



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 18, 1861.

No. 23.

THEOBALD;
OR, THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY.
(Written by Madame la Comtesse de la Rochette, and published under the auspices of the Archbishop of Tours.)
INTRODUCTION.

THE LADIES OF CHARITY.
(Continued.)
CHAPTER IV.—ANNUNCIATA.

Very early the following morning I received a note from my friend, Madame D—, containing these words only—"Theobald disappeared last night; I am greatly perplexed, and expect you as soon as possible." I threw a shawl over my morning dress and hastened to the hotel of the baroness.

"How did this happen?" I asked.
Madame D— was seated in the ante-room, and appeared in the greatest anxiety.

"Heaven only knows how it happened; the child was much better and calmer than on the previous day; I kept him with me the whole of yesterday; he related many interesting circumstances regarding his family: I endeavored to give him good advice, spoke to him of his duty to God and to his poor little sisters, to whom he had promised to become a father. He seemed to listen with pleasure, and surprised me by his replies, full of good feeling; his observations were really above his age. We prayed together for his father and mother, and she shed tears abundantly at the remembrance of them. In the evening, much company arrived; I sent him into Clarita's room; the servants say they saw him walking alone at dusk in the garden;—in short, he has disappeared, and we have found no trace of him, although I have done everything possible to find him. What think you of it all, my dear friend?"

"I think that this is a very extraordinary country, and hope this boy has not already conceived some project of vengeance. Did you remark that he carried a stiletto under his vest?"

"Madame need not be alarmed at that," said the lady's maid—who was working at the window; "almost all the Corsican children carry a stiletto at eight or nine years of age. It is the custom here."

"What a terrible custom; and how uneasy I feel," said the baroness. "This child interested me to the greatest degree; perhaps I was responsible, as he was in my house; what shall I say to his relations, when they come to claim him? Are they not sufficiently unhappy?"

"Calm yourself," said I. "Theobald is not lost; perhaps he has gone to Vesina, to the hotel where his mother died, or to pray on her tomb—who can tell?"

"That is a very probable conjecture," said the baroness, somewhat relieved. "I will send immediately to Pietranera."

"It will be useless," said an old Corsican woman, in her native dialect, who had been standing for a few moments in the doorway. We turned on hearing her voice, and recognized Francesca, the purveyor of water from Cardo, who carried a large basket on her head, filled with vessels containing water, and covered with rushes and foliage.

Cardo is a small town, now falling into ruin, built on a rising ground half a league from the seashore. It flourished at the time when Bastia was nothing more than a hamlet consisting of fishermen's huts, and was called the *marino* of Cardo. The water of the spring of Cardo being of extraordinary purity and flavor, has become the object of small commerce to the poor women of the place. Francesca, who supplied ours, was very dark, nearly black, and much wrinkled. An old plaid handkerchief was the only covering to her white hair, when she did not raise the blue or black petticoat over her head, which serves as a mezzaro (mantilla) to the poor people. She was barefooted, and her whole appearance denoted poverty approaching extreme indigence. But notwithstanding all this, Francesca's destiny might have been very brilliant. She was young and handsome in 1787, when Bernadotte, afterwards Charles Joho, king of Sweden, was a private soldier in the regiment of royal marines. He was employed on the works of the road between Bastia and St. Florent, and often saw the young girl. He fell in love with her, and proposed marriage; but Francesca's father refused the offer, because the youth at that time possessed nothing but his courage and his talents, though both were unimpeachable. Time passed on; Bernadotte dictated laws to Sweden, and poor Francesca carried the water of Cardo. We were well acquainted with this circumstance in the poor woman's life; and we often wondered among ourselves if Francesca would have been happier, seated on the throne of Sweden, than she was in her laborious and obscure existence.

"Why do you say it will be useless to send to Pietranera, my good woman?" asked the baroness kindly.

"Because the lad you are in search of is not

at Pietranera, but in the thicket out there. I cannot exactly say where. I saw him pass yesterday evening on horseback, and recognized him. He was accompanied by Burcica the bandit. They both stopped to drink at the spring. I offered them some bread and milk, and my neighbors filled their pockets with lentils."

"Glorious heavens! Theobald in the maquis!" cried the baroness; "a child barely fourteen years of age in such a place!"

"But is Burcica not a man, with a long beard, and very piercing eyes?" asked I of Francesca.

"Eyes as brilliant as two stars," replied the old woman, "with a lion's heart, and hands of iron; that man missed his aim."

"'Tis he!" I exclaimed, and related my meeting with him the previous evening. Two hours later, the Corsican voltigeurs explored the wood in search of Theobald, whom we suspected of some dark project, but they returned the next day without having found him.

