, no, indeed,' said Clara; 'and as to Catherine, if she will come to see me, I cannot turn her out of doors. My health, I suspect, will not permit me to come here very often. The doctors even say I must spend next winter out of England.'

'I think it would be the best thing that could be done,' said Catherine, looking towards Father Raymond. 'If Clara left England immediately after her conversion she would be spared much

of the publicity and disagreeableness attendant on such a step.'

'And you too,' said Father Raymond smiling. Catherine smiled too.

'Of course this is Clara's home whenever she is obliged to leave her brother's protection, and it would do both good to see what a real Catholic country is.'

Clara did not speak. She could scarcely believe her ears; for Catherine had never spoken of her living with her before; and now a beautiful vision of foreign lands came before her mind's eye.—Italy with her magic sunshine and her glowing devotion; cathedrals, churches, processions; all her young dreams of barefooted nuns and veiled nuns. She almost thought she already heard the indescribable wail of the Miserere, and knelt in adoration at the shrine of St. Peter. Her cheek flushed, her eye kindled, and her heart fluttered like an imprisoned bird, as Alan's image mingled with the enchantment of the scene, and she felt she was no longer trespassing on forbidden ground. She was quite absorbed, and did not perceive the turn the conversation had taken, till she heard Catherine say.

'Dr. Carter recommends Malta.'

'You could not see the Catholic religion under a more favourable point of view,' replied Father Raymond. 'The only complaint Protestants make is, that it is so intensely Catholic.' He looked at his watch and rose as he spoke. 'I shall not say good by,' said he to Clara; 'I shall hope to see you again. If anything disturbs you I shall only be too happy to be of any service to you. Any books that you may write for, I may be able more easily to procure perhaps for you than even Mrs. Temple.'

'Oh, I am so wearied with controversy!' replied Clara; 'I long so to be at rest, to have an authority to which to look, as a guide that cannot err!'

'I would not then read any more,' said Father Raymond; 'You are convinced that there is but one Church, and that you as yet are not within its outward pale. Now, pray; do not forget to pray; pray God to give you light and strength to do His Will, and nothing but His Will. Let me end as I began the first time I saw you: prayer—earnest, faithful, humble prayer—is the one thing necessary for you.'

Those six months of trial passed one by one away. Many and many a time did Clara's patience nearly fail; but the thought of her promise restrained her ardent spirit. Douglas never approached the subject; he seemed to select another line of conduct, and treated her with far more kindness than he had ever done before. Clara continued in very weak health, very rarely went out, and accordingly gave him no subject of displeasure. With Mildred she spoke openly, and Clara could plainly perceive that she had made some impression on her sister-in-law's mind, and cleared away a good many prejudices; but still she avoided speaking, for it was her character to listen not to talk; only once she showed what was working in her mind in some degree.

'O Clara!' said she, had you but been to Rome as I have, you would not be thus attracted towards the Romish Church.'

Clara looked up, but said nothing; she dared not mention the thought of her going abroad; it was Douglas's wish that no one in the household should know the day of her conversion, or whether she intended going; in short, from the hour she left his house she was to be as one dead.

'What can it be,' continued Mildred earnestly, laying down her work, 'that attracts you in that system, which to me is so full of things which perfectly shock and revolt me? O Clara! how can you leave a light so pure, a system so simple and beautiful, as ours is?'

Clara gazed up in her face.

'Shall I, can I make you understand it?' she replied more earnestly still. 'O Mildred, is the Blessed Sacrament what it once was to you?'

'I have never changed, Clara,' said Mildred, in that reverent tone she always used when speaking of sacred things. 'What I believed in those happy days dear Clara, when we were one in every feeling, I believe now.'

'O Mildred, then,' replied Clara, 'it is that constant, daily, ever-returning, never-ceasing love and adoration of that holy mystery in the Church of Rome that attracts me. Our Lord is never absent from her altars. He is ever there; you do not go to a Church, and feel that it is empty; the Lord of Glory is on His humble Throne.'

'But He is ever present, dearest Clara,' interrupted Mildred.

