

THE
THRILLING
MYSTERIES
OF A
CONVENT REVEALED!

PHILADELPHIA:
T. B. PETERSON, 101, CHESTNUT STREET

(Page 96 of Book Text is Blank)

LITERARY NOTICE.

“This book will be eagerly sought for and appreciated by all those sincerely and conscientiously opposed to the worst of tyrannies—the *tyranny of religion*. It is unquestionably one of the best works that has been issued during the nineteenth century. Mr. Peterson has been at considerable expense in getting up this interesting book; and we feel assured that it will have a rapid sale, as there are few persons of the present day, but who wish to be made fully acquainted with this important subject. The author grapples his subject with a keen, determined intellect, and all the bigotry, fanaticism, practises, and doings in a Convent, are here exposed to the light of the noon-day sun. It is a work of especial interest at the present time. The author is one of the most celebrated Methodist preachers now living, and what he exposes and narrates he does from the heart. All should read and study it. It is a rich, highly interesting work, and the *low price* at which it is published, will, as it should, bring it within the reach of the tens of thousands in every section of our country that should read it.”—*True Sun*.

(Page 98 of Book Text is Blank)

THE MYSTERIES OF A CONVENT.



CHAPTER I.

Antique mansion—Family portraits—Count of St. Aubyn—Father and daughter.

Towards the close of the last century, there stood, within a few miles of Paris, an ancient, moss-grown chateau, embosomed in oaks, whose gnarled limbs, covered with mistletoe, gave evidence of their antiquity, and showed that they had battled against many a fierce onset of the elements.

This venerable pile, with the ample and handsome demesne in whose midst it stood, was the family seat of the Counts of St. Aubyn, through whose long line of succession it had descended from sire to son, in spite of political convulsions which had shaken the State to its very foundations. Every thing about the building wore the impress of time. The furniture, throughout its almost numberless rooms, was of the most antique fashion, and had been preserved with great care, indeed with a sort of superstitious reverence. Over the spacious fire-place in the great dining hall, which had so often rung with the voice of revelry, was suspended the once brilliantly illuminated, but now discoloured, pedigree of the family; while upon the oaken panelled walls were hung suits of mail, and implements of war and of the chase, many of which were of the most primitive and curious construction. In various parts of the building were to be found portraits of those members of the family who had been remarkable for achievements on the battle field, or in the tournament; for learning, for statesmanship, or for personal beauty: the mailed warrior, the tilting knight, the grave councillor of state, the robed priest, and the lovely belle of her day. In the chapel, the floors and walls were covered with marble tablets and monuments, whose bass-reliefs and inscriptions declared the honours of the race in bygone days; while in the library was carefully preserved an ancient volume of vellum, heavily bound, and clasped with brass, upon whose broad pages the chaplains of the family had been wont to record the history of the successive counts. An old oaken chest, which stood in one corner of this room, was filled with musty rolls and moth-eaten parchments, that told many a curious tale, and contained the evidence of many a dark transaction.

Charles, the Count of St. Aubyn, at the period when our story opens, had distinguished himself in the wars of France, and had fought many a well-contested battle; but having, in the last of these, received a dangerous wound which wholly incapacitated him for the further service of his country, in the army, he had retired to his patrimonial residence, where he spent much of his time in superintending the education of his only daughter, Louise,

Mysteries of a Convent.

a beautiful girl, now in her eighteenth year; his remaining leisure being devoted to the management of his estate, and to court intrigue.

Naturally of a cold, haughty, and tyrannical disposition, which his long career as a military leader had by no means abated, but, on the contrary, had greatly aggravated; excessively vain of his ancestry; impatient of all contradiction, and ambitious of power and preferment; Count St. Aubyn was but ill prepared for the accomplishment of a task which had been early devolved upon him by the death of the countess, soon after giving birth to Louise; and this task was rendered the more difficult by her inheritance of her father's traits of character; and by the fact that, while absent from home in the service of his country, he had confided his daughter to the care of a maiden aunt, who was too indolent to take any interest in what so nearly concerned her niece, and to the chaplain of the family—a Roman Catholic priest—who thought that any knowledge beyond that of the breviary was wholly useless for a young and beautiful girl, sole heiress to a noble name and princely estate. Possessing, however, an inquiring mind and great natural talents, Louise spent much of her time, from the age of twelve years, in her father's library; reading such books as suited her fancy, and especially delighting in the perusal of the volume of vellum which contained the history of her ancestors. Finding, too, the key which unlocked the old oaken chest, she eagerly pored over the contents of its time-rusted parchments. At other times, she would ramble over the gloomy pile, passing from room to room, spending hours in looking at the family pictures which smiled or frowned upon her from the walls, and in examining the curiously wrought-tapestry with which some of the rooms were draped; or, going forth into the forest near the chateau, she would stroll from place to place, as her fancy dictated, or sit by the side of the rippling stream, lost in bright musings, engendered by the works of fiction she had read. Companionship she had none, save when, after supper, she entered the servant's hall, where she would sit until midnight, listening to the legends which were recited to her by the old retainers of the family, who had spent more than half a century in the household, and by those who had accompanied her father to the wars. Then, retiring to her room, with her imagination wrought up to the highest pitch, she would lie awake for hours. Thus raised until she had passed her seventeenth year, it is not wonderful that when Count St. Aubyn, himself, undertook to superintend the education of his daughter, he should find her mind in chaotic confusion, and her disposition wilful and impatient of all restraint.

Fortunately for both of them, the protracted illness consequent upon the severe wound that he had received in his last battle, and during which Louise had nursed her father with the greatest affection and tenderness, scarcely ever leaving his bedside, had served greatly to attach them to each other, preparatory to those collisions of temper which were sure to be the result of the association, as teacher and pupil, of two persons so unhappily constituted as Louise and the Count. In spite of this, however, scenes frequently occurred in the Library, during the three years which were spent by them, in this relation, which would beggar description; the father in a storm of wrath; and the daughter

Mysteries of a Convent.

101

alternately weeping passionately, and then turning upon her parent, with all the fury of an ungovernable spirit. Indomitable in his purpose, however, the Count had at length succeeded, to some extent at least, in bringing Louise into subjection to his iron will, when events occurred which changed the whole tenor of her life, and marvellously shaped her future destiny. A recital of these we shall defer to the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Events foreshadowed—A daughter's anxiety—A scene of terror—The victim's doom—The daughter's horror.

CAUSES had been in operation, for years, tending to revolution and bloodshed in France :—causes which it is the province, not of the writer, but of the historian, to trace and to record. The tremblings and ominous mutterings of the glaciers had long been felt and heard :—good men, and there were a few, had stood aghast, as the earth reeled beneath their feet, in fearful expectation of sudden and dire catastrophe ; bad men, and their name was legion, had, with malicious exultation, looked forward to mighty upheavings of popular excitement, which should benefit them by the change they should effect, be that change what it might, and ruin whom it would. At length, the mountain masses are loosened ; the avalanche descends, crashing, crushing, destroying, in its downward rush, life, honour, fortune,—all that it had cost the labourers of centuries to rear :—at one fell blow, civil government, the rights of man, religion, are overwhelmed in one undistinguishable mass of utter ruin ; while anarchy, cruelty, and impiety, sit enthroned in gloomy grandeur and the wide-spread desolation, wearing a triple crown, baptized in the blood of more than a million of victims ;—fit emblem of that worn by "*Babylon the great, the Mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth ;*" which would exult thus to sit gloating upon the ruins, not of one province or state only but of all the world ; while the wailings, not of infidel France alone, but of *Protestantism* every where, should come welling up as sweetest melody in her ears.

Count St. Aubyn,—Count no longer, for titles of honour had been abolished,—was not one of those who could be inert or inactive at such a crisis as this ; and soon rendered himself obnoxious to the fury of the "*Infernal Triumvirate.*" He had, of late, been frequently absent from home, during the day, but had always returned, at night, for the protection of his daughter. At length, however, he came not, as usual ; and Louise felt greatly alarmed, for she was apprised of passing events, as they occurred from day to day. She went to the great hall door, and, looking out upon the darkness, waited long and anxiously for her father's return but he came not. She sent messengers to the city, that she might, if possible, learn what had befallen him. The old clock, which stood in the hall, and whose tickings seemed to vibrate through her every nerve, at last told the hour of midnight. Still he came not, nor had her messengers returned. She knew not what to do, nor where to send ; she feared the worst, yet hoped hourly for her father's arrival. Wearied and exhausted by

anxiety, as well as chilled by the damp night air, she went to her room, and tried to compose herself, but in vain; the old clock continued to sound forth, from its iron throat, hour after hour, and still her father,—whom she loved, in spite of their outbursts of temper in the past,—her father came not. Hastily summoning her maid, she bade her descend to the servants' hall, and order the coachman to get ready the carriage; and, just as the day broke, she threw herself into it, and, saying, "To the city," leaned heavily upon the cushions, in a perfect fever of excitement.

It was already seven o'clock when she reached the gates of Paris; and here fresh difficulties arose in her path. She was refused admittance; but, opportunely for her, a friend of her father, who had some influence with the guard, arrived just at the moment, and succeeded in bribing him to let her pass; the stipulation being made, however, that the carriage should remain outside the barrier, and that she should enter the city, alone and on foot, so as to attract no observation.

