



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 1867.

No. 25.

EUSTACE; OR, SELF-DEVOTION. CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

'Too late, too late! Ah! yes, ever has it been so with us; disappointed in every effort throughout the whole of our chequered existence,—what before Margaret and myself, but dependant situations, which must involve a separation, and which, if not obtained immediately, the result would be that we should be the next victims to the fell grasp of poverty.' Ah! yes already I felt the effects of what we had suffered; my own impaired health would ill brook the thousand galling stings and pains which extreme poverty causes. Should we succumb too, or would aid be extended to us, ere it was too late?

And he, who in a few short hours would be numbered with the dead, how had his noble mind languished till it could wrestle no longer, but yielded to the grosser wants of its earthly nature.

At length I schooled myself into silence and resignation, and followed Margaret, who had come in search of me, to our dear father's chamber, which was almost immediately afterwards entered by the priest. And now the holy sacrament was administered to strengthen the wayfarer on his long journey, and the solemn words prescribed by the Church's ritual were read, whilst we, the children of that meek, tried sufferer, knelt around that humble couch.

But he was to linger still, till the shades of night had gathered all nature under its veil, though no sharp death-struggle was to rend our loving hearts, as we watched around his dying bed. As far as those minor details were concerned which are so harrowing to the feelings of the survivor,—namely, the inability to look to the requisite expenses, which must necessarily accompany death,—a word from our good friends had encouraged me; they had reminded me that the amount of the first quarter's pension might even now be drawn, and had offered to advance me whatever I required for present necessities, feeling convinced that far more than what we should use would be reimbursed.

It was late at night, perhaps midnight—we could not exactly tell; for our watches had long since changed owners, and our little clock had a few days since shared the same fate. Arthur, to our unspeakable comfort, had determined on remaining with us till all should be over, and we should have settled on the step to be taken for the future. With that sickening at the heart which all have felt who have suffered severe trial, or have watched by the dying couch of those they love, we had sat for two hours, or perhaps more, in mute silence, when we heard a solitary footfall on the crisp snow on the path beneath.—I know not why, but Maggie and myself exchanged glances, and felt our hearts beat quicker even than before. A sound as of something lightly thrown at the window, followed by a very low knock at the street-door, attracted our attention. I crept on tip-toe to the window, motioning Margaret to continue her melancholy watch, whilst Arthur stole as quietly as possible to the door, and, drawing aside the blind, I looked out. It was a clear moonlight night, the stars sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and the whole earth seemed spread as it were with a pall of dazzling whiteness. Beneath the window I plainly saw, in that bright, clear moonlight, the figure of a man; and a spasm seemed as if shot across my heart, as I fancied too well that form to be no stranger to me. The faces of Kathleen and Gerald were before me; I let fall the blind, and creeping back to the bed, I laid my hand on Margaret's shoulder, and whispered one word—the name of 'Edgar.'

Margaret's face grew a thought paler! we both thought of the bitter past, and old scenes and bitter remembrances thronged thick upon our minds in those two or three short minutes; then we heard a whispered conference below; the steps of Arthur followed by another; and the latter, accompanied by Edgar, travel-stained and weary, entered the room.

My wretched brothers, how much have they to answer for. Ah! had they discharged their duty, things would not have been like this.—Looking far older than he really was, for he was in the very prime of man's existence, Edgar stole noisily between us, pressed a kiss on the forehead of each without a word, and with folded arms stood at the head of the bed, another watcher at the death-scene of the faithful steward, whose example he had never copied.

I dreaded the shock his presence, thus unforeseen, might occasion; but there was no need for fear; alas! consciousness had departed, save one small spark, which seemed to hover till the last, while life still lingered in that feeble frame. He speaks,—oh! how eagerly, reader, do we treasure up the last words of the dying—and we, his children, bend anxiously forward to catch these words.