Clarita was much better; thanks to the continual care of which she was the object. The poor child was as gentle as a lamb, and most grateful to her benefactress. For some time we concealed from her the flight of Theobald, whom she loved tenderly, and the death of her little sister, who soon joined her poor mother in heaven. The little angel expired in the arms of the baroness, notwithstanding our care and that of her wet-nurse. Three days passed, and no answer arriving from the mayor of Piovola, the baroness became very anxious. The first Thursday of every month the ladies of charity, or rather of the society, assembled at the baroness's hotel, to make up the sheets and clothing to be distributed to the poor; each member took home the work she had commenced in order to spare the fund the expense of making. The Thursday having arrived, I went to the work-room like the others; it was one of the large salons, beautifully furnished and decorated. About thirty ladies were assembled, conversing and laughing as they sewed; Madame D— was cutting out a cotton dress for a poor little girl, who could not go out for want of clothing.

"We are exactly one sleeve too short," said she. "My maid is out and will not return for an hour or more, and this frock is wanted immediately."

"I will go and buy what you require for the sleeve, and the frock will be finished to-night," said I.

"You are always kind," replied Madame, with a sweet smile. I took my bonnet, and went to the shop near the harbor; in ten minutes I was crossing the market-place, my little parcel in hand, when I was accosted by an old woman whom I only knew by sight. "How can a lady like you trouble herself with carrying that parcel? Have you no servants?" I looked at her in astonishment.

"What I say was not intended to hurt you, carissima signora," pursued she, "for we all love you in this neighborhood. If you please, I will call that woman who is seated down there, to carry your parcel."

"No, my good woman," said I, laughing;—"Providence has given me arms, and I choose to make use of them."

"These French women are very singular, murmured the old creature, in the Corsican idiom; however she is a good lady, nevertheless."

I continued my way and saw a young girl on horseback; she entered the market-square from the main street, and was followed by a boy also on horseback, whom I instantly recognized. It was Theobald. I uttered an exclamation; he saw me at once, colored very much, instantly leapt from his horse, and ran to me.

"Where do you come, naughty boy?" said I, tapping him on the cheek; "both the baroness and I have been in great anxiety about you."

"Indeed, I am very sorry, Madame. Burcica promised you should be apprized of my departure. How is my poor sister?" Then turning to his companion, he added, "Annunciata, this is the lady."

Annunciata jumped lightly off her horse. She was a tall and handsome girl, about twenty-five years of age; her mourning dress fitting closely, permitted her fine figure to be seen, which was easy, graceful, and at the same time robust.—Her mezzaro of rich lace did not conceal her hair, which was darker than the raven's wing, and formed into thick braids on each side of her face; her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy;—all the lines of her countenance recalled the finest types of ancient sculpture; her cheeks were delicately red; her beautifully-formed mouth, however, had a disdainful expression, but her smile, which disclosed a set of white and most regular teeth, softened the face, which otherwise would have worn a somewhat severe expression. She saluted me with grace. "Madame," said she, with a very strong accent and low voice; "my grandmother and I are most grateful to you, and also to Madame D—

for all your care and kindness to my unfortunate sister-in-law and her poor children." In pronouncing these words she pressed my hand with warmth and large tears rolled from her eyes.

"Mademoiselle," I replied, "we can only lament that our efforts were not crowned with happier results. The poor little infant is gone to increase the number of angels in heaven, but Clarita is much better. Will you see her? I will conduct you to the baroness, who will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

She accepts the offer with joy. The countryman who attended her, took the two horses, tied them to a ring in the wall, following the custom of the people who go to market, and told Annunciata he would take the lawyer's letter to the Signor Cafarelli.

"Go at once," said he; then turning to me, "I wait your orders, Madame."

This was the first time that Annunciata had left her native village; any but a Corsican girl would have been dazzled and intimidated by what she saw. A servant in rich livery opened the door of the baroness's hotel; the suite of drawing-rooms through which we had to pass to the work-room, were all magnificently furnished. The circle of ladies was chiefly composed of the wives of the highest authorities, and the richest inhabitants of the town; the greater number were dressed as for a *fete*, for the ladies of Bastia are extremely fond of dress, several of them, tired with work that had lasted for some hours, were laughing and chatting together like great girls at a boarding school. They even talked of having a little music to enliven them, and one had risen at the general request of her companions, to place herself at the piano when we entered the room. At the same instant every eye was turned to the new comer. Annunciata did not lower hers; no trace of timidity was visible; she advanced with modesty, but without the least appearance of awkwardness, towards the baroness, whom she no doubt distinguished from the rest by Theobald's description, for, of all the ladies present, my excellent friend was certainly the most simple, both in dress and manners.—Annunciata addressed her in touching and grateful terms, with a trembling voice. The departure of the young girl was remarkable for dignity and calmness. The baroness received her with her usual kind manner, and taking her by the hand led her to Clarita's room. This charming child threw herself into the arms of her aunt and Theobald, who had followed us.