What a scene met her gaze, on her entrance into the thoroughfares through which she had repeatedly passed before, a light-hearted maiden, richly appareled, seated in the old family coach, by the side of her father, the Count; of whose dignified and commanding appearance she was so justly proud. Now, alone, on foot, and, happily for her own safety, but indifferently clad, with her heart palpitating under the influence of fear and anxiety, she had to make her way through a dense mass of human beings, heaving and rolling like the waves of the ocean, when moved by the storm. Here were men, drunken with excitement and intoxicated with power, for the mob ruled—drunken men uttering the most awful blasphemies, and crying, in tones which called the very soul within her, "*Blood! Blood. More Blood!*" Here were women with dishevelled hair; torn and ragged dresses, besmeared with blood; countenances haggard and pale for want of food; women blaspheming, and crying, in accents of despair—"*Bread! Bread. Down with the Aristocrats—give us bread, or we die.*" There the infuriated crowd was making a bonfire of the elegant but broken furniture which had just been taken from a neighbouring mansion—that mansion in flames; while another party was dragging to the guillotine the late owner of this princely establishment—his only crime, perhaps, his wealth. A few steps further on, and she beheld some unfortunate being hanging, lifeless, from a lamp-post; and advancing but a short distance beyond, she encounters a dead body, lying upon the pavement, with its ghastly, upturned features, ground by the heel of some ruffian, until they could not be distinguished. Blood, blood, blood—every where; in the street; on the pavement; standing in great puddles, running in the gutters, spattered upon the walls in the houses, staining the faces and garments of the populace; blood crying to heaven for vengeance upon the regicides, the homicides. O, it was a horrible spectacle—a sight to have sickened her woman's heart—a sight which she never forgot, and which mysteriously affected her whole after life, as it stood in connexion with the event of that morning, which froze that heart to stone, and for ever dried up that kindly emotion. Drawing her shawl closely about her person, and stopping from time to time to recover herself, as in the swayings to and fro of the maddened crowd, she was now hurried rapidly forward, and now almost hurried to the

Mysteries of a Convent.

103

ground. She had succeeded in passing through several streets, as yet unharmed, when, on suddenly turning a corner, she stood in full view of the guillotine; around which was gathered a motley multitude of men, women, and children, all vociferating that terrible cry—"Blood! blood!" One glance sufficed to tell her that she had found her father, but under what fearful circumstances. There he stood erect upon the scaffold, casting a look of dignified defiance upon the surging mob, thirsting for his life. A moment more, and he, who had never feared death upon the battle field, calmly lays his head upon the block. Spell-bound, Louise sees the fatal knife descend with lightning speed, but she sees no more: with one wild shriek of agony she falls swooning upon the hard stones; the last link severed which bound her in sympathy to her race.

CHAPTER III.

Returning consciousness—Louise the orphan—A friend in need—Genuine sympathy—Disinterested generosity.

ON recovering from the state of insensibility into which she had been thrown by the dreadful spectacle that she had witnessed, she was surprised to find herself on a low pallet, in a small and ill-furnished apartment, with a female bending over her, whom she did not recollect to have seen before, busily engaged in chafing her temples.

"Where am I?" cried the unhappy girl. "O, where am I, and where is my dear father? I have had such a horrible dream! I thought I saw my father lay his head upon the bloody block—that I saw his gray hairs floating on the breeze, and then—I saw that terrible knife—but tell me, O, tell me," she added, eagerly grasping the arm of the stranger, "have I been dreaming, or is it, indeed, a fearful reality? Speak, I entreat you, for my poor head reels so, that I cannot remember any thing."

The good woman sought to soothe her, and to evade the question; telling her how important it was for her to be quiet; but all her benevolent efforts were in vain. Louise pressed the question, until, finding it was still evaded, she screamed in agony—

"Then, indeed, it was no dream. They have murdered my poor father. Take, O take me to him!" and again fell back exhausted and faint upon the couch.

Her kind hostess again succeeded in restoring her to consciousness; and then, in spite of all entreaties, refused to answer any questions, until she could have tried to sleep.

Louise, fully aware of her loss, and that she was truly an orphan, for her father had been cruelly murdered before her eyes; her mother had died in giving her birth; and she had not a blood relative in all France; wrung her hands in silent agony, and tossed from side to side upon the bed, until at length wearied nature yielded to the soft impulse of sleep: and she lay, for four or five hours, in unconsciousness of the sorrows which had settled down upon her young spirit, like a pall of darkness.

While she thus sleeps, it may be as well to inform the reader, that, when Louise uttered the cry of horror, and swooned in the

street, on seeing her father guillotined, there stood not far from her in the crowd, an old soldier, in the dress of a labourer, who, attracted by her scream, and looking upon her face, discovered in her the daughter of his old general, the Count St. Aubyn, whose blood was, at that moment, streaming from the neighbouring scaffold. Hastily seizing the poor girl, as she lay upon the pavement, her dress stained with the crimson fluid, which stood in puddles all about her, he raised her in his arms, while the rushing crowd seemed ready to trample them both beneath their impatient feet; and, forcing a passage, with his brawny shoulder, through the heaving masses of human beings, who appeared to be demons incarnate keeping their infernal holiday on the green earth, which blushed in blood, he made his way as best he might, until, turning into a by-street which was less thronged than that through which he had passed, he presently reached the outskirts of the city, and arrived at his own humble dwelling. Here depositing his unconscious burthen upon the bed, and bidding his wife take care of the stranger, until his return, he went forth, and, going to a restaurant, bought a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine, with which he hastened home; the shouts of the maddened multitude, from a distance, even now and then falling upon his ear, as victim after victim sank beneath the stroke of the guillotine. Accustomed as he had been to the mingled cries of the battle-field, and to scenes of carnage, there was something inexpressibly dreadful to him in these fiendish shouts of citizens imbruing their hands in each other's blood, and in the wild excitement of neighbours fighting against their neighbours, in mortal strife and deadly hatred.

On re-entering his dwelling, he found Louise sleeping disturbedly, and, seating himself by the side of his wife, proceeded to relate to her the events of the morning, and to inform her who their guest was.

Presently Louise awoke, and, heaving a deep sigh, cast a hurried glance from one to the other of the strangers who sat near her bedside, as if to inquire where she was, and who they were.

With a kindness and consideration that would have done honour to those who make greater pretensions to refinement than this humble couple, Marie—for this was the good woman's name—approached Louise, and, placing her hand affectionately upon her forehead, from which, as well as from her hair and dress, all stains had been carefully removed while she had been sleeping, pressed her to take some nourishment, and placed before her the bread and wine which the old soldier has brought home. Louise succeeded in taking a little of both, and then, thanking her kind but unknown friends, begged they would satisfy the enquiries of her mind.

Pierre Loubat—her generous preserver—then proceeded to relate what had occurred during the interval of her unconsciousness, and assured her that, as long as she desired it, his house, humble as it was, should be her home; adding that her father, under whom he had served in the army, had saved his life on the battle-field; and that, while he had an arm to raise, it should be outstretched for her protection.

"Thanks, most kind friends," replied Louise, who, while listening to the good Pierre, had covered her face with her hands; the heaving of her bosom, and the tears as they fell upon her

Mysteries of a Convent.

105

dress, meanwhile evincing her deep emotion; "a poor orphan, for truly such I am, cannot reward you, for your benevolence to her, but may that God who has promised to be a father to the fatherless, pour upon you his choicest blessings."

"Speak not of reward," was the prompt and feeling response of the labourer; "your noble father has laid me under eternal obligations, and it is but a poor return to befriend his child. You have only to command my services, to secure them in any way you may require."

"But tell me," he presently added, "are there none of your relations in the city, to whom you would like to send a message by me?"

Louise shuddered as this question fell upon her ear; and, with a fresh gush of tears, replied, "Alas, I have not a blood relative on earth. My parents are both dead; and I know not another being, besides myself, in whose veins flows the blood of the St. Aubyns."

"But your father must have had many friends in Paris, who would be glad to be of service to you now."

"My father had friends, while in prosperity; but now that he is dead, and by means of the guillotine, who would dare to befriend his child? To apply to them, would be but to throw myself upon the same block, and to meet the same fate."

"The Virgin forbid!" exclaimed Marie, devoutly crossing herself.

"Alas! poor young lady," said Pierre, in tones of heartfelt sympathy, "how sad is your condition! Be assured, at least, that neither Maria nor I will ever desert or betray you."

A fresh burst of grief was the only response that Louise could make.

At length, as though a sudden thought had crossed her mind she asked,

"Do you know M. De Montmain, the banker?"

"I know where he lives," replied he.

"You will greatly oblige me then," said Louise, "if you will go to his house, to-morrow morning; and say to him, that the daughter of the Count St Aubyn would be glad to see him here, for a few minutes, on business."

"I will most cheerfully," quickly returned Pierre, as if it did his noble heart good to have an opportunity of redeeming his promise to the poor orphan.

Here Marie interposed, and, insisting that Louise should be left to seek rest, made arrangements for the night, and, giving up their own bed to her, retired to a little room adjoining that in which she was to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

Kind-hearted banker—Noble resolve—A generous proposal—Obligation returned—A thankful heart.

On the following morning, at an early hour, Pierre called at the residence of M. de Montmain, and having with some difficulty, succeeded in seeing the banker, informed him that a young lady

wished to see him, on business, at No. 58, Rue de Nantes, and that if he would go with him, or say when it would suit his convenience to make the call, he would show him the way.

"But my good friend," replied the banker, "you have not told me her name; and these, you are aware, are not times for a man in my situation to be calling on nameless damsels, simply because they express a desire to see him. Who is this unknown lady?"