He speaks, though not to us, but of the dead—of Gerald, of Kathleen, of my mother; and

with them come flitting across his mind the harrowing scenes of our present life; then he talks pleasantly of green fields, and streams, and blue skies, and happy days to come; and, anon, a thrill of horror runs through our veins, as he murmurs,—

'Minnie, see you yon white form beckoning me away? adding, as if perfectly conscious of the sense of the words he uttered—'The dying see and hear oftentimes things which it is not given to others to behold and hear.'

We asked him, did he know us, to give us his blessing and press a hand of each; and, raising his hand with Margaret's help, while I wiped the heavy dew from his face, he placed it over us, calling on God to bless, too, his absent ones.

There was not the name of one omitted, and when Edgar's gaze met mine, it was as if a load had been lifted from his heart. But this was the last effort of expiring nature;—the hand fell heavily on the breast; no pressure, however faint, returned my own warm grasp;—sight and sense and hearing all had fled, and the golden fillet had shrunk back, and the soul had returned to the God who gave it.

We reverently closed his eyes and paused a while in prayer and grief, ere we discharged the last sad duties.

CHAPTER V.—NEW SCENES, OLD FACES, AND COTTON LORDS.

It is four months since the death of my beloved father, and we look no longer out on the obscure and gloomy street in London in which he breathed his last, but on the broad and open country, in the pretty village of—, on the borders of Yorkshire. It is a fine morning in May, and the early spring flowers, the sweet lily of the valley, with its bell like waxen flower, the pink hawthorn and modest violet, shed their fragrance around, and now raise their tender buds, still laden with the weight of a recent shower. All speaks of peace and quiet in the retirement which Margaret and myself have chosen, thro' the kind interest of the physician who attended my father in his last moments. £100 of the pension granted to him was allowed to devolve on myself, and for the first time in my life I am free from the anxious cares caused by extreme poverty. Yet how much of human alloy is there, how much of bitterness in the thought that he suffered and died in such abject want.

On this morning we have received a letter from a dear friend, whom we have not seen for three years, from Mrs. Maxwell, the mother of Eustace; the family have long been located in the village of Haleswood, in—, and the mother writes with an honest pride of her only son, that son who had saved his family from the ruin ours had known, and who was now on his way to England, there to remain in lucrative employment, a partner in the firm which he had served for years; and, added the mother, he entertains yet a hope that Margaret will not reject his suit. The letter ended with the expression of an earnest wish that we would immediately pay them a visit of a few days. And, desirous again to see our old friends, Maggie and myself bade adieu to our own home for the ensuing week.

It is a pleasant thing to meet again with those whom we have known and esteemed in other days, still more so if those we thus meet are persons of kindred mind, and if we have known each other when the dark shadows of adversity mutually enveloped us. Now, however, there was a break in the clouds, the fortunes of the worthy couple were mended, an appearance of ease and comfort, if not absolute elegance, is everywhere to be seen. And as I sat with them in a pretty parlor, the French windows opening on a terrace, beyond which gently sloped a small lawn clothed with the bright green verdure of spring, I could not help my mind wandering to a certain scene in their former habitation in Gower street, to which I adverted when writing the memoirs of our beloved cousin Gerald.

The girls, too, how they had grown, almost out of knowledge; and not only were they tolerably well informed, but accomplished, too, at least quite enough so for young ladies of the middling class, who, if they are paragons of wonder in any one accomplishment, will scarcely deign to attend to the domestic economy of a household, but most probably deem each hour lost which they do not devote to their favorite accomplishment. All very well in their way, fair reader, and well do we love to see the beautiful sketch, to hear the strain of gentle harmony to watch the development of genius, to see each talent diligently put out to the best advantage; but there are other duties to be performed, which are often-times neglected by our fair countrywomen of the middling class, the duties of their own working, domestic, every-day existence, which they seem to think it beneath them to perform.

Of such a class were not Lucy and Helen Maxwell; refined, elegant, well-informed, and fairly accomplished, they divided their time

pretty equally between the care of their aged parents, the piano, the pencil, the needle and the lighter duties of domestic life.