"Naughty brother," said she, "why did you go without your little Clarita?"

"Sister," replied the lad, with much gravity; "I had a duty to perform."

"Theobald is now become the head of our family," said his aunt, with a heavy sigh; "it was necessary for him to attend the funeral of his father; it was only for the day before yesterday, Clarita, that the remains of my poor brother were placed in the family vault."

"His body was then found?" said the baroness.

"Alas! our shepherds brought it home even before we received your letter. My poor brother had left us the evening before in perfect health, and his body came back to us wounded and disfigured." The young girl repressed the tears which were ready to fall. "Let us wait patiently, however," said she; "there is justice in Heaven. The two brothers Fabiano have been taken by the *gendarmes*. The supreme court will avenge us, I hope; and if they fail us, — in time young lions become lions," said she, casting a long and significant look on her nephew.

"But why did you leave without apprising me of your intention, Theobald?" asked the baroness. "Did you not foresee the anxiety your disappearance would cause?"

"I was wrong for leaving without your knowledge, Madame," replied the boy; "but our friend Burcica arrived in the evening when I was walking in the garden. He perceived me, jumped the aloe hedge, and told me to follow him, as he had a message for me, and the vicinity of the barracks did not allow of his remaining there. I knew Burcica well, having often taken powder to him from my father; so I had no hesitation in following him. We walked on in silence to the little wood, where he had left his horse. 'Your grandmother has sent me to fetch you,' said he at length. 'To-morrow the last duties are to be paid to our poor Antonio. We must proceed all night; we have not a moment to lose. You will afterwards return to thank the kind-hearted lady, who has done so much for you. Besides, I will inform her of the cause of your absence.'"

At this moment a servant announced the visit of Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Cafarelli, who entered the room immediately. The signor was a thin man, about sixty years of age, with a serious, though benevolent aspect.

"Mademoiselle," said he, addressing Annunciata, "I have received your friend the lawyer Muletto's letter, and beg to say that my ser-

vices, as well as my house, are at your disposal."

The young girl bowed. The ladies Cafarelli then advanced. They both wore the national mezzaro, which covered the white muslin handkerchief that encircled the mother's head; the daughter wore hers on her fine chestnut colored hair. They both embraced Annunciata, as if she had been an old friend, though they now saw her for the first time. The laws of hospitality are such in this country (still in some respects so near a state of nature) that a few lines of recommendation traced by the hand of a friend is sufficient to procure the most pressing and hearty welcome for a stranger. You may in this way make the tour of the island, and everywhere be the object of most delicate attentions. People will dispute the pleasure of receiving you. Except in the large towns there are no inns in Corsica. Travellers are received in the houses of the residents, where, with simple dignity, they bestow the most cordial and graceful welcome—every comfort, in short, that they are able to offer. The Cafarellis insisted on the young girl returning with them, the strangers' room having been already prepared for her.—They also invited Theobald, but he preferred staying with his sister. When they took their leave the baroness and I returned to the work-room.

CHAPTER V.—RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

The following day Annunciata acquainted us with her hopes and intentions. The two Fabianos arrived at Piovola the evening before the departure of Antonio Loncini. They were not seen in the village during the whole of the following day, and a shepherd had met them in the thicket armed with guns and pistols. Towards evening the same man found the pocket-book of the elder brother, Giuseppe, very near the scene of the murder, and this contained several letters addressed in his name. Annunciata felt convinced these two men had committed the murder; "and no one," added she, "could have a doubt on the subject." The court must therefore condemn them to death, and thus would terminate the long enmity between the two houses of Loncini and Fabiano, as after them the family was only composed of women.

"And what are your intentions respecting your nephew?" asked the baroness.

"To send him on the Continent for his education, as such was the wish of my deceased brother. Indeed, there is no time to be lost, for he has just completed his fourteenth year, and knows nothing but what his mother could teach him. It is true that my sister-in-law was a very superior and clever woman, as regards her learning. She could read and write with the greatest facility, besides being acquainted with many other things. As for me, I am ignorant of all this, which is very unfortunate for Theobald. He will forget the little he knows, as he must now remain with us till after the next assizes; for he alone saw the eldest Fabiano aim at his father, and must bear testimony to that effect."

"My aunt," said the boy, gravely, "I have already told you several times that I did not see Fabiano; but when my father fell dead, I instantly thought it was he who dealt the blow."

"Well, then, is not that the same thing?" pursued Annunciata, darting a terrible glance at the youth.

The baroness reflected for a moment.