"The daughter of General St. Aubyn, who was guillotined yesterday," answered Pierre, bowing respectfully, and brushing away a tear from his eye.

"The daughter of General St. Aubyn, who was guillotined yesterday!" slowly repeated M. de Montmain, looking fixedly upon Pierre. "Impossible!" added he, "How came she there?"

"I carried her there on my shoulder, from near the scaffold on which she had seen her noble father perish," answered Pierre; "and I intend to protect her with my own life, now that she is an orphan, without home, and without friends." As he said this, the good soldier drew himself up to his full height, and looked as though he saw before him some one who had intentions of injury towards his young protégée.

The banker saw the noble bearing of the veteran, and, reading the devotion to her interests which he had unconsciously betrayed, took him warmly by the hand, exclaiming,

"Noble-hearted man, the great God will bless you for this kindness to the orphan. Come, show the way to your house; I will follow you anywhere."

Advancing hastily along the less-frequented streets; for no one, who had anything at stake, loved, in those troublous days, to linger by the way, or to mingle with the crowd; the banker and the old soldier soon reached the dwelling of the latter, and were seated by the bed of Louise, who was too feeble to arise.

M. de Montmain immediately recognised the daughter of the deceased General, whose features she bore very distinctly, and whom, indeed, he had once seen at her father's; and, addressing her in tones full of sympathy and kindness, asked if he could in any way serve the child of his old friend.

"I am an orphan, and destitute"—replied Louise, her utterance almost choked with emotion—"and having no home to which I can safely repair, while I am willing to become a burden to these kind-hearted people, who have saved my life, and perhaps, at least, my honour, I have sent for you, M. de Montmain, to know if my father, at the time of his death, had any money in your hands, and if in any way I can, as his sole survivor, obtain that money, or any portion of it?"

"There are in my hands, belonging to the estate of your late father, 18,000 francs;" replied the banker—"but you are aware, Mademoiselle, that, in times like these, it is impossible to foresee what may happen, as well as to take any legal steps, to secure to you the inheritance; besides, if it were known to the government that this amount were now standing on my books to the credit of General St. Aubyn, it would be seized upon immediately, and confiscated to the purposes of the State. In this dilemma, it is very difficult to determine what is best to be done."

Having said this, the banker sat for some time in deep thought; at length raising his eyes from the floor, upon which they had been intently fixed, he said,

Mysteries of a Convent.

107

"I will tell you what I will do, Mademoiselle Louise; I am under obligations to your excellent father for advances made me in my business, when I greatly needed them. This money is rightfully yours, independent of all legal proceedings, which are now of course entirely out of the question: but eighteen thousand francs is a large sum of money, and if it were discovered, after I had paid it over to you, that it was in my possession subsequent to the General's death, the Government might confiscate that amount of my funds, and hold me responsible for the entire sum. But you need money, and must have it; I will, therefore, in the course of two hours from this time, pay you the sum of ten thousand francs, and take your receipt for that amount, together with a bond of indemnity against any loss that I may sustain by the act, payable out of the estate; should these troublous times ever pass away, and men's right be once more respected and established. The remainder to be left in my hands, subject to the establishment, at some future time, of your claims, as heiress of your father."

"You have my thanks, M. de Montmain, for this generous offer," said Louise, in tones which at once evinced her surprise at the generosity of the banker, and the relief which it afforded to her mind. "I will most cheerfully sign any writing you may require, and shall consider myself under obligations to one who has manifested so much honesty and true kindness of heart."

The banker hastened home, and, returning in about an hour, placed in Louise's hands the sum of ten thousand francs in gold, taking the necessary papers to secure himself from loss, as far, at least, as possible, under the circumstances; and, assuring her of his readiness at all times to serve her, for the sake of her father, he bade her adieu, and left the house.

Louise at once called the good Pierre to her, and, counting into his hand, in spite of all his remonstrances, five hundred francs, desired him to consider them as his own, and to take the remainder into his safe keeping, for her use. It is unnecessary to add that the trust was never betrayed.

CHAPTER V.

A comfortable retreat—Retribution—The peasant girl's victim—Blood for blood—The chiefs receive their merited doom—The orphan's curse.

EIGHTEEN months rolled away, and still found Louise an inmate of the same family which had first afforded her protection. They lived not in the same house, however; for she had insisted upon their taking one somewhat larger and more comfortable, at her expense, while it was at the same time less exposed to the prying eye of curiosity, and her safety was, therefore, rendered the greater. The good Marie ministered to all her wants, and submitted to all her caprices; while Pierre daily brought her the news from the city.

Meanwhile, the first of that "Infernal Triumvirate" which had condemned her father to death by the guillotine, and had deluged France with the blood of her citizens, had fallen beneath the knife of the peasant girl, who putting aside the weakness of her sex,

and clothing herself with enthusiastic devotion to the interests of her native land, bared her arm in the name of Freedom, and inspired with a heaven-born heroism, tracked the monster Marat to his lair, and there stuck that knife to the heart of him whom she believed to be the foremost in the butchery of her countrymen, and whose death would, she thought, give birth to the liberties of France.

Next fell Danton—a victim to the jealousy and to the wiles of the unprincipled Robespierre—but while he met the fate which his atrocities so richly merited, his dying prediction was fully verified, for, in falling, he dragged with him the arch-murderer, Robespierre, from the guilty seat of power, which they had occupied together.

On the morning of the 29th of July, 1794, at daybreak, the streets of Paris were filled to repletion with masses of human beings, all converging to one point of general attraction. The populace of this great and wicked city, their hands and garments reeking with the gore of the thousands whom they had slain in the fever of popular excitement, had grown weary of the sight of blood, and yet they were thronging to witness another execution. Onward they press, one cry sounding above all others—"Down with the tyrant—down with Robespierre. To the guillotine with him!" What, Robespierre! Ay, that name, at mention of which, as it passed from lip to lip, hundreds of thousands, nay, all France, had trembled:—that name, whose magic power had led the maddened multitude to deeds of violence, and to words of blasphemy which astonished the world—that name, which had swept, sirocco-like, over the land, blaspheming and blighting—that name, once so powerful, now so powerless—that name, once so dreaded, now so contemned. How are the mighty fallen! Robespierre is about to expiate his crimes, upon that very scaffold to which he had sentenced so many victims. The guillotine stands on the very spot where the unhappy Louis XVI. and his noble consort, Marie Antoinette had suffered. It stands in the Place de la Revolution. Around it gathered the dense crowd, waiting impatiently to witness the death of him who had promised them riches, and fields of grain, but who had, instead, fed them upon the blood of their fathers, and husbands, and brothers. Now the crowd disports to the right and left; and, amid cursings, and execrations, and shouts of exultation, the band of conspirators, against the liberties of France, slowly advances. There are Henriot, and Couthon, and St. Just, and Dumas, and Coffinhal, and Simon, and others, but conspicuous among them all is Robespierre—the master-spirit, and arch-conspirator, the tyrant, the bloodhound, of the Revolution. The bodies of Henriot, of Couthon, and of Robespierre, are mutilated—mangled in the bloody scene consequent upon their seizure, the night before. They all stand around the fearful instrument of death, each awaiting his turn. One by one they ascend the platform, above which the glittering blade is suspended, and each is beheaded; a wild shout of joy goes up from the congregated thousands who witness this last offering to liberty. At last comes the tyrant's turn, and, as he mounts the scaffold, a yet wilder shout ascends from the multitude, who are frantic with exultation. There he stands, the last of the dreaded enemies of human rights! See the blood oozing from the bandage that holds up his fractured jaw; it runs down upon his clothing; the exe-

Mysteries of a Convent.

109

cautioner snatches the bandage from his head ; the broken jaw falls upon his breast ; and one yell of terrible agony is wrung from his stoical soul, which had borne the anguish of the previous night, without a groan. But, what cry is that which pierces the ear, whose tones, sounding even above the yell of mortal pain which filled every heart with horror, are heard ringing out shrill and clear upon the air ? It was the voice of a woman—a young and beautiful woman, whose dress of deepest mourning, and whose pale face, showed that she has been a sufferer from the tyrant's cruelties. Hark to the voice ! "Murderer of my father, your agony fills me with joy ; descend to hell, covered with the curses of the orphan ! aye, covered with the curses of all the orphans and widows you have made in France ;" See, he shuts his eyes, he would fain stop his ears ! he would gladly hush his conscience, but he cannot ; the iron has pierced his soul—" *there is a God.*" The retributions of that hour declare it. Robespierre feels it ; and, with remorse gnawing at his vitals, he bows his head upon the block, and his doomed spirit passes into the awful presence of Jehovah : exultant shouts proclaim the joy of France, that a tyrant has been removed from the face of the earth ; while the whole scene declared the presence of an avenging Deity.

The execution over, the crowd dispersed ; and Louise St Aubyn, leaning heavily upon the arm of Pierre, the old veteran, walked slowly homeward. It was she who, having heard what was to transpire that day, had clothed herself in mourning, and, standing beneath the guillotine, had cursed Robespierre, the murderer of her father.

CHAPTER VI.

Louise longs to leave France—Looking towards America—Prevails upon Pierre and Marie to accompany her—Arrival in the new Republic—Church of the Jesuits—Interview with Father Jubert.