'But how on earth, Minnie, can people so refined in their tastes as the Maxwells, have become acquainted with those vulgar people, the Arnotts and the Landowes, who appear to visit her?' said Margaret to me; 'they are surely not fit companions for Lucy and Helen.'

'Peculiar circumstances, I believe,' replied I. 'Mrs. Maxwell was going to give me an account of both those families, and how she became acquainted with them, when Mrs. Arnott entered; but, by-the-way, here she is, and now, my dear friend,' I continued, 'Margaret's curiosity is at its utmost pitch to know how you became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Arnott, an account of which intimacy you told me you wished to give me.'

The good old lady smiled, and replied, 'I told you, my dears, that after Mr. Maxwell's failure we were utterly without the means of living till my poor son Eustace made way in Australia; and whilst you were enduring hardships and suffering in London, we were but little better off in—, a pretty watering-place in the next county, I have, however, a handsome house of my own, which we managed still to keep in our own hands; what to do we knew not, when suddenly I behought me that we would ourselves be the tenants of Holly Lodge instead of letting it to others. I knew that the widow lady, lately my tenant, whose husband had left her in very reduced circumstances, had managed, after paying me my rent, to eke out an income of about £50 a year by letting it off, and I behought me that as my girls were growing up of very domesticated habits, that we would, as the house was now to let, occupy it ourselves. I had, however, a hard battle to fight before I could gain my point; my husband urged what was indeed but too true, that domestic comfort would all vanish from the moment that I received beneath our own roof the families of others; then the children, too, how could I possibly expect that he should bear the tumult they would occasion in the house; 'for,' said he, 'remember, Mary, you can bid your own family be still, and enforce compliance, but you must put up quietly with the noise of the children, as well as the impertinence of their parents, in whom the greater part will see no fault.'

So said my husband, while Lucy and Helen laughingly asked what posts they were to fill, for we should want a larger retinue of servants.

'Bless me,' I exclaimed, 'we can only keep one, of course; and as we are now so poor, we must not be above doing many things ourselves. You will remember, my dears, Mrs. Ashton, in whose house we lodged in London after papa's downfall. She used to superintend everything; and,' I added, 'you are not better educated, or better born, than was Kate Ashton; and you know every morning that young lady would go to the market. And then, again, at home Kate, though in the kitchen, was not less the lady.—And bread, and pies, and many a delicacy, was cooked by Kate's own little white hands; and what they did, we may and must do,' I replied, a little angrily, 'for I could not avoid laying a stress on the word 'must,' my love, added the good lady; 'for the fact was, I began to think that my daughters, poor girls, would become unhappy if they could not bend a little to the change in our circumstances. And I really could scarce believe that I heard aright when Lucy exclaimed—

'But I tell you what it will be, mamma, depend on it you will find yourself woefully mistaken. Remember, you may not expect to find in the cotton-traders of—, those people without a name,' she added, with just a little curl of the lip as she spoke,—'you will never find in them, I say, the refinement and gentility of London circles. Yes, both ourselves and Mr. Reynolds' family, who were with those unfortunate Ashtons, consulted a little their comfort. We did not treat them like servants because we lived in their house, mamma. Nor do we ever see a London tea-table spread as you will see them spread if you apply your house to the purpose for which Mrs. Ellis used it. Fancy, ye London gentry, with whom such a spread table would be a vulgarity unpardonable in your eyes—briumps and eggs, and plum-cake and toast, and Devonshire cream, and pork-sausages, all at once on the table. Such have I seen when I have called on Mrs. Ellis, and such will you see, and feel the difference too; for I do not think you will find one servant can cook up all this.—Fancy how good Mrs. Ashton would have stared,' added Lucy, 'if any of her lodgers had ordered her to send up such a tea!—why she would simply have told them she would prefer her house and her poverty to herself than have accommodated such people.'

