

AN UNWILLING VISIT.

"I had better go, and get done with it." This elegant peroration, muttered one crisp October morning, is the outcome of various qualms of conscience. A promise made in a rash moment "Unter den Linden," in the city of the Kaisers, and shamefully broken, because fulfilling the same seemed an unmitigated bore.

While in a virtuous mood I strike the iron; hurrying down to breakfast, I announce my intention to the astonishment of my respected family. The approval of my mother—always the soul of honour and politeness—the unquenchable banter of the boys, the fear and trepidation of my inward self all jostle through my brain, leading me here and there every three minutes. To save myself from an outburst I dash from the room, wave goodbyes from the door and betake myself to the railway station. I catch the train for a wonder, ensconce myself comfortably, cultivate a mild interest in the people hastening in with bags, books and children, gaze pensively out of the window fearing some promiscuous acquaintance may see me and draw me into conversation and grow pathetic as the spires and chimney stacks of my beloved Toronto, vanish into space; the train rushes busily forward and I am launched, irrevocably on the stern path of duty and civility. The silvery mists rise, break and fade away. The sun late from his slumbers, makes up for lost time, by a fiery onslaught on the vapoury world, flinging himself upon the maples and young oaks, and reflecting his golden magnificence on their radiant foliage. What is it in the soft, languid beauty of our Indian summers, that steals pathetically over us, haunting us with memories of the past, of the dead and dying, and yet wooing us, winning us, entwining itself into our day dreams, and fading from us with a wail of November blasts, smothered by golden showers of the leaves, it has dyed in its own unrivalled colours.

The train rushes along by field, forest and farmhouse, and I prepare for a good read, my eyes fix themselves on the print, but my unruly thoughts will fly across the Atlantic; resting tranquilly on the gentle motherly face of my dear old German Baroness—a perfect picture, her crown of snowy hair, her irresistible smile, our pleasant talks and walks in the twilight, and that last day together, when she spoke of her child far off amid the wilds of Canada. The youngest and dearest of her large family, going forth from the old scholars in her teens, to the cloister, joining the great Order of the Sacred Heart, of which I heard so much abroad, and her offering herself to the Canadian mission. It was then I made that rash promise of bearing messages from the mother, to the child, on my return homewards. The story interested me greatly, as told by the Mother, but it is only after months, that I have brought myself to the disagreeable task. Nuns and convents, have always been utter strangers to me; I have never had anything to do with them, and never had the slightest desire to. Clanking chains under ground passages, vaults, and all the other doleful objects, are all my knowledge of abbays and abesses, and now to be on the way, to see a regular all round nun, is something thrilling! On, and on we go, every mile dragging one nearer the dreaded encounter. Over, and over again I assure myself she will not strangle me; after all she is only a woman like myself, and I am considered able to hold my own with my sex, but some how or other, I feel woefully in the condition of Bob Acres.

In the midst of my agitated feelings the train slackens to a mild joggle, and we steam into the "Forest City." I order the Jehu to drive as slowly as

he can, with the apparent object of seeing "London Town" but the truth is, to hold off, until the very last moment. Surprise and admiration are my first emotions, as we wind under the tinted maples; such luxuriance, such wealth of colouring, handsome balconies, pleasant homes, blaze from their thatch of Virginia creeper in all its autumn gorgeousness. All along the way, brightness, and beauty, distract my thoughts, until a sudden jerk, reminds me the horses are turning in a gate, then up a short carriage drive, and oh! here we are. I step forth slowly and cautiously, the man smiles affably as I pay him, and is gone, leaving me to my fate!

I pull the bell timidly, and have scarcely touched it, when the door flies back and a smile, pleasant and honest is the first thing I see, and hereupon—strange as it may appear—I take heart, respond with a natural friendly bow, step inside, and talk!