FRANCE was hateful to Louise, since the death of her father, and the atrocities which she had witnessed, and of which she had heard ; and she longed to leave its shores. She had heard much of the young Republic across the broad Atlantic, and determined to go thither, that she might no longer be surrounded by those whom she regarded as lawless murderers, against whom she had in secret vowed eternal hatred. Indeed, her heart was filled with bitterness towards her whole race, save the good Pierre, the kind Marie, and the generous banker, M. de Montmain ; the only beings, in all the world, towards whom she felt one emotion of regard or esteem.

On the morning succeeding the tragical events narrated in the last chapter, Louise called Pierre and his wife into her room, after breakfast, and, bidding them be seated, she said to them :

"My friends, I hate France ; I wish to leave it, and seek an asylum in the new home of the sorrow-stricken, the United States. I am unwilling to leave you behind ; will you go with me ?"

"But Mademoiselle," replied Pierre, who was much astonished at this intelligence—"we have not the means ; and, besides, we should starve, when we got there, without friends, and without business."

Mysteries of a Convent.

"As to the means of getting to America"—responded Louise—"leave that to me; I will provide them. It is as little as I can do in return for the kindness which you have manifested to me, during the many months that I have spent under your hospitable roof. I will pay your passage across the ocean; and, when we reach that friendly shore, we will take a house, and live together as we do here. Our good Pierre can find something to do; you, Marie, and I, can keep house, and thus we will do very well. I have seven thousand francs left; and, while these last, you shall not want. Come, let us leave this horrible country, and go at once where at least our lives will be safe, and we can earn our daily bread in peace. What say you, my friends?"

"Ah! it will be hard to leave Paris, with all her faults," answered Pierre: "but yet, I feel well assured, from what I have heard about that far off country, that Mademoiselle Louise advises for the best. We love her,"—continued he, addressing himself to his wife—"and we will go with her; we can soon earn enough, by our labour, to repay what she may advance for our expenses. Come, Marie, say yes, and we will go with her."

"Well, Pierre, be it so, then. We have nothing to keep us here, save our love for la belle France, and who knows but we may grow rich in America, which we assuredly we cannot do here."

"By the way," said Pierre, "it just occurs to me, at this moment, that the captain of the new brig, the *Jean Maurice*, told me, the other day, that he would start from Havre for New York, some time next week. If you say so, Mademoiselle Louise, I will see the captain, and ascertain what he will charge to take us all to that place."

Suffice it to say that the arrangements were all made to the satisfaction of Louise and her companions; their passports obtained, hers being in an assumed name; and on the Thursday following the conversation that has just been related, the *Jean Maurice* was breasting the waves of the ocean, on her way to the new world.

In due time the brig arrived at its port of destination; and, in a few days, Pierre had taken, at the request of Louise, a nice little house in the suburbs of the city, which was plainly but comfortably furnished; and here the three friends, whom misfortune had so singularly bound together in strong ties, lived in the enjoyment of quiet and repose. Pierre soon found profitable employment; Marie busied herself with household affairs; while Louise employed her time in embroidery, lessons in which she had taken before she left Paris, and for which she received a handsome remuneration from a French merchant, who had been for some time established in business.

Some weeks rolled away, when, one morning, Louise entered the confessional in the church of the *Jesuits*, at New York; and, after a full confession, sought absolution from the priest who was present. He inquired who she was, and, manifesting great sympathy for her sorrows, asked for her address; telling her he would call, in a few days, and pay her a pastoral visit. This priest was a young man, of about thirty years of age, of handsome features, commanding figure, polished manners, and was a refugee from France, being a descendant from a noble family; his name, Jubert.

Mysteries of a Convent.

111

It was not long before Father Jubert stood before the dwelling of Louise St. Aubyn, and, lightly rapping at the door, was admitted into the little parlour, where sat her whom he came to see. The blush mantled upon the cheek of Louise, as she looked at the handsome priest; and, Jesuit as he was, and accustomed to the maintenance of an iron control over himself, the tell-tale blood which mounted to his face, told that an impression had been made upon his heart which would be exceedingly dangerous to the peace of both.

The interview was a long one; for Father Jubert insisted upon having, from the lips of Louise a full account of her past history; and, during its recital, manifested the deepest interest in its details.

At length, the narrative was completed; and the priest had arrived at the conclusion that Louise St. Aubyn possessed rare qualifications for membership in the order of Jesuits, and that if she could but be persuaded to join that order, it would be at once a most valuable acquisition, while it would render more easy of accomplishment, certain intentions of his own, which had been formed in his mind, while, with flushed cheek and fire-flashing eye, she had told her thrilling story.

He, therefore, related to her, at her request, his own history, taking care to expatiate upon the happy retreat from worldly anxiety, which he had found in the bosom of the church, and in association with the order of which he was a member. His impassioned eloquence, while he enlarged upon this topic, made a deep impression upon the mind of Louise, already predisposed, by misanthropic feeling, to abandon the world, and shut herself out from its tumult and its sorrows; and the wily Jesuit, finding that he had succeeded beyond his expectations, thought it best not to push the matter, at that time, any further, but to leave the impression to deepen itself, and work its own way.

Rising gracefully from his chair, and offering his services to Louise, in the most delicate manner imaginable, he promised to visit her again; and took his leave, with all the refined politeness of the accomplished Frenchman.

CHAPTER VII.

Louise's reflections on the interview—Its effect on Louise—Anxiety of Pierre and Marie—The heart's consolations—The wily Jesuit.

THIS interview with father Jubert left the mind of Louise in a tumult of emotion, such as only a being of her peculiar mould is capable of. Before the disastrous event occurred, which made her an orphan, she had had but little intercourse with those of the opposite sex; and then only when, on State occasions she had visited Paris, in company with her father; and although her imagination had often been inflamed by the perusal of romances, which she found in the library of the chateau, and which she had devoured with great avidity, she had never before met with any one who had inspired her with the feelings which she experienced in the interview with the young, the handsome, and the polished, French priest. In short, she had fallen desperately in love with him; and her quick woman's wit had made the discovery that the passion was a reciprocal one. Had he been of low origin in his

112 Mysteries of a Convent.

native land, she would have spurned the idea ; but, as he had informed her that he was a son of the Count Jubert, than whose there was no better blood in France, her romantic disposition seized eagerly upon the adventures ; and her fondness for excitement of every kind, that might relieve the tedious monotony of her every-day life, found nutriment upon which to feast itself, in the flame which the Father Jubert had inspired in her bosom.

"But he is a priest," said she to herself, as she thought of the circumstances which had transpired in the interview ; and this, instead of shocking her by the new phase in which it presented the subject to her mind, only served to make the affair more romantic, and therefore, the more pleasurable to her excited fancy.

"Yet he loves me, I know ;" she added, mentally. "Did not his voice falter, and his cheek redden, as he spoke to me ? and, when he bade me good bye, how his hand trembled, as he pressed mine ! He loves me, I am sure of it. What a pity he is a priest ! How handsome he is ! How agreeable !" And thus she sat reasoning and communing with her own thoughts, until Marie announced that dinner was on the table.

"Mademoiselle does not eat to-day," said Pierre, with some anxiety, as he observed that Louise scarcely touched the food on her plate, and seemed greatly abstracted during the silent meal, "I hope you are not unwell."

"I am quite well," replied Louise, aroused, for the moment, from her reverie—"I was only thinking of the past, my good Pierre, and that made me sad."

"Ah ! do not let your thoughts go back to the sorrowful days that are past, Mademoiselle Louise ;"—said Marie, with a tear in her eye—"it will injure your health ; think only of that happy time we now see, and of the bright future."

But Louise heard not what was said by the kind-hearted Marie ; she was thinking of the handsome priest, and of the pleasant tones of his voice, which seemed still to vibrate as sweet music upon her ear.

Her simple friends exchanged looks of sympathy, little dreaming of what was passing in the mind of Louise ; and, her plain meal being finished, she retired to her own room, and spent the afternoon, not as usual over her embroidering frame, but in the reveries of a passionate imagination, and in building air-castles for the future. She devised a thousand schemes by means of which she thought, for a moment, the obstacles in the way of her union with Father Jubert might be removed ; and as insurmountable difficulties would throw themselves around each of these, as if in mockery of her anxiety on the subject, others would arise, to be in turn destroyed by some impossibility that would suggest itself. Thus was passed the afternoon and evening of that eventful day ; and, at last, overcome with fatigue, consequent upon the strength of her emotions, and the unwonted mental exercise, she fell asleep, and dreamed of the handsome young priest.

Father Jubert, meanwhile, had sat himself down in his comfortable room, and, after recalling to mind the incidents that had been related to him by Louise in their interview, and reflecting upon the traits of character which she had developed to his keen observation, as well as the beauty of her face and person, which had indeed made a most lively impression upon his heart, as she had supposed ; taxed his inventive powers to devise a plan by means of which she might be induced to enter the order, and he

Mysteries of a Convent.

113

accomplish his private purposes. Having succeeded in this, to his own satisfaction, and determined that no time should be lost in carrying his plan into effect, he turned to his writing-table, and addressed to the superior of the order in Rome, a letter, containing some general information, and a summary of the events which had transpired in the last month, not omitting to say enough, in reference to Louise, to attract the attention of the superior to her case, and to evince with what avidity the writer seized upon every circumstance which might promote the interests of the order.

CHAPTER VIII.

The lover's dream—The confessional—Its effects on Louise—Her determination to enter the Convent of St. Mary's—Sorrow of her friends—Enters the Convent, under the appellation of Sister Frances—Father Jubert's wily schemes.