'Well,' continued the good lady, wiping her spectacles, and readjusting her knitting. 'I would not listen to what the girls said, nor my husband either, but to Holly Lodge we went.—

It was no use there to say, as people do in London, that you would not have children about—the over-indulged spoiled things we were glad to have; and many was the wakeful night they gave us, too, but it all had to be endured. And we found, as is always, indeed, the case, that we invariably got on better with some two or three families here and there, who moved in really high circles, than with the 'parvenus,' of whom there was certainly a great majority, who, mushroom-like, as Lucy used to say, sprang up from yesterday. These, my dear Minnie, were the people who invariably gave us the most trouble—whose sole delight seemed to consist in their dress and in their food—for whom no luxury was too great or too expensive. But to return from my digression. It was during my two years' sojourn at Holly Lodge—for I was glad at the end of that time to let the house again, and remove to this place—that I encountered the two persons whom you have met here. As to Mrs. Landowes, she comes, much to our mortification, literally because she is one of those idle women who find life insupportable unless they can gossip away two or three hours each day.—I know she excited your merriment yesterday, Minnie, grave as you are, because she told you she thought the little Montagues, who are natives of London, were cockneys—that they did not speak like English people. Well, she was the daughter of a man fortunate in the cotton trade, who had sprung up from nothing; and, despite Mrs. Landowes's elegant dress, you see the truth cannot remain concealed. Her greatest pleasure is to talk; and the blunders she commits, and the way she mutilates and murders our good English grammar, is something terrible to listen to; besides that, we feel valuable time really lost in cultivating such an acquaintance.

As to Mrs. Arnott, she is of a better specimen—a good, easy, kind-hearted woman. Here the case is reversed. She has tact sufficient, when in company, to be as silent as possible.—Vulgarity she has none; but her ignorance on some subjects passes unobserved in many cases, or, if noticed, she is so uniformly unobtrusive and good-natured, that no one could have the heart to say anything that would 'cause a moment's pain to Mrs. Arnott. Her husband you shall form your own judgment of; you will see him when we return to the house. They happened to stay a short time with us when we were at Holly Lodge. Their own elegant establishment—for they are immensely rich—is in this neighborhood; and Mrs. Arnott not unfrequently drops in for an hour or two, along with her husband. They dine here to-day.'

Accordingly, when we returned, we were introduced to a fat, vulgar little man, with an excessively red face, red whiskers, and small little grey eyes. His conversation was chiefly on matters connected with the cotton trade, of which Mr. Maxwell simply knew nothing. But he was the owner of not less than three large mills, all of which were in a very flourishing condition; and if Mr. Arnott could only meet with any one willing to listen, he was contented. I had much ado, however, to keep my risible faculties in check, for at table—(I will merely give one specimen)—he asked Margaret to help him to some 'sparrowgrass.' Maggie, in her simplicity, replied, 'What did you ask for, sir?' 'A little 'sparrowgrass,' if you please miss,' was the reply. I left for the fair little wife, who was also by. I saw her blush, and heard the quiet answer, 'Some 'asparagus,' if you please.'

Poor woman! she would have passed muster for a genteel, lady-like woman. She had married Arnott because he was a wealthy man. I pitied her, sorely as she was to blame, for I saw her many times that evening blush at the numerous coarse vulgarities he uttered.

When they had withdrawn, and we were alone with Lucy and Helen, the conversation fell, not unnaturally, on these persons; and Lucy asked me, with an arch smile, if mamma had spoken of Mrs. Howley, an old lady who had frequented Holly Lodge; adding, 'I know she would scold me if she heard me tell you Mrs. Howley's table; but she was a hard old woman, and I cannot say I ever liked her, so I will tell you how she used to distress her children with her odious vulgarity. This—'