'Not as He is in the Blessed Sacrament, Mildred,' replied Clara; 'it is He, in His very Flesh and Blood, as He was when He wandered on earth during those glad forty days after His resurrection, resting in that Tabernacle! He was spiritually omnipresent, as He is to us now at this moment, when He was on earth; but, oh Mildred, and she clasped her hands, with one of her beautiful expressions of almost seraphic rap-

ture,—'would you have been content? would you not have sought His Feet, and wept with the Magdalene, as you bathed them with your tears? would not earth have been a void where He was not? would His spiritual presence have sufficed you then? Oh, no, Mildred; your heart says no; and such is every Catholic's feeling when he leaves that very presence of his Lord in that Tabernacle, His poor abiding place, for the mere spiritual presence which Protestants are content with.'

'Thank you, Clara,' replied Mildred, thoughtfully; 'I am very glad you have told me this.—You know I cannot feel as you do, but it explains a great deal to me. I now think that I understand you better.'

Clara looked up, her eyes wet with tears.—Her mind returned to those days when they had shared every thought, and her heart swelled with affection. She turned to the little Madeleine who was playing on the floor beside her, and leaning over her, hid the tears that would fall in the caresses she bestowed on the child.—She felt how deep was the sacrifice God required of her; and she shrank not from it; she only felt amid her grief that joy which God gives to those who are willing to give up all for Him, and murmured to herself her long loved anthem, that was now fast approaching, 'O Adonaï! O Root of Jesse! come and deliver us; do not tarry; come to us, our salvation, the Lord our God.'

#### CHAPTER XXIV.—THE ORATORY.

'Jesus and Mary be the stars  
That shine for us on high;  
God and Saint Philip brothers, be  
Our gentle battle cry.'

Father Faber.

Month after month passed away; the ecclesiastical year rolled on and came to a close, and Advent began.

On the first Thursday in Advent Clara's probation was over, and with beating heart she went out, as early as she was allowed, to spend the morning with Catherine Temple. She had just come back from Mass; and as she pressed Clara affectionately in her arms, and wished her all the blessings Catholic hearts are wont on such days to pour forth, she could feel how warmly Clara's heart responded to the last words,

'And now it is over, and you are free.'

'Thank God, I am free!' replied Clara; 'but the shadows of the future are over me, and I scarcely feel as I could wish. But now, when can I see Father Raymond?'

'I saw him this morning,' replied Catherine, 'and he has promised to call; so I will leave you think over what you have to say.'

Clara sat down in deep thought. There was a shade of uneasiness on her countenance; once or twice she sighed heavily; she longed for and yet dreaded Father Raymond's arrival, for she had now to think of him as her confessor, and she began to fear that she would become as afraid of him as of Mr. Wingfield. She did not wait long, and she soon found her fears of being afraid of him were very groundless.

'So your probation is at last over,' said he.—She earnestly looked up in his face, and told him that the six long months were expired. 'Let me congratulate you.'

'And now,' said Clara, but her voice faltered with agitation, 'may I hope to be admitted into the bosom of Christ's Holy Catholic Church?—Do you think I am fit for such a blessing?'

'If you are in the same state of mind as when I saw you last,' replied Father Raymond, 'I should not only think you fit, my dear child, but urge you now to lose no more time. You have done every thing, and more than everything, that your friends could demand of you.'

'Then,' replied Clara, as she looked down, and her color rose, as she felt that the moment so long desired, so long dreaded, was at last really come,—'what day will you receive me? I am ready; I have only waited too long.'

'What day have you thought of?' said Father Raymond gently.

Clara hesitated a moment.

'Christmas-day,' she replied, at last, 'has been an eventful day in my life, and I do not think what remains of Advent will be too long a time wherein to prepare such a terrible thing as a general confession is to me.'

We need not repeat all that Father Raymond here said to soothe the terrified spirit of poor Clara, who, he saw, shrank from the task before her with the idea that she had to deal with an Anglican confessor, untrained as they are in the art of sifting the conscience, and binding up the wounds of the soul with that dexterity and tenderness a Catholic priest so well knows how to use. He drew her on all that unwittlingly to speak openly to him of all that had happened to her in her whole life—her childhood, her father, her home-life—her occupations,—and acquisitions,—and then gave her some simple rules for self-examination, bidding her not to fear, not to trouble and agitate herself; till Clara naively exclaimed,

'Ah, they told me Catholic priests would not give me half the care and individual guidance our Puseyite confessors used to give us; but my heart told me it was not the case.'

Father Raymond smiled, but said nothing; and it was arranged that the second Friday in Advent she should seek him at the Passionists' Church.

'I have never been present at Mass,' said Clara, 'and I am afraid, till I am a Catholic, I shall not have an opportunity.'

'You shall be present at the midnight Mass on Christmas-eve at the Oratory in King William Street,' said Father Raymond, smiling—this time with double meaning.

Clara looked quickly up, as if a thought struck her, then coloured deeply as she replied—

'Will that be my first Communion?'

'I think it would be very appropriate,' replied Father Raymond, 'if you wish it. Your conditional baptism might take place on the evening before, together with the absolution, and thus leave you free to think of nothing but the Lord, who will then take possession of your soul for the first time.'

Clara bowed her head in awe and silence, his manner was so gently solemn.

'You wish me to be received into the Church at the Oratory?' said she after a pause.

'I mention'd the Oratory because I thought you took an interest in it,' replied Father Raymond. 'I do not think the Oratory Fathers will make any objection.' And he smiled again.

Clara did not quite understand his smile; but she was too deeply preoccupied to pay much more attention to this part of the conversation. Slowly she pursued her way home, immersed in a deep reverie; and when she had gained her own room she knelt down before her little oratory, and burst into a flood of tears.

She had expected to hail this day with the bounding delight with which sometimes she had looked forward to it; and now that it was at last come, and the irrevocable step taken, a darkness seemed to fall heavily over the scene and an indescribable trouble and agitation take possession of her mind. All that Mr. Wingfield and Douglas had ever said to her about her regretting the step she was now to take, came back upon her in full force, and she almost fancied she could read in this unhappiness a Divine warning of the fatality of what she was about to do. Doubts of the most horrid kind came flashing across her, veiled in all the semblance of truth; and when she attempted to recall the arguments by which she had come to the quiet conclusion which had borne her up these long months of suspense and trial, she could not remember one. All was a chaos. She threw herself down almost prostrate before the crucifix, kissed his bleeding feet, and implored strength and assistance; but the hour of darkness was come; the demon seemed allowed for the hour to exercise his sharpest temptations upon the agonized spirit. One by one she was to leave passed before her mind's eye, arrayed in its brightest coloring,—her home, Mildred, the children, Douglas and his late kindness and consideration; and the tempter whispered that 'he was right'; 'how well and happily she had got on since she had given up confession; 'it was a useless flying in his face; 'a self-will.' Her heart flitted, and then came the thought of Mr. Wingfield. He was known, tried, and loved; she was sure he wished her good, and she could trust him. She had seen Father Raymond but three times, and was not interested in persuading others to do as he had done, schooled in that system of fraud and deception which the Church of Rome was famed for, to entrap souls into her nets? And then came the horrible vision of Antichrist, and the Babylon of the seven hills.—What if it were true? And Clara, who for years would scarcely have sat in that room to hear another insinuate that dreadful blasphemy, which Protestants for three hundred years have unceasingly uttered against the Church of God, actually, as it were, felt the beautiful vision of unity and Catholicity changing into the hydra form that had scared her childish imagination; and she shrank back, as if beneath the silver veil that fancy had flung over it she could now perceive the hateful features of 'the veiled prophet of Khorassan.' It was an agonizing moment.—She knelt motionless for a length of time, trying in vain to recall the calm assurance of her former happy convictions. Still more dreadful thoughts succeeded; the inconsistency of the Protestant rule of faith came over her mind with a tremendous force once more, and the tempter suggested that all was a falsity. Rome was a deceit, Puseyism only her blind imitator. All the stories she had ever heard or read of the vice and craft of the Catholic priesthood presented themselves on one side, the inconsistency, divisions, follies, fanaticism of Protestantism on the other; and Clara saw before her the cold creed of the deist,—the triumph of reason as the alternative into

which she must fall. But the tempter was discovered; her guardian angel was by, and, as by the touch of Ithuriel's spear, she saw at once that this could be no work of God. With an effort she sprang from the ground, and threw abroad her arms, as if to free herself from the spell that was upon her.