"Mademoiselle," said she, at length, in her persuasive voice, "as you possess so few resources or means of instruction at Piovola, allow your nephew and niece to remain with me for some time. I will send Theobald to the best school, where he will learn French. In four months, at latest, one of my most intimate friends is going to travel on the Continent. I will recommend your nephew to him, and he will place him in an excellent school at Paris, the superior of which is personally known to me. Will this arrangement suit you?"

Annunciata reflected in her turn.

"What you are kind enough to propose is, without doubt, very advantageous," said she at length; "and yet I foresee a circumstance which would render it advisable that Theobald should not leave me. He is still a child, and who knows —?"

She stopped short, as if fearful of committing herself.

"However, continued Annunciata, 'I consent. I know not what I feel in regard to you. You are an angel, Madame, and it is impossible to resist your wishes; but it is necessary to consult my grandmother on the subject.'

"Nothing can be more natural or proper," replied the baroness. "Will you write to her to-day?"

"I have already told you I cannot write," said Mademoiselle Loncini with a smile. "We mountain girls are only taught to be good housekeepers; we know nothing but that. If you, Madame, will kindly write the letter, I will send it by the countryman who is in attendance on me." The old lady's consent arrived in three days.

Annunciata then prepared to leave to the great regret of the Cafarellis, who wished her to extend her visit. Before her departure she went to take leave of the baroness. She embraced Clarita and Theobald, then, taking the latter aside—

"Remember," said she, in a low voice, "that when the heart has recognized the murderer it is as if the eyes had seen the deed performed. At all events, I shall be here the day of the trial."

She then mounted her horse with the grace of an experienced amazon, bowed to us all, and departed, followed by the countryman. The baroness's wish of keeping the two orphans with her was suggested by a lively feeling of Christian charity; as were all the actions of this admirable woman, who eagerly seized on every opportunity of doing good. She had quickly discerned that Theobald possessed an excellent disposition, but that he was violent and passionate. Clarita, on the contrary, was very gentle and full of feeling, being timid and weak; it was necessary, therefore, that religion should act as a check on the one, as a support and aid to the other, so that they might both advance in life without deviating from the path of virtue. It became then in the highest degree necessary to teach them their Christian duties, and that in such a manner as should make them love religion. Very little time remained for so important a work. This excellent woman lost not a moment. She prayed the Almighty to assist her, charged the superiors of the school to instruct Theobald in writing, orthography and arithmetic, reserving to herself, in concert with the Abbe Durand, his religious instruction. To avoid fatiguing the minds of her young pupils, she taught them the catechism little by little; but leading them out on the terrace she made them admire, at one and the same moment, the sun and its rich productions, the heavens with all their magnificence, the deep and illustrious sea.

All these wonders are but the pastime of the Most High, the creation one act of His will, and the children then form some idea of the wondrous power of God. Next, calling their attention to themselves, she made them remark the just proportion of their limbs, the perfect and suitable formation of their bodies, the regularity of their features; their eyes, so readily raised to heaven, our real country; their ears, open to all inimitable sounds; their mouths, capable of discerning and appreciating the finest fruits; and all the senses, in short, which make existence so great a blessing, and enable us to enjoy all the gifts of God. "But all these gifts," continued she, "are but the least of His graces, for He has given us besides a mind capable of knowing Him, a heart made to adore Him, a soul intended to enjoy His presence throughout all eternity; and the young people, who already comprehended the power of God, understood also something of His infinite goodness. Not satisfied with teaching them the dogmas of our holy religion, she thought to inculcate the spirit of it at the same time. With the New Testament in her hand, she made them follow with the deepest interest the divine life of the Word made Man, in order to save all men, imitating with them on the humility of that God who was content to be born in a stable and to expire on the cross, thereby teaching us to conquer pride and endure affliction; on Jesus who had compassion on all misdoers; who healed the sick and pardoned the repentant; who said of Himself that he was mild and humble in heart; who taught his disciples that they must pardon their enemies, not seven times, but seventy times seven, that is to say, indefinitely; who, in the torments of His passion, prayed for His executioners, when a look would have reduced them to nothing. Dwelling particularly on all that could inspire the love of our neighbor, and especially on the obligation of forgiveness of injuries, the baroness explained at length the parable of the Good Samaritan and that of the wicked servant, whose lord had taken compassion on him and forgiven a large debt, and who meeting one of his fellow-servants, who owed him an hundred pence, took him by the throat, and threw him into prison, in spite of his prayers;—hearing of this, his lord sent for him, and said—

"I forgive thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" and in anger, his lord placed this wicked servant in the hands of justice, and left him there until he had fully paid his debt. She also made them consider the words of our Divine Saviour: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for those that despitefully use you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven; and these not less sublime—'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' Then kneeling with them, she made them repeat these words of the most sub-