ON awakening, the next morning, Louise found herself, as it were, in a new world;—a world containing but two inhabitants, the priest of whom she had dreamed, and herself. She arose, and dressed herself with more than her usual care: and, after breakfast, telling Marie that she was going to confession, repaired to the church which she had visited a week before; and there, to her great joy, she found Father Jubert in his seat, ready to listen to her. With palpitating heart, she entered the confessional, and her tremulous voice betrayed the emotion of her soul. The priest heard her through, and then administered consolation to her; but what was said, or what was done, in that hour, the writer is not prepared to say. Let it suffice that Louise left the church, with a smile upon her countenance, which bespoke the joy of her heart, and, in the course of a few days, astonished the good Pierre and his wife, by informing them that she had made up her mind to enter the convent of St. Mary's, in New York; and that she should give to them one half of the remaining money which she had brought from France, to be their own: so that they might not suffer from the step she was about to take.

Marie, who loved Louise, burst into tears, and wrung her hands in the bitterness of her sorrow, declaring that she should die without the presence of her good mistress, for so she termed her; and Pierre stood mute and motionless, as if he were striving to comprehend what had been said to him. Meanwhile, Louise soothed them, by telling them that she had no longer anything to live for in this world, that her situation was a peculiarly distressing one, and that her happiness would be greatly promoted by placing herself under the protection of the nuns, in association with whom she could spend her days in acts of devotion and works of piety. She also assured them that her entrance into the convent would not prevent her from seeing them frequently, and from affording them assistance, at any time, should they require it.

Thus assured, her kind friends reluctantly consented to their separation from Louise; and, during the remainder of that day, Marie's eyes were constantly red with weeping.

Some ten days were spent by Louise in making preparations for her conventual life, during which time frequent visits were

114 Mysteries of a Convent.

paid to the family by the nuns of the convent, and by Father Jubert; the latter interesting himself for Pierre so much as to set him up in a small but lucrative business, by means of the money which Louise had presented to him, in token of her friendship, and of the appreciation in which she held his past kindness and fidelity.

Before entering the convent, Louise, under the direction of Father Jubert, made a safe investment of her remaining money, subject to her own order while living, reversionary to the order at her death; and, procuring the services of an agent to visit France, and attend to her interests there, executed an instrument in writing, donating the one half of whatever might be realized from her father's estate, absolutely to the Jesuits, and retaining the control of the other half in her own hands, with an obligation that it should be given ultimately to the convent in which she should end her days.

In due time, she entered the convent, and, having passed her novitiate satisfactorily, became a nun, under the appellation of sister Frances; and, from the moment of her introduction into the order, assumed a position, and acquired an influence, which amply attested the sagacity of Father Jubert, and verified the soundness of the conclusions which he had drawn from their first interview.

Meanwhile, the latter, who was the confessor to this same convent, had not been idle, but had laboured industriously to promote the interests of sister Frances, between whom and himself a solemn compact had been entered into, on the morning of that last visit to the confessional, to which allusion has already been made. By means of an underground communication between the monastery, in which he resided to avoid scandal, and the convent, by the connivance of the sister Porter, who was charged with the care of the gate which opened into the latter building from the arched way which formed this communication, he visited sister Frances almost nightly in her private cell, where he instructed her in the mysteries and usages of the Jesuits, and prepared her fully to act that part which she afterwards filled with such distinguished ability. Nor was the father confessor wholly disinterested in these labours; he was duly rewarded; and, as subsequent events will demonstrate, they were coupled with his own schemes of personal ambition. A more unhallowed compact than that which existed between this priest and sister Frances—a compact instigated by a Jesuit mind, and the foul offspring of passion and of pride—was perhaps never entered into, nor ever more fearfully punished.

CHAPTER IX.

Honours in prospect—Ecstasy of Father Jubert—Power, apostrophe to—The compact not to be forgotten—Arrival of the Legate—His treatment—Approaching ceremony—High Mass celebrated—Consistorial Hall, its splendid furniture and fittings—Procession of priests—The ceremony of Installation—Awful Oath—The cup of blood—The Bible cursed and burned—Fierce exultation of the priests—The American flag of liberty trampled under foot, and torn in pieces—Father Jubert made head of the Order of St. Ignatius Loyola, for the United States of America—Homage and obeisance of the priests—Oath of allegiance.

FIVE years had passed away, when, one morning, a large and

Mysteries of a Convent.

115

carefully-sealed document, bearing upon it the impress of the Father General of the Order at Rome, was handed to Father Jubert. Dismissing the servant who had brought it, he broke the seals, and sat down at his writing-table to read it. As he progressed in its perusal, he became singularly affected; and, at length, arising from his chair, greatly agitated, his eye dilated, and his countenance expressive both of astonishment and joy, he stood erect, and, with the letter held almost at arm's length, he gazed upon it intently, as though he found it difficult to comprehend its meaning. Then, snatching his cap from his head, he threw it up in the air, and clapped his hands in very excitement, exclaiming, as he did so:

"Well, it has come at last; and I—yes, I—Francois Jubert,—am Head of the Order of St. Ignatius Loyola, in these United States."

Again seating himself, and carefully examining the seals, the envelope, the outside and inside, of the document which conferred this high dignity upon him, as though he yet feared that there might be some mistake, he appeared to be fully satisfied with his scrutiny, and, replacing the missive upon the table, again arose and paced the room from one end to the other, talking to himself, and occasionally uttering audibly a sentence or two.

"It is well," he said; "I have richly merited this honour, young as I am."

"Power! dearest idol of my soul, I have thee; aye, and will use thee, too!"

"Louise, our compact shall not be forgotten."

"But when does he say the installation is to take place?" Here he seized the letter, and read,

"The Legate, by whom you are to be installed, within ten days after his arrival in New York, is the bearer of this letter. See that he is treated with all the respect due to his high office."

"Treated with all the respect due to his high office," slowly repeated the Jesuit. "Aye, that shall he be; and he shall be made a stepping stone to further power. I must away to see this Legate."

So saying, he carefully locked up the important document, and, arranging his dress, went out to make the necessary preparations for the suitable reception of him who bore so honourable a commission as the representative of the Supreme Power at Rome.

Several days of feasting and ceremony had passed by, that set apart for the installation of Father Jubert had arrived.

At an early hour in the morning, High Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the monastery; after which all the members of the order, resident in the city, together with several from a distance, who had been hastily summoned to attend, adjourned in procession to the Consistorial Hall, in the same building. This was a spacious room, with arched ceiling, some sixty feet in length, by thirty in width; the walls heavily draped in black cloth, which hung in deep folds, so as entirely to shut out from sight the openings both for windows and doors. At one end of this apartment was a platform raised some three feet above the floor, being covered with rich carpeting of the best fabric. Upon this platform or dais, was placed a sort of throne, painted a bright scarlet, ornamented with gold, and surmounted by a magnificent canopy of silk, of the same colour, trimmed with heavy gold fringe. In the

centre of the room was suspended from the ceiling, a richly out-glass chandelier, with almost innumerable lights brilliantly burning; while placed at convenient distances around the hall were candelabra of silver, supporting massive branch candlesticks, each having several lights. At the lower end, there was a neat but small organ, of powerful tone, and seats for the choristers arranged near it.

Immediately in front of the throne stood an altar, upon which was placed a golden censer, sending forth its clouds of sweet incense to perfume the air; and near this altar, an ancient, curiously carved chair, lined and cushioned with black velvet, and studded with gold-headed nails, intended for the occupancy of the candidate for the honours of the occasion. Seats of a plainer description, but displaying the same contrast of colours, were arranged along the sides of the room, on either hand.

As the procession of priests, clothed in their long black robes, with their peculiarly shaped caps upon their heads, and having the youngest member of the order in the front, bearing a massive silver crucifix, and the oldest in the rear, with the Legate in the centre, supported on the right hand by the candidate, and on the left by the Father Superior of the monastery; and all, save these last, walking two abreast, entering the ante-chamber, they severally armed themselves with drawn swords, which were placed in racks on either hand; and, as they passed through the looped-up drapery which covered the ample door-way, between two sentinels, who, fully armed, were there found on duty, they severally gave the watch-word, on the right and left—“*A bas la Liberté.*”

Having entered the spacious hall, whose whole arrangements presented a most imposing appearance; the Legate was escorted to the throne, by the entire body of priests, who kneeled in a circle around him, while he seated himself, and exclaimed,

“Honour to his lordship, the Legate of his Holiness the Pope, and Vicegerent of the Father General of the Order of St Ignatius Loyola!”

Then rising, and taking their appropriate seats, the crucifix, meanwhile, having been placed in an upright position in a receptacle for its foot, provided for the purpose, near the altar, a low-toned, but beautiful, chant was sung by the choir, assisted by the organ, whose rich notes seemed to fill the apartment with fleeting melody.

The Legate, wearing a robe of gorgeous grandeur, then arose, and, with a distinct voice, read aloud the authority, appointing Francois Jubert the Representative of the Supreme Head of the Jesuits in the United States; and commanding his installation as such, by the hands of the Father Romeo, there present for that purpose.

“The will of the Father General be done!” cried all the priests, devoutly crossing themselves and bowing low, as the Legate took his seat; while a joyous peal burst forth from the organ.

Directing the Superior of the monastery to present the candidate at the altar, the Legate proceeded to dictate to the kneeling priest, the rest all standing, the following oath, which was repeated by him in an audible voice:

“I, Francois Jubert, in the presence of the Holy Mother of God; of St. Ignatius Loyola; the Legate of the Father General of the order of Jesuits, and of these members of the same, here

Mysteries of a Convent.