The portress seems a poetic figure in her nun's garb. The snowy white cap frames a cheery, pure young face, the long veil falling away in graceful folds over the severe black gown. Her voice is full of welcome to the bashful stranger, and charmed unwillingly, I tell her my mission. Her face lights up when she hears I have actually seen the mother of one of her veiled Sisters, evidently those nuns share all joys and sorrows. She brings me into a reception room, chatting gayly, and leaves me to tell the Superior of my arrival. I hear her light feet echo down the long waxed corridor, and while she is gone, have time to look around. The room is large with long windows opening on the lawn, flower beds and sunshine—no bars and things here! Polished floors, tinted walls, bright, fresh, and home-like, with a charming atmosphere of peace and purity. The door opens and another nun comes cordially towards me, with outstretched hand and welcomes me with a voice of exquisite refinement. She is so motherly, and gracious, this little woman, speaking as one having authority, and who I at once surmise is the Superior, and yet her simplicity, and unobtrusiveness are little in accordance with one's preconceived idea of the ruler, and guide of this large family of sisters, and children. "We have been expecting you for some time, your name is very familiar to me, through the letters of Baroness von W.; she seems so fond of you, and was anxious her daughter should meet you. Were you afraid of us?" with a merry little laugh. "The Baroness did not think you were willingly anxious to make our acquaintance." I smile feebly, then seeing how ridiculous all my alarms and fears have been, go off in a hearty peal. I have the honesty to pour forth all my diabolical ideas, of the horrors of my visit, and we both make merry at my expense. This serves to unlock my tongue, and away it goes. My new friend is a charming conversationalist, a delightful listener. She knows every thing; the last picture, the newest books, bacteria, electricity, airplanes, comets, canals, 'isms and 'ologies, discussed in a sprightly, sensible way that is refreshingly original in these hum-drum, days, of flat, feminine, would-be-blue-stockings.

My back to the door, I am dilating on a visit I once paid to Ober-Ammergau when a soft step comes behind my chair, a hand is laid on my shoulder, and a face bends towards me. I look up suddenly, and meet the eyes of my dear old friend in Berlin, only with the fire of youth, and beauty, in their blue depths. And I forget everything, but my affection, and memories, and jumping up I gave this tall, German nun a hearty embrace. What has the world come to?—I in a convent, holding high parley, with a Superior, and greeting one of her Sisters with the enthusiasm of a life-long friend.

They tease me unmercifully, those two, cruel, unkind nuns, and the trouble is that I cannot get angry, their shafts are so barbed, their points so keen, their words so happy, that I am overwhelmingly crushed and choked with merriment.

"Now," I exclaim at last indignantly, "you know, you can laugh at me, as you may, but I shall not believe in your protestations against clanking, chains, and underground passages, if I cannot see for myself," and my mouth twitches with an intense effort to be solemn.

"Come then," smiles the Superior, "let us go in a body"—and we do.

Down the long, handsome corridors opening on class-rooms, study-hall, and library; we go into each, and I am amazed. I had no idea that nuns could be so broad minded. No sham, or vincer here. The study hall is lofty, attractive and my especial hobby—well ventilated. At the time of my visit it is empty, but gay voices, and shouts through the open windows, tell where the usual occupants are. The desks are ranged round the room, the chairs tucked away underneath, and everything exquisitely neat. At one end is a large coloured figure of the Saviour, to remind the girls, that the eyes of the Master are always on them, and that their studies should be done for Him. The class rooms are small editions of the Study Hall, bright and pleasant, the windows opening on the play ground, bordered by fine old trees.

We linger longest in the library, a most inviting spot for a literary treat; here the girls come to read with every opportunity for culture, and converse with the finest minds of ancient and modern times—the latest works in fiction, history, biography and science, well into the hundreds; while all the old familiar names look down on us from the well lined shelves. We find the Librarian, an old French nun, busy arranging a new collection, and we enter into an animated conversation on her treasures. Her English is remarkably good for a Parisian, but from her criticism on some late books, I see that she not only speaks but reads, our mother tongue fluently. Her accent is beautiful, and modestly I air my Montreal French just for the pleasure of hearing her exquisite modulations and idioms, that it seems no one but the cultured Parisian can manage. I envy the young people whom she trains, no need of a year's polish abroad I assure you. The Republican system of government of the Sacred Heart is, I think, one great reason of its success as an educational Order. The head centre is in Paris; all the other houses over the world are divided into Vicariates; the nuns under strict obedience to be sent hither and thither at a moment's notice. The Superior of to-day may be the Portress to-morrow, and so on, as the person best suits the office. Should a Mistress be required for any special study, and none to be had here at home, a telegram to Paris brings back the desired subject by the next steamer from the old world. This is how a Sacred Heart convent is so cosmopolitan, and consequently peculiarly enlightened. Here to-day, away to-morrow; no regiment of dragoons is so well drilled in discipline, obedience and respect for authority.

"As yet no horrors," I whisper to my German friend, as we leave the library, "now may we see the girls." Their screams of delight, or excitement have been distractingly inviting for some time. I like to see children enjoy their games, it shows they are children and not young ladies as now, alas! we too often find them.

Down steep steps, through a gravel alley by an open gateway smothered in vines and we are in the park. The girls are in three separate companies; the little ones, middle aged and the grown girls. One party are holding

high revel at base ball; I wish I could sketch a few of those young women as I saw them. Full of life and mischief, flushed and triumphant, their small legs active enough to break a record. A cricket match of absorbing interest holds the older enchained—how I long for the boy athletes to see them. They play splendidly, bowling good and capital form. Our English sisters could not boast of their athletic prowess, nor sneer at our degenerate sluggishness were they here now.

I clap impulsively at a fine bat just now that made five runs, and am disconsolate when one of the players drops the ball, seizes a bell and rings with all her might.

The unwelcome knell causes instantaneous cessation. All is stopped; they fall into line, two and two; the nuns in charge gives the signal, and in silence they walk to the house.

They are gone, those wild merry spirits, and the park seems lost without them; we follow, back through the corridor, and peeping wistfully through the open door I see them solemnly at their desks like small soldiers on duty—not a sound down the long hall, you could hear the inevitable "pin drop." That large band of women in embryo are a lesson, and I marvel at the system that can maintain such discipline and authority.

On our way back to the parlour, we pass a short flight of oak steps, and turning to me the Superior says: "Perhaps you would like to see this? We mount the stair and enter the chapel.

A flood of sunshine falls with loving touch on the high altar of glistening white marble almost dazzling at the first view contrasted with the rich crimson velvet cloth falling gracefully at either end. The carving is delicate and artistic. Far above are painted cherubs, blue sky and soft fleecy clouds, the walls below blending in harmony.

We steal away from the quiet sanctuary where one can so easily commune with the Creator, lost to the noise, din, and rush of the busy world beyond the cloister.

Time that dragged me here so remorselessly, now as reluctantly forces me away. To my amusement it is with no little pain I make my farewells which my German friend changes to au revoir.

A last regretful look as the horses dash out the gate under the maples, and my life-long prejudice and ignorance die for ever. DIANA GROSVENOR.

Jesuit and Convert.

We have to record with deep regret the death of a distinguished Jesuit and convert, whose demise severs another link with the Tractarian movement which led so many eminent men into the true fold. Father John Walford, S. J. who died at Roehampton on Tuesday morning, was an intimate friend of the great leader of thought, John Henry Newman, whose writings showed that "kindly light" which showed the way Rome-wards to many who accompanied or followed him into the Church. Father Walford's mother and sister also died Catholics, his brother, the late Rev. Henry Walford, a zealous supporter of Home Rule, and who was presented by Mr. Gladstone in 1883 to the rectory of Ewelme, near Oxford, being the only one of six Anglican brothers who died Protestants.—*Liverpool Catholic Times*.

Benziger's Catholic Home Annual, 1894.

We have just received a supply of this very popular annual. It contains the usual good things in the shape of stories, poems, historical and biographical sketches, and plenty of pretty, interesting pictures. Price by mail 25cts., in stamps or scrip. Address, CATHOLIC REGISTER Publishing Co., Ltd., Toronto, Ont.

On December 30th, a gentleman caught a butterfly in the vicinity of the Limerick Railway Terminal. The fact of butterflies being on the wing in December is evidence of the remarkable mildness of the season.