'Stop, Lucy, for shame,' said a voice behind us, while at the same moment a small hand was placed on the daughter's lips; 'remember, that if the parents had not worked so hard, by the sweat of their brow, these same sons would not have moved like gentlemen. It may be that they would not have worked for their parents as they did for them. And I think nothing can be more painful to the feelings of a parent than the knowledge that the very comforts—the children enjoy, the priceless advantages of education and a position many degrees higher in the social scale which they possess, are to form the plea upon which these same ungrateful children found their special cause of complaint. Now, I will tell the tale, Minnie. A gentleman called one

day, and engaged our rooms for an elderly lady. He said he was in the medical profession; and in either manners or education seemed qualified to enter the best society. When the mother came to our house, we found her the very antithesis of all that we had been led to expect from the bearing of the son—course in her ideas, unrefined, illiterate, she certainly was. She would obtrude her company, unsolicited on that of others; her language—'I maun go myself,' for instance, will do for a specimen, for thus she spoke—nay, in short we could not at times understand her; and her manners, her language, her whole demeanor, was strangely at contrast with the poor soul's still brocaded silk, and collar and sleeves of point lace, which formed indeed her ordinary dress. She told me that herself and her husband had begun life without a farthing; that by slow degrees they had become rich folk, as she termed it; that for eleven years of their life they never slept after five in the morning; that she was now, her husband being dead, the sole proprietress of not less than eight cotton mills. 'And,' added the poor old woman, 'I always tell people how we worked and toiled, and how wealthy it has made us; and my sons are ashamed, and say to me, 'Why do you always throw up your former obscure condition?' and I say, 'But for your father and myself, instead of being fine gentlemen, you would be standing by the road-side working in your shirt-sleeves.'

'Poor old soul! the tears were in her eyes as she spoke, and I pitied her from my soul. There was, no doubt, something of honest pride in the feeling with which she would talk of the way in which, from extreme poverty, she had risen to the possession of great wealth, and also, doubtless, a feeling of self-gratulation, too, for she felt quite as much delight in telling how much she paid for an India shawl, a bracelet, or a collar of point; and whilst I pitied her, I could not help reserving a portion of my pity for the sons also; by-the-way, I forgot to say, that though infirm and old, for she was seventy-six years of age, she still retained a firm hold over her property, her sons merely acting as though in her employment; she holding a tight hand over the management of her concerns.

'However, there is one story still to tell you, too good to be omitted, and you must really bear in mind that some of the very wealthiest of these people have, like Mrs. Howley, sprung up from the lowest circles, or you certainly will deem me guilty of exaggeration. You were not, perhaps, aware that the disgusting practice of smoking prevails, in some cases even among the softer sex, in the manufacturing districts, as amongst the apple-women of London. You will be sure I speak only of isolated cases, where the parents have been originally of a very low stamp.

'On one occasion, the proprietress of an extensive concern in— answered the advertisement of a London footman; he was shown into the kitchen to speak to the mistress of the house, when, to John's inexpressible horror, he found her sitting with her feet on the kitchen fender, deliberately smoking a pipe.

'I need scarcely tell you that the London footman thought the situation beneath his dignity to accept. I can well believe the story, and know the veracity of my informant to be unimpeachable; moreover, it was once done in my own house. To my unspeakable horror, I one day saw a like exhibition at a parlor window in Holly Lodge.'

It may well be imagined that we heard these tales with some degree of mirth; a pipe in the fingers of a woman seems so very ridiculous.

CHAPTER VI.—COMING SHADOWS—AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

'You must then really leave us to-day,' said our kind friend, Mrs. Maxwell, on the morning that we had appointed for our departure, 'and if Lucy accompanies you, you must promise me to allow her to return this day week, as we shall then be making preparations for the return of Gertrude and Eustace.'

I promised my assent, and in unusually good spirits, we returned to our home.

But soft, who is that weary looking traveler, who, in that wretched garb, scarce a shoe to his feet, and want, and at the same time recklessness on his countenance, leans against the garden gate, as though awaiting our return? I knew too well, though we had withdrawn to the obscurity of a Yorkshire village, we were not to be in peace. A large portion of my pension must go each month to Arthur, in whose character there were some redeeming points. I could not know that he and his wretched children were, starving; I was glad to leave London in order to get off with a stated sum, that I might in fact know what I really had for ourselves. And for Edgar I had striven also to do my best, but I had been both injured and disgraced in many ways by him, during the first three months after my father's death, and I had vainly hoped that the place at which I had chosen my abode, would ensure to us the rest and quiet we both