117

assembled: do most sincerely and solemnly swear;—that I will and do renounce all allegiance to king, prince, potentate, and power of every kind, and however constituted, which may now or hereafter hold civil rule in this or in any other country in which I may be called to reside; acknowledging, now and for ever, no other civil or religious rule whatsoever, save that of his Holiness, the Pope—the Vicegerent and Vicar of Christ—and of the Father General of the order of St. Ignatius Loyola; hereby solemnly engaging to surrender myself, at all times, as I now do, body, soul, and spirit, unreservedly to their sole control; to have no will or mind of my own, but unhesitatingly and without question, in all things, to think, and speak, and act, as they may direct.

“I do most sincerely and solemnly swear eternal hatred to all forms of government, whether monarchical or republic, and by whomsoever administered, whose tendency is in any wise, directly or indirectly, to limit, or subvert, or control the supreme and rightful authority of his Holiness, the Pope, or the Father General of the order of Jesuits, to reign over the whole world; and to use my best endeavours, at all times, for the overthrow of all such governments, and the universal extension of that of the order of which I am a member.

“I do sincerely and solemnly swear eternal hatred to all sects, societies, and institutions, of every kind, whether political or religious, which tend to the establishment of civil or religious freedom in this or in any other land; and to use my best efforts for their destruction; ever keeping in my mind that divine maxim of the order, that—‘the end justifies the means.’

“I do most sincerely and solemnly swear that I will not appropriate to my own purposes, any funds that may be entrusted to my care or keeping, as belonging to the treasury of the order; but will sacredly apply the same to the uses to which they are set apart, rendering to the Father General at Rome, quarterly, a true and faithful account of the same; and that I will further use all possible means to increase the wealth of the order, for the better accomplishment of the purposes for which it has been instituted.

“I do most sincerely and solemnly swear that I will not expose, to any person or persons whatever, nor permit the same to be done by others, any of the secret instructions that may be given to me by the Father General, or any of his duly accredited agents; and should any such at any time fall into the hands of those for whom they were not intended, I will deny, even with oaths, their authenticity, affirming them to be forgeries.

“I do most sincerely and solemnly swear to regard the orders, instructions, and requirements, of the Father General of the order of Jesuits, as of paramount authority to those of his Holiness the Pope, whenever the latter shall clash or conflict with the former; and, should I ever discover any plot or conspiracy, or intention of evil in any person or persons whatsoever, towards the interests or safety of the order, I will, without delay, communicate the same to the Father General, and do all in my power to contravene and to thwart such plot, conspiracy, or intention of evil: always esteeming his interest and authority, as the head of the order, paramount to all others.

“I do most sincerely and solemnly swear that I will keep a

Mysteries of a Convent.

true, faithful, and permanent register, and forward a copy thereof quarterly to the Father General, of all events, political or religious that may come to my knowledge, and of all persons, by name, residence, and occupation, whether Protestant or Catholic, who may in any wise, or to any extent, obstruct the progress of our order, or say or do aught against it; and by my agents, officers, and emissaries, do all in my power to injure their business, and ruin their character and fortune.

"I do most sincerely and solemnly swear that I will, at whatever inconvenience or sacrifice to myself, repair, without delay, to Rome, or whatever other place I may be ordered by the Father General; and should I in any manner violate this my oath, I will inform him of such violation, and undergo any punishment that he may think proper to inflict upon me therefore.

"To do, and keep, and perform, all of this, I devoutly call upon the ever blessed Trinity to witness my sincerity; and should I ever prove a traitor to the order, or betray its interests, or its secrets, may the severest pains of purgatory be suffered by me, without cessation or mitigation, for ever and ever."

"Amen! and Amen!" shouted all the priests.

This fearful oath—so fully embracing all the destructive features of the Jesuits, and so faithfully portraying the real objects of their organizations—having been taken by the candidate, he was sternly ordered to arise from his kneeling posture, and to place his hand upon the cross, the symbol of his faith; while the whole number of priests were made to surround him, and, pointing their naked swords at his body, were directed to thrust the steel to his heart, should he falter or hesitate in the least in obeying the order which should next be given to him, and which was wholly unexpected by him; a test of the promptitude to comply with any mandate that he may hereafter receive from the Supreme Head of the order, though its performance might involve even death itself.

The Superior of the monastery, by direction of the Legate, then handed to the candidate a small cup, formed of a section of a skull, into which had been poured about half a gill of a dark fluid resembling human blood. Bidding him hold this cup to his lips, the Legate thus addressed him:—

"Francois Jubert, the honour which I am about to confer upon you, by the authority of his Holiness the Pope, and of the Father General of the order of St. Ignatius Loyola, is of too august a character, and involves interests of too great moment to be lightly bestowed, or to be given to one who quails at the sight, or smell, or taste, of human blood; if you have been sincere in taking the solemn oath which has just been administered to you, and if you are worthy of the high honour for which you are the candidate, you will not hesitate to drink the contents of that cup. If you are insincere or craven in spirit, you will hesitate and die. *It is blood—DRINK!*"

No sooner had the word passed the lips of the Legate—uttered in a tone of powerful emphasis, which ran through the vast apartment, and vibrated on the nerves of the priests—than the candidate swallowed the contents of the cup, without even blanching, as though it had contained the most delicious nectar; and, to show that he had done so, held it up at the full stretch of his arm, as his commanding stature towered above the priests who surrounded him, its bottom turned upwards.

Mysteries of a Convent.

119

"Lower your swords!" cried the Legate, "the candidate is worthy."

The priests let fall their sword points, and, as they did so, a rich and triumphant gust of music sounded forth from the organ; while the choristers chanted the patron saint and founder of the order.

"Bring forth the accursed book," cried the Legate, when the music had ceased.

A copy of the Protestant Bible was then handed to the candidate; while a chaffing dish of burning coal was placed before him.

"That book," said the Legate, "is the great enemy of our Order. It must perish from the earth, or we must cease to exist. Curse and burn it, in token of your enmity and ours, and of your determination to do all that lies in your power for its destruction, and with it for that of all heretics."

"I curse thee, thou text-book of heresy!" exclaimed the candidate, placing the book upon the blazing coals; "I spit upon thee, vile cheat, uncompromising enemy of my order. I burn thee; and, as thou consumest in that flame, so may all heretics be burned in that fierce flame which shall wreath itself around them, in that hell prepared for the reception and punishment of all those who put their confidence in thee; and reject the true Scriptures, the only true and infallible church."

As the sacred volume—the charter of human liberties—crackled and glowed under the action of the fire, and its smoke ascended heavenward, like the spirit of many a martyr, whose body has been burned by the minions of popery, a shout, wild and fierce, arose from the congregated priests, which shook the room in whose midst they stood; while again the organ and choristers sent forth swelling pœans of praise to "*Mary, the refuge of sinners—the blessed Mother of God.*"

"Bring forth *the ensign of freedom!*" hissed, from between his teeth, the proud Legate, concentrating unutterable hatred in the manner in which he called for the American banner, under whose stars and stripes, Washington and the worthies of the revolution had fought and bled.

"This vile rag," he cried, as the flag of the Union was being unfurled from its staff, "fit emblem of those hellish principles which have wrested this noble land, with its fertile fields, its majestic rivers, and its ocean lakes, from the hands of an imbecile king; which have revolutionized France; and which, if not prevented from spreading, will one day overturn the thrones, and destroy the ancient established monarchies of Europe; that vile rag is more to be dreaded by us, as an order, than all things else, beside the Bible. If it be permitted to pollute the pure air of Heaven by its foul embrace, for half a century longer, it will float on every sea, on every land, and be the rallying sign for the nations of the earth. It must be torn down; it must be trampled under foot; it must trail dishonoured in the dust, or our cause is lost. In token of your love for the order, and determination to uproot liberty—accursed name, more cursed thing!—tear it from its support, and trample it beneath your feet."

Hastily obeying the mandate, the candidate flung the stripes and stars upon the floor, and, with an energy which declared the feelings of his heart, ground them with his heel; while, in a voice of thunder, the Legate cried—

120 Mysteries of a Convent.

“ Jesuits, destroy the enemy of your order. A bas la Liberte.”

Like as a herd of famished wolves rush upon their prey, rending and tearing it in pieces, while growling and screaming in horrible discord, they overturn each other in their efforts to gratify their rapacity: so rushed these Jesuits upon the ensign of the world's freedom, and, pushing each other aside, in frantic fury, they soon tore it into a thousand fragments, while their yells and shouts added to the terrible uproar of the scene. Meanwhile from the choir came forth, in strains of wild excitement, as though the downfall of man's liberty and the universal triumph of Jesuitism were already secured, and the world were fixed in eternal slavery, civil, political, and religious—the “ Te Deum Laudamus !” insulting high heaven with blasphemous ascriptions of praise, as though it had been instrumental in a destruction of all that is dearest to man, and of highest appreciation in the sight of God and of the blessed angels.

In the meantime, the Legate had received, from an attendant priest, a gorgeous robe, which might have well become a monarch, and, when the insulting strains had died away, and the priests, at his command, had resumed their places, he advanced to the candidate, who stood near the crucifix, and, throwing the garment upon his shoulders, led him to the throne, and, seating him there, turned to the priests, saying—

“ Behold, Jesuits, the Father General of the order of St. Ignatius Loyala, for the United States of America; whom I declare duly appointed, and installed in that high office. Approach, and do his Lordship reverence.”

So saying, he caused the priests to kneel around the throne, and to repeat after him the following salutation and oath of allegiance:—

“ Hail, most worthy Father General, we honour thee !

“ We solemnly swear full and explicit allegiance to you, as the representative of the Father General of the order; and to obey, without hesitation, or question, any command that you may give to us, while holding the said high office; here surrendering ourselves body, soul, and spirit, ‘ as dead corpses,’ to your control and government, to be directed and used as your judgment, and that of Him whom you represent, may dictate.”

It was a proud moment for Francois Jubert; and well did it repay him for the toil, anxiety and effort, which it had cost him to gain the eminent distinction.

A choral burst of melody, swelling the general joy and congratulation, closed the ceremonial; and the priests, arising from their knees, and preceded by the Legate and their new Father General, repaired, under the conduct of the Superior to the refectory, where a sumptuous banquet awaited them.

CHAPTER X.

The Father General's affections for Sister Frances on the wane—Removes her, by instituting her to the office of Superior in the Convent of Annunciation—Her active and proselyting efforts shortly after assuming office—Emily de Vere—The Superior's base conduct towards her.

FOR some months prior to the occurrences which have just been

Mysteries of a Convent.

121

described, the Mother Superior of the Annunciation, distant some fifty miles from the city of New York, had been in very feeble health; and, among the first acts which the Father General was called upon to perform after his installation into office, was to appoint a superior to fill the vacancy occasioned by her death.

He had not lost his attachment to Sister Frances, but, with the inconstancy of the Jesuit character, he had for some time past thought it no harm to look upon other pretty faces besides hers; and his facile conscience saw no impropriety in intrigues with other nuns than the good sister, who, exceedingly jealous of her power over him, maintained a most rigid watch upon his conduct; so vigilant, indeed, that there had already occurred some interesting quarrels between them, which, however, were easily made up, although they left traces of uneasiness behind them upon her mind, conscious, as she was, that her personal attractions were not as fresh as once they were.

It was, therefore, a great relief to the Father General to have it in his power to appoint Sister Frances to the vacancy; as, while he adroitly persuaded her that it was an honour which he had long been anxious to see conferred upon her, and one for which she was peculiarly qualified, he would thus be removed from her immediate espionage, and be more at liberty to act as he pleased.

Connected with the Convent of the Annunciation, was a very large female boarding-school, which, in the great dearth of the means of education existing at this time, was very extensively patronized by Protestant families. This was represented to Sister Frances as being a very strong inducement to her acceptance of the appointment, since it would afford her ample opportunity for the protection of the interests of the order, in proselyting to the true faith the children of heretics, who should be entrusted to her care.

Ambitious of power and of preferment; and such an appointment as this, with its cognate rank and influence in the order, having been an object held in view in the original compact, to which allusion has already been made, Sister Frances felt a sacred joy in its contemplation; while, at the same time, her mind misgave her somewhat as to the real motives of the Father General; but when, in an interview which she had with him, in her private room, she broached the subject, and he, with well-affecting surprise, the most solemn protestations, and fondest caresses, assured her that she was wholly mistaken; she suffered herself to be deceived, and accepted the office, as an additional proof of the undiminished affection of her priest lover.

In the course of a few weeks, she was duly installed Mother Superior of the Convent of Annunciation, and entered upon the duties of her new station, with a spirit and zeal, as well as exhibition of talents of the highest order, which bespoke her adaptation to it, and presaged a brilliant career for her in the future.

With a tact rarely equalled, and by means of her winning manners, and consummate skill in accommodating herself to the peculiarities of those whom she wished to control, she soon succeeded in engaging the affections of the nuns, and especially in securing those of the young ladies who were boarding pupils in the establishment. In the course of five years after her installation, she was the instrument of converting not less than thirty-five of

the latter to the Romish faith: twelve of whom joined the order, and became nuns.

Among the latter was a Miss Emilie de Vere, a young girl, some sixteen years of age, of surpassing beauty, and the only daughter of a wealthy planter in Louisiana, who, having lived in New York for some time before he removed to his southern home, had selected the Convent of the Annunciation, as a suitable place for the education of the child, because of its remoteness from the city. Mr. De Vere was descended from Protestant parentage, as was his wife, but thought well of the Catholics, and apprehended no danger in thus placing his daughter in their hands, while he went to his far-off home, not expecting to see her again for some three years. Great was the self-gratulation of the Mother Superior, when the rich heiress joined the Catholic church, but greater still when she wore the habit of a nun, and bore the name of Sister Theresa, two years before the time of which we are now writing.

In the course of one of his somewhat frequent visits to the Convent,—during which the Mother Superior was always careful to keep, as much as possible, out of sight, all those nuns who had any pretensions to personal attractions,—the Father General happened to meet Sister Theresa in one of the passages; and, immediately recognising her as one whose great beauty had strongly attracted his notice, on the occasion of her taking the religious vows, he entered into conversation with her; and, while holding her hand in his, and giving her some fatherly advice, the Mother Superior, having occasion to pass that way, unseen by them, had witnessed a portion of the interview, and imagined that she saw enough to warrant a jealous feeling on her part, and to determine her to prevent any further occurrence of a similar sort. Dissembling her true feelings, however, she met the Father General, in half an hour afterwards, with a brow as placid as if nothing had occurred to disturb the quiet current of her emotions. To gratify her vindictiveness, nevertheless, as she dared not reproach the General, she degraded the poor nun, for a month, to servile work in the kitchen, without assigning to her any other reason for so doing, than her own will.

CHAPTER XI.

The Father General's visit to the convent—His interest for Sister Theresa—The deformed nun—Proposes a meeting at midnight with Sister Theresa—The Mother Superior's kind entertainment of the Father General in the private parlour—Her chagrin at his abruptly leaving her—Suspicion—Sister Theresa's sorrow and anxiety at receiving the Father's note—Her trepidation on meeting the Father General—He reassures her—His wily stratagems to accomplish his base object—A wolf in sheep's clothing.

THE Father General again visited the convent, in about six weeks after this unpleasant occurrence; and, as he approached the great iron gate, the image of the beautiful nun arose to his mind, and he determined, if possible, to learn something more about her; but, aware of the sensitiveness of the Mother Superior, he knew that his inquiries must be made with great caution.

Mysteries of a Convent.

123

There was, in the convent, a deformed nun, who, because of a grudge which she bore to Mother Frances, and of the uniform kindness with which the General had treated her, had, on more than one occasion, been of service to him in his intrigues in the convent. He determined to make use of her on this occasion.

Accordingly, seizing a favourable moment, he took Sister Martina aside, and asked her who the beautiful nun was. The communicative sister answered his question, and said so much about her, and the cruel treatment which she had recently received at the hands of the Mother Superior, for she knew not what offence, as she affirmed, as greatly to enlist his feelings in behalf of Sister Theresa. Hastily writing a few words upon a piece of paper, which he took from his pocket-book, he handed it to the nun; directing her to give it to Sister Theresa, and to be discreet about the matter, saying that he would reward her handsomely, if she did not betray his trust. Then returning into the parlour, where he had left the Superior, he chatted gaily with her until they were called into the refectory to tea. While seated at the table, the nuns and boarders all present, both the Father General and the Mother Superior were models of propriety and decorum; and the former, especially, was careful not to cast even a look which could serve to excite any suspicion in the mind of the Superior, while their juniors were greatly edified by their pious conversation concerning some of the saints, and the miracles that had been wrought by them.

Arising from the table, the Mother Frances invited the General to her private parlour, the room in which she usually entertained him, when he visited the convent. This was one of a suite of rooms, three in number, set apart for her own special use, and never intruded upon save by her own invitation or permission:—all of these, save the last, opened upon the great passage which ran through the house, on the second floor. The first of this suite was furnished as a private parlour, in very neat and elegant taste. Communicating with this, by means of a sliding panel, so ingeniously contrived as to be known to but few of the inmates of the family, was a beautiful bed-chamber, most tastefully fitted up; and beyond this, and accessible only from this room, was a smaller apartment, arranged as an oratory, having a mahogany reading desk, a magnificent ebony crucifix, an *escritoire* inlaid with mother of pearl, and some hanging shelves, upon which were arranged a number of elegantly-bound volumes—the entire suite of rooms was handsomely carpeted, and abounded with indications of female taste and refinement.

Having seated themselves upon a sofa placed at one side of the private parlor, and conversed for some time upon general subjects, the Superior arose, and, taking from a small sideboard a richly cut decanter of old wine, with some glasses, and a plate of delicious spiced cakes, which she had prepared with her own hands, she placed these upon a table which stood in front of the sofa, and invited the General to partake of them, and to join her in a game at chess, of which she knew he was passionately fond, and for which she had arranged the materials before him.

They thus occupied themselves until the convent clock tolled the hour of eleven, when the Father General, pleading a headache, and affectionately as well as most gracefully saluting the Mother Superior, asked leave to retire to his own apartment, which was

situated on the first floor, and elegantly furnished. This the latter rather ungraciously granted, with an air which showed that she was disappointed; and the priest retired.

Meanwhile, the note had been handed to Sister Theresa, by the deformed nun, and had greatly excited her mind by its contents.

"Meet me in the garden, near the plum tree, alone, at midnight:"—she repeated, for the twentieth time, as she sat in her room, with the note in her hand, thinking over its contents.

"What can he mean?" And then, as she thought that his intentions towards her might be those of evil flashed across her mind, she burst into tears, exclaiming—

"What have I done or said, that could lead him to think so meanly of me?"

"Have I not spurned the base overtures of my own confessor, Father Jerome?"

"Gracious heaven, into what hands have I fallen?"

Here a sense of her helpless condition, as a poor, friendless, and unprotected nun, was forced upon her mind, with such terrible conviction, that she became fearfully agitated; and throwing herself upon the bed, she wept as if her very heart would break.

"O that I had known all this," she said, her voice broken by sobs—"before I took the vows!—How sadly have I been deceived!"

"O, what shall I do? Where shall I hide myself? My honour, my life, is hunted by those who made me vow eternal chastity and purity!"

"But recently I was degraded to the condition of a menial, I know not why; and now this priest, as if he were master of an eastern harem, and I his Georgian slave, bids me meet him alone in the garden at midnight! Good God, what does this mean?"

"O that I were once more within reach of my dear father! how gladly would I fly to him for protection!"

She again burst into tears, and wept most bitterly: then, as a sudden thought occurred to her mind, she started up, exclaiming—

"It may be so. Perhaps Sister Martina may have intimated to him that I have been badly treated, and, in order to know all about it, without the danger of being interrupted by the Mother Superior, or in order to keep her from knowing that he had spoken to me on the subject, he may have selected this time and place with a view to secrecy. It must be so."

The more she thought about the matter, the more fully convinced she became that this was the true state of the case; and while she felt grateful to the good Father, as she now called him, when she regarded him as intending to befriend her, she reproached herself for having thought so ungenerously of him. The idea of being revenged on the Mother Superior, dried up her tears; and she determined to keep the appointment.

It now wanted but a few minutes to twelve; and, wrapping herself up in a heavy shawl, to guard against the chilly midnight air, and, with her heart beating wildly within her breast, she left her room, and noiselessly creeping down the great stairway, pausing at almost every step, as she fancied that some one had discovered her; while she started at the very pantings of her own bosom, she reached the back door of the hall; where, finding the key in the lock, she turned it with great caution, and then, slowly opening one side of the folding leaves, so as to avoid any

Mysteries of a Convent.

125

creaking which might give notice of her movements, and looking out intently to see if any one was passing about, she went forth, quietly drawing the door to behind her, and, with quick and silent step, hastened to the garden. It was a moonlight night, but hazy and somewhat cloudy.

On arriving at the spot which had been designated in the note, she was surprised to find that there was no one there but herself; and she was about to conclude that she was the victim of some treacherous plot, when she beheld the Father General rapidly approaching her. On reaching her, he extended his hand, in the kindest manner, saying, as he did so :

"Thanks, Sister Theresa, for this evidence of your confidence in your Father General. I was half afraid that you would not meet me here, at this lonely hour; and that I should be deprived of the opportunity of doing you a kindness. But," added he, perceiving that she trembled as he spoke to her, "fear not, my child; I mean you no harm; but will protect you from all injury and insult."

Reassured by these words, which she believed to be sincere; and feeling ashamed of her previous misgivings with regard to the Father's intentions, which now seemed to be so wholly unfounded, the nun thanked him for his kind consideration, and said—

"I have every confidence in the honour of the Father General, and cannot suppose that he would betray that confidence."

"Never," replied the wily Jesuit, who quickly perceived the change that had been wrought in the feelings of the trusting girl; for she no longer trembled, nor seemed disposed, as at first, to withdraw her hand from his.

"I have heard," he continued, "no matter how nor from whom, of the cruel conduct of the Superior towards you, recently; and I wish you to tell me, if you can, why she did so?"

"I know not," replied Sister Theresa. "I have endeavoured faithfully to perform every known duty, and to comply, as far as I could, with every rule of the institution. I have always treated the Mother Superior with marked respect; rendering instant obedience to her every command; and I cannot imagine why she suddenly, and without assigning any reason whatever for it, inflicted so severe a punishment upon me, and degraded me so in the eyes of the whole convent. Had the punishment been continued for a short time longer, I should have been seriously ill, for my health is but delicate at the best."

"When did she order you to this menial service?" asked the Father, eagerly.

"On the very day that you left the convent, on your last visit before the present," replied the nun.

"I see it all," muttered the priest, as if communing with his own thoughts; "it is as plain as it can be. Poor fool, to think that I belong to her, soul and body, and that I cannot be civil to a pretty nun, but that instantly, as soon as my back is turned, the poor nun must be a victim of her jealousy and wrath. Pshaw!" he continued, as if still talking to himself; "she shall suffer for this." Then, seeming to recollect himself, he said to Sister Theresa.

"Never mind. I am your friend and protector. I have the right and the power to shield you from oppression and from in-

sult; and, should your feelings ever be outraged again, I require you to let me know it at once, that I may take the necessary steps to redress the wrong. Meanwhile, say nothing, but leave this matter in my hands."

"I know not how sufficiently to thank you for your kindness," responded the nun; her heart really touched by what she believed to be the sincere friendship of the Father General, and fully prepared to feel all its force, by the lonely life that she had led—a life so full of disappointment as to the expectations which she had formed when entering upon the religious duties of a nun—and, with the tears standing upon her cheek, she continued, "but if you will show me how I may evince my gratitude, I will most cheerfully do it."

"You can show your gratitude, Sister Theresa, by loving me," replied the priest, in low and thrilling tones, gently putting his arm around her waist, and drawing her to him, on pretence, as he said, of protecting her from the cool night air; but, as he perceived that she shrank from his embrace, he added,

"Fear not, my child; I love you too well to mean you any harm."

He then entered into a lengthy conversation with her, touching her studies, her employments, and what not that was likely to interest her mind, and inspire her with confidence; and then, telling her it was time that they should return to the house, he inquired the number of her room, and its position in the building; saying to her that, on the following night, he would visit her there, in order to instruct her how to spend her time in the future, so as to prepare herself to occupy the position of Mother Superior, in her own turn, when she should be a little older and more experienced.

Meanwhile, the wily priest kept his arm around Sister Theresa, and, walking thus to the house, he gave her what he called the kiss of peace, at parting, and each sought their own room; the former feeling assured that he had gained a victory; the latter, as she had never done before in all her life; her soul a sea of tumultuous emotion. The Father General soon fell asleep and dreamed of beautiful nuns and bowers of roses; the unhappy Sister Theresa laid awake for hours, tossing restlessly upon her couch. She felt that she was caught in the coils of the priest, and that it was as useless for her to struggle against what seemed to be her inevitable destiny, as for the poor fly, caught in the meshes of the spider's web, to attempt to escape its impending fate. She felt that she was powerless in the hands of an all-powerful foe; and, though she deeply regretted having kept the appointment, and met the Father in the garden, yet, strange to say, she did not after all wish to avoid the meeting on the following night. In truth, the arch magician had infused his poison into her young soul; and his foul necromancy had thrown a spell upon her, which she no longer desired, or had the strength, to break. She was doomed, and yet she trembled not; she was in chains, and still she hugged those chains to her breast, and seemed to delight in wearing them. The priest had silenced her monitory fears; had thrown her off her guard; had awakened feelings of gratitude, which were easily transmuted to others of a warmer nature; and the hellish work was well nigh completed—the consummation waited but for the occasion.

Mysteries of a Convent.

127

Oh, ye self-annointed, self-exalted priests, that put yourselves "above all that is called God, or that is worshipped;" "sitting in the temple of God, showing yourselves that ye are God;" "whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;" ye "false prophets;" ye "ravening wolves in sheep's clothing;" ye "blind guides," that "compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and, when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves;" ye smooth-faced hypocrites that devour virgin innocence, "and, for a pretence, make long prayers;" ye priests, that work your damning deeds, in the dark shrouding of the midnight hour; and then, with unblushing countenance, go forth in broad day, and look honesty in the eye; when the disparting veil of eternity shall be drawn aside, and the judgment trump shall summon you to stand before the dread bar of Him whose searching gaze now penetrates your convent walls, your monastic cells, your dark hiding-places, where works "the mystery of iniquity," and reads all your damnable crimes as though they stood emblazoned in the face of the noontide sun; ah! how will ye quail then! how will ye seek to escape the fearful inspection of that hour, in the presence of a congregated universe, and unbidden try to hide yourselves, and your hellish deeds, in the depths of eternal night! But know, "ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, ye cannot escape the damnation of hell;" "the Lord shall consume you with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy you with the brightness of his coming." Babylon "shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her."

CHAPTER XII.

Interregnum—The family of Mr. Moreton—Discussion on the education given in boarding-schools.

THE reader must now suffer himself to be carried forward over an interval of three years, and be presented to an interesting family circle, whose members will have a large share in the scenes of the following pages.

Mr. and Mrs. Moreton were the parents of an interesting family, consisting of two sons and three daughters, living in the town of —, in the state of Pennsylvania, about eighty miles from the city of New York.

Mary, the eldest of the five children, was a handsome brunette, just entered into her seventeenth year, and had been wholly educated in her native town. Julia, the next in age, was fourteen, and gifted with strong natural powers of mind, but not as handsome as her sister Mary. Mrs. Moreton was a lady of excellent judgment and refined manners, but, like her husband,—who was a merchant, in very comfortable circumstances—not a member of any church. Having received a better education than her companion, she had, in matters of this sort, acquired considerable influence over him; while, with the sagacity and prudence of a business man, he looked narrