

A Good Confession.

The chains that have bound me are flung to the wind. By the mercy of God the poor slave is set free; And the strong grace of heaven breathes fresh over the mid. Like the bright winds of summer that glad-dened the sea.

TONIA.

Mary Louise Sandrock in Catholic World.

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK. Somehow—possibly because little Tonia bore no resemblance to her American father—the legend originated with Sefton's new friends, and was by them transferred to newer acquaintances, that he had married a beautiful Italian girl, dying when their child was but an infant, had left him ever afterwards mourning her memory and absorbed in its only living reminder. Sefton never openly contradicted this story, and when, with various embellishments, it reached the ears of his adopted child, she implicitly accepted it, for she had quite lost all recollections of her infancy. To her grief, however, she discovered that she was never to learn anything more definite of her beautiful Italian mother than her nurse's romantic conjectures and imaginings could supply. When she asked her father some questions on the subject he gave her a short and sharp answer, and bade her never repeat the queries. They grieved him, he said, and it was his earnest desire that her mother should never be mentioned between them again. Tonia obeyed him, but her thoughts dwelt often on the dead mother; whose face must have been like her own, "only much more beautiful," whose voice, too, must have been like hers, "only much sweeter and lovelier." So this ideal mother, always sweet and gentle and beautiful, dwelt in the little maiden's heart, bringing with it, as does every generous ideal, the spirit of peace and content.

and had a circle of friends in most of the European capitals. He was clever and intellectual, and amiable enough to be excellent company when it pleased him to exert himself. His greatest fault was an intense dislike of the commonplace. Only people and things out of the common excited his interest, and, as is the case with most mortals, it was seldom his fate to meet with them. He privately pronounced existence to be "agreeable enough, but something of a bore." His name was Seymour Blaire. The young lady with whom he was conversing was Miss Travers. They had been friends for a long while and, as they had not met for several months previously, their talk had been particularly animated. The occasion was the first reception for the season of one of London's most famous society leaders. The rooms were crowded and very warm. Mr. Blaire plied Miss Travers's fan vigorously for a few moments and then announced his intention of departing. "Oh! you are not going yet," she said. "I particularly want you to meet a very dear friend of mine who is to be here this evening, though I haven't caught sight of her yet. She has been on the Continent with her father for the past three years and only returned to London a few weeks ago. This is her first season and she's bound to be the rage before long." "You have a delightfully flattering opinion of your friends. What are the most shining qualities of this one, and what's her name, by the way?" "You are just ready to laugh at me, I know. I've a great mind to tell you nothing about her." "You know you are dying to talk of her." Miss Travers closed her lips defiantly. "Come; I admit myself curious. Tell me all about her. After all, it's a great point in her favor to be your friend." Miss Travers smiled and relented. "Well, I'll tell you her name, at any rate. Oh! there she is. Don't you see that tall, gray-haired man standing at the door of the music-room? That's her father. She is just beside him. I declare, they have induced her to sing! She is going to the piano. I am so glad you are going to hear Antonia sing." "So her name is Antonia. It has a classical sound that seems in keeping with the young lady herself. I don't think I'll wait to hear her sing, though. I'll just slip away before she begins. I've heard heard so many young ladies sing, you know. They're all very much alike—not half bad, of course, for amateurs, but rather tiresome. Good-by, Miss Travers. I'm so glad I met you this evening! Tell your mother that I mean to persecute her on her Thursdays this season as much as ever." A gloved hand was laid on his arm. "My dear Mr. Blaire, I shall never forgive you if you don't wait, and I promise you you will never forgive yourself." "The thought of the first penalty," said he, "is more than sufficient to make me listen to a dozen young ladies singing. As for the second—," he shrugged his shoulders, and cast a second look at the young lady, who stood turning over a pile of music at the piano. There was a distinction about her appearance that pleased him. The simplicity of her soft, trailing white gown and her low-coiled black hair suited his critical taste. She turned with a smile to the young man who was to play her accompaniment. With the smile a wave of animation swept over her face. After a word or two, she handed him the sheet of music she had selected and stood, tall and lithe as a young pine, waiting to sing. Seymour Blaire noted her attitude with involuntary admiration. "Her face is like a beautiful cameo," he thought. Then his moment of enthusiasm subsided. As the first chords of the piano sounded Miss Travers exclaimed in a rapturous whisper: "She is going to sing that exquisite little thing of Rubinstein's, 'Du bist eine Blume!'" The young man frowned slightly. The song was a favorite of his, but he had a theory concerning it. In his opinion it could only be well rendered by a singer who was at once a perfect artist and a pure-souled woman. He wished this beautiful girl had chosen something else.

who were, he realized immediately, so clever and so unaffected, so broad in view and experience. For the first time he had met a woman whose conversation afforded him at once complete intellectual satisfaction and a feeling of grateful repose. On the other hand, Mr. Sefton and his daughter were most favorably impressed with him. When they parted the father gave him a cordial invitation to call on him. "My daughter is always at home of Tuesdays," said he, with a laugh, "and I am there whenever she is." The invitation was acted upon as promptly as a due regard for appearance would permit, and the acquaintance thus established developed speedily into a comfortable intimacy. When Seymour Blaire did not meet Antonia and her father at a dinner or reception or ball—and as they were in the same circle of the social "swim" it generally happened that their engagements were identical—she spent a quiet and delightful evening with them at home. Miss Travers proved a true prophet. Antonia was indeed before long "the rage." Nature and education had made her that rare but not impossible combination, a woman of beauty, of rare gifts, of sound sense. Whether her face or her wonderful voice won her most popularity, or whether the last quality above mentioned was a help or detriment, I know not. I know only that she was much in demand, that everybody was aware of the fact that she would one day be a very rich woman, and that this consideration may have had something to do with the shower of bleeding hearts that seriously afflicted her during the early part of the season. She confided to her father her opinion that mere friends were very desirable, but that would-be-lovers were extremely tiresome. That was the nicest thing about Mr. Blaire; he was so friendly, so entirely free from any nonsense. She felt the greatest friendliness for him and wished to display it. Somehow she was never quite content with the result of her endeavors. She did not know why the mantle of reserve seemed to be always gathered around her when she was near. As for him, he loved her. He was happy when he was with her, happy when he thought of her, miserable when he meditated telling her his love. She was pure and cold as a snow maiden. How could any man have the impertinence to dream of being loved by her? He was very grateful for the gracious friendliness—though there was a bit of reserve about it—with which she always treated him. What right had he to ask any more? One day he received a cablegram from his youngest brother. It read: "Mother ill—nothing serious—but wants you. Come at once. Doctors think your presence necessary." Young Blaire was very fond of his mother, so he lost no time in setting about his preparations for departure. After securing a state-room on a Cunarder that sailed in two days, he completed all arrangements for a probably long absence. One or two intimate friends had to be seen for a moment or two. Then he would go to the Seftons and make his adieu. "After all," he reasoned, trying to drown an unreasonable pang that would make itself felt, "it is better to have an end of it. She will never be more than my friend. She is too cold to ever care for me. I can never even tell her that I love her." He had argued himself into much propriety of thought and feeling when he made his farewell call. Mr. Sefton was out driving, he was told, but Miss Sefton was at home. In a few minutes she joined him in the drawing-room. After a few indifferent remarks, he said, in a carefully casual manner: "I have come to say good-by, Miss Sefton. I am going home in a day or two, for a visit of indefinite length." A shade of surprise crossed her face. Involuntarily she raised her eyes and gave him a glance in which he read amazement—and something more. It is one of the many responsibilities of Mother Eve & Co., this glance in which a woman unconsciously proclaims to the man her heart has chosen for its life lord her willingness to swear vassalage and fealty unto him. There are divers ways of reading and misreading such a glance. In this case the man acted with more composure and common-sense than most men when such a revelation—unhoped-for as it is delightful—comes upon them. He tried to collect his thoughts for a moment with small success. He picked up a dainty bit of carving and seemed lost in its critical examination, while he said, very slowly: "I fear, Miss Sefton, my absence will be of no consequence to you." No answer. He steadied his nerves, replaced the bit of carving on the table, and tried again. "I mean, Miss Sefton, I wish that it were of some consequence to you. May—may I hope that it is?" He felt that he was unwarrantably bold, whatever her look had seemed to say. Antonia rose and half extended her hand. Now was the time to display her friendliness, she thought; to give him a hearty handshake and a cheerful, sincere God-speed for his journey. Somehow she did neither. She only said two faint little words, "You may." They were sufficient for the hearer. They were encouraging enough to open the floodgates of his eloquence. There was a good deal said on both sides after that, and with so satisfactory a result that, half an hour later, when Mr. Sefton came in from his drive, Seymour Blaire announced himself a candidate for the honor of being his son-in-law elect. Mr. Sefton had a cordial liking for the young man. He knew that his character was irreproachable, his family connections and worldly prospects excellent. The union was in