'Away!' she exclaimed aloud; 'away, foul fiend! I know thee now!'

She passionately pressed the crucifix to her lips, and repeated aloud the Apostle's Creed, and then with a sudden effort she added, 'I believe these and all the other articles that the Holy Roman Church proposes to our belief, because Thou, my God, the infallible Truth, hast revealed them; and Thou hast commanded us to hear the Church, which is the pillar and ground of truth. In this holy faith I am firmly resolved, by Thy holy grace, to live and to die.'

Her head gradually sunk as she uttered the last words.

'Hearst thou, thou fiend?' she added, in low stern tones, and then again she kissed the feet of the precious image,—'in this holy faith I will live and die.'

The conflict was over; the tempter fled.—Peace for the moment had returned, and Clara, with her face buried in the palms of her hands, quietly began her work of self-examination.

We will not pause long over the few weeks that followed. Hour after hour did Clara spend upon her knees searching each recess of her heart. She felt as if her spiritual life was now to begin afresh, and she left nothing undone to secure this its commencement being perfectly accomplished. They were days of darkness, but the memory of that first triumph over the Evil One bore her up in many an hour when, heart-sick and dismayed, she would have turned back upon her steps and left her task unfinished. She dared not tell her state of mind to Father Raymond when she met him the next Friday at the church of the Passionists; she feared his displeasure. Little did she know the comfort and deep sympathy she would, on the contrary, have met with. And yet the dreaded confession was made so easy, his manner was so gentle, so unlike anything she had met with in her Anglican days, that Clara, who for months could not look Mr. Wingfield in the face after her first confession to him, looked up amid her tears and exhaustion more fearlessly and confidently than before; and at that moment felt indeed that this was a Sacrament. The other had but the shame and agony of a confession made to man; though God had rewarded the faith of that voluntary unillumination with a peace and consciousness that all was forgiven,—such as full many an Anglican can remember, and loves to dwell on. Another thought served to cheer up poor Clara's fainting spirit. She felt that to Puseyism she could never return. She had opened her eyes to its utter inconsistency; the spell was broken. She saw it in the light that every one else, both Catholic and Protestant, view it:—if she remained a Protestant, she must be a thorough-going one, till she sunk back into Socinianism; and back she would not go. She well knew that God had blessed her onward course too markedly not to see even amid such darkness as overwhelmed her, that to go back was perdition. A Puseyite she could never be again; and dark as what was before her seemed, there was no help for it. Onward she must go; and a kind of desperate strength steeled her mind, and supported her through the whole.

Even Catherine knew nothing of this struggle. Outwardly, to all around, she was perfectly happy; and Douglas and Mildred rejoiced in thinking that as there seemed no symptoms of her leaving them, she had returned to a better state of mind. Clara saw it, and kept in secret for she felt that it would come upon them at last with a more cruel blow; but she would not disturb the happiness of the last few days.

The last evening came. They were more cheerful and kinder than ever, and Clara, feeling as if her heart would break, sat listening to their plans for a day of pleasure, in which she was to have her part, and a dinner to be given to several friends on Christmas-day,—knowing that by that time her place would be vacant, and they would be mourning her apostasy from the faith of her fathers.

The nurse came to take the children to bed. She kissed them again and again; and when the hour for her to go to her room was come, she lingered round the fire, and with difficulty tore herself away.

'To-morrow evening,' said Mildred, smiling, 'we shall be singing "Adeste fideles." I wonder what is in the approach of Christmas that exhilarates one's spirits so. Clara, I hope you are in good practice.'

Clara answered not,—she could not, for her heart was full, and she left the room, as if she did not hear. She walked up stairs, laid the candle on the table, and gave way to a burst of tears. She looked round the room. There lay all the pieces of her just finished window. Every-