every sense desirable. Therefore his manner was very genial as he heartily pressed the young man's hand. "My dear fellow," said he, "if Tonia loves you I have nothing to say. I have no wish but her happiness, and if she thinks you are the man to secure it, why, I think so too." After making a few remarks about his intended journey and assuring them that he would do his utmost, if his mother's illness were not much more serious than he fancied, not to protract his absence beyond a month. Mr. Blaire took his departure, promising to dine with them on the morrow, which was to be his last day in London. At dinner the next day the conversation turned on the last novel of a brilliant young writer whose stories were the topic of the hour. The book is the history of a lie which makes the happiness of several lives that would have been made desolate by the true facts of the case. They were all agreed upon the cleverness of the writer, and, from general comments on the book and its characters, they passed to a discussion of the main fact contained in it. "It is wrong to teach such a lesson," said Antonia decidedly. "But whatever makes for happiness makes for final good," remarked Seymour Blaire. "I'm afraid, my dear Blaire, that your own individual feelings at present are sufficient excuse for any oblique view you may express. I think Tonia is right. The author teaches a harmful lesson—in its general application, that is. Of course there are always individual instances where it would be wiser that the whole truth should not be known. Truth is sometimes very ugly, my dear," said Mr. Sefton, smiling across the round table at his daughter. "That is so, father, and yet I think in every case it is better known. The facts of a man's life belong to him. No human being has a right to deceive another in what is so vital a concern to that other. 'The fool's paradise' cannot be cried out on too often. Every honest man or woman ought to prefer, a thousand times, a truth that brings unhappiness to an illusion or deceit that gives happiness." The young man's brown eyes kindled as he looked at the girl's earnest face. When she paused he bent towards her and raised her hands to his lips. "Antonia," said he gravely, "I promise you that in our life together I will give you always truth—and happiness, too, I hope." She smiled her thanks. Then her earnest mood passed away. Both tried to forget the impending farewell, and each tried to outdo the other in gaiety. With an effort Mr. Sefton shook off the shade of trouble that had settled over his face and tried to join in their liveliness. He felt that his sparkle was ineffectual, and wondered if they noticed it. He might have made his mind easy. For the first time in her life Antonia failed to observe every change in her father's face or voice. Another face and voice demanded all her attention. When they adjourned to the drawing-room after dinner, Mr. Sefton remarked: "I am going out for a bit of a stroll while you young people make the most of your last evening. I suppose it will be a whole month, at least, before you have another evening together. Well, Tonia, do you think your old father will be able to comfort you?" A kiss was the response. Mr. Sefton, looking quite content, went out. His stroll seemed to bring him very little comfort. The troubled look came back to his face as he paced slowly up and down. A hard decision lay before him. Was it or was it not his duty to tell Tonia the true facts of her infancy? Her chance remark had awakened thoughts that had not been in his mind for years. It quickened into intense life the one treasure he prized higher than even Tonia's happiness—his honor. His heart swelled with pride in the girl that she, too, should cherish truth and honorable dealing above all else. He decided to tell her everything. As he re-entered the house there was no longer any trouble in his face or in his thoughts. To-morrow he would tell her. After all, what difference could it make?

to her the portrait of what her dead mother must have been. The loss of an illusion is always a painful wrench. To Antonia, as she faced the picture, there came a moment of intense physical agony. Then she was overpowered by that torrent of grief that can only overwhelm a cold and self-contained nature, by way of establishing a balance, once or twice in a lifetime, with the habitual self-control. She flung herself passionately on the floor. Her whole frame was convulsed with sobs. In a moment every hold she had upon life had slipped from her hands. Her father, whom she loved with the most intense devotion, was not her father. The dead mother, whose beautiful image she had cherished for years, was a myth—the reality a mulatto, an convict; Heaven knows what she had become, if she still lived! Her lover, who alone of all the men she had known was worthy to rank with her father, must be nothing to her hereafter. She clenched and unclenched her hands fiercely; she bit her lip till the blood came, and the same question rose in her breast that sooner or later rises in every heart when the inevitable anguish comes upon it: "Why must I, who am strong and vigorous, deserving of and anxious for happiness, endure this misery?" It is the question that was asked and answered one night, long ago, under the olive-trees of a garden in Judea. Every soul, when suffering—particularly unmerited suffering—comes upon it, is compelled to accept this answer or be left desolate. At last Antonia roused herself and rose slowly to her feet. She still trembled from the violence of her grief. She lit the lamp that stood upon her desk, and stood for a long while gazing earnestly at the pictured Madonna which, a few hours before, had represented her mother. Out of her mind the vision and remembrance of her ideal mother seemed to fade as she stood there. In its place there rose the image of the loveless, lonely, hunted life of the poor mulatto. A great wave of pity surged over her heart. She went to the mirror and looked steadily at the pale, sorrowful face, the heavy, tear-laden eyes before her. The grotesque thought came to her that she had become, even in appearance, a veritable negro. She looked at her long, slim fingers, and fancied she saw a dusky tinge under the nails. A thousand invisible cords seemed drawing her to the despised mulatto woman. Finally she drew a long sigh; a firm look came over her full, red lips and into her deep eyes. Her conclusion was reached, and, as she seated herself at her desk and drew towards her pen and paper, it seemed impossible that she could ever have dreamed of resolving otherwise—so true it is that only by taking hold of the unendurable do we learn endurance. She wrote rapidly for a few minutes, then threw down her pen and read the brief lines she had penned. They did not satisfy her. It seemed cruel to sly to the man who had hoped to make her his wife: "Circumstances have arisen since we parted that render our marriage utterly impossible. It is equally impossible for me ever to see or hear from you again." There was truth but too much austere pride in so cold a dismissal. Now, truth and humility are very near neighbors, and perhaps they were not altogether separated in the letter she finally completed with more comfort to her aching heart. In this she said: "MY DEAR SEYMOUR: When you thought me the daughter of a man with whom any one might be proud to ally himself. To-day I have learned many things, and my life's horizon has become very different. I am not the daughter of Charles Sefton, but was adopted by him at the expiration of my mother's term of imprisonment in an American penitentiary, of which he was then keeper or superintendent. I was then three years old. I have absolutely no recollection of my poor mother, of whom nothing has ever since been heard. She was a mulatto, married to an Italian of good class who died when I was a year old. Her father was a French half-breed. You perceive, my friend, what an impossibility your marriage with a woman of such parentage is. Family pride, even in you who are so free from every mean prejudice, must absolutely forbid it. Even if you wished otherwise, after what I have told you, I know I could never be happy as your wife. God knows what it costs me to lose you! But I realize, and you, too, will realize it for me, that there is but one thing for me to do—to spend my life, if need be, searching for my unhappy mother, and if I succeed in finding her still alive, no matter where or how, to devote myself entirely to her. That much, at least, I owe to her. I have only one request to make you, that you will permit me to drop out of your life and not allow my memory to sadden you. I do not ask you to forget me entirely, but I wish you to remember me as one gone for ever from your sight, whom you honored by your affection, and who gave to you her whole heart." ANTONIA. The letter folded and addressed, Antonia felt that the first and most painful step had been taken. It was with a sense of relief and of returning energy that she made her way to her father's study. He sat at his table, his white head buried in his hands. He looked up as she entered, the light in his eyes that her presence never failed to bring; but a great sadness came over his face when he saw the traces of the long afternoon of suffering upon her countenance. He rose from his chair and went to her. He took both her cold little hands in

his and, stooping, kissed her brow. "My Tonia!" said he. She smiled—a wan, dreary little smile it was—and returned his caress. "Yes, father, always your Tonia. I have just been writing to Sey—Mr. Blaire. Will you read the letter, please?" His quizzical glance met no responsive twinkle, so he sat down, turned up his reading-lamp, put on his eyeglasses, and gravely read the letter. As he replaced it in the envelope he said deprecatingly: "My dear, why should it make a difference? You cannot help but be always my daughter." The girl put her arm about him and bent her head till her lips touched his silvery hair. "My father, I am always your daughter. But I am also the daughter of the poor mulatto, who needs the love and care of the girl whose father has given her such a bright and happy life." "You feel it right, my child, to go to her?" "I can do nothing else." "Very well, my dear; I shall not thwart your wishes. Eighteen years ago, when I adopted you as my own, it was of your own free choice you came to me. I have often wondered what your life would have been had you chosen otherwise. If you had chosen the negro you might have been his salvation—he was not a bad fellow at heart—but what a life you would have led! If you had gone with your mother you might have been an angel guiding her to good, or she might have been weak enough to drag you into the wretched ways of sin with herself. I hope all is best as it has been. You have made a lonely old fellow very happy, Tonia. And he ends by making you miserable." "He ends by showing me my duty, by teaching me truth and honor as he has always taught me. Now, tell me, what is the first thing to be done to find my mother?" "I think, if she is still living, she is probably in Warham. I will write to the superintendents of the various charitable institutions in the city and try to obtain news of her." "But that is so slow. Can we not go to Warham ourselves?" "If you wish it, child, I have answered gently, 'we will close the house and go immediately. It's high time we had an American tour, anyway.'" She put her slim, brown hand softly on his gray head. "You are so good, dear," she whispered.

On a bright September morning a cab drove rapidly through the streets of Warham. Mr. and Miss Sefton had arrived that morning in the city, and immediately after breakfast at the hotel had begun their quest. Institution after institution was visited without result. The books of neither hospital nor almshouse showed the name of Rosa Corsini. The postmaster knew nothing of her. If she were still in the city there seemed but one other place to seek her. The same thought was in both minds as Mr. Sefton gave the order, "To the penitentiary!" A few pencilled words on his card at once admitted Mr. Sefton and his daughter to the superintendent's private office. As one in a dream Antonia listened to the apologies, brief explanations, casual remarks that followed. She gathered only that a search was being made among the records for the name of the woman they were seeking. The compression of her lips alone told how intense was her emotion as she watched the superintendent rapidly turning over page after page. "Ah!" said he finally, fixing his broad thumb upon the last page of the big book before him, "here we are. 'Rosa Corsini, mulatto, ten days for vagrancy.' I rather think that's the woman who was brought here a few days ago, and who seemed to be in the last stage of consumption. Her place is in a hospital, not here. It often happens that people are brought here who were much fitter subjects for the almshouse or hospital or insane asylum. It is doubtful, however, if that woman has many days to live anywhere. Two nuns, who come here regularly to see the prisoners, and who accomplish much good by their efforts among them, were with her this morning. I think they mentioned that the Catholic chaplain had prepared her for death. Would you like to see her?" And he looked curiously at his visitors. "Yes," replied Mr. Sefton. "A family matter gives me a deep interest in the affairs of this unfortunate woman. My daughter and I are most anxious to give her any assistance in our power." "Then, sir, we will go to her at once, if you and the young lady will come this way." As they were mounting the iron stairway they met the two nuns descending. The superintendent greeted them courteously, and said: "This lady and gentleman are anxious to get some information concerning the mulatto woman, Rosa Corsini. I know that you ladies have a way of obtaining the confidence and affection of our prisoners that we, their official guardians, never even dream of. Therefore I think, if you will have the goodness to come to the library with us, you will be able to satisfy them far better than I. First permit me, Sister Hildebrand, Sister Alphonse,—Miss Sefton, Mr. Sefton." The two religious bowed, smiled, murmured an assent, and the party entered a square, bare-looking room at the top of the first flight of stairs. It contained a couple of half-filled book-cases and half-a-dozen wooden chairs. As they entered the room Antonia impulsively grasped the hand of the younger of the nuns, Sister Alphonse, a cheerful, sweet-faced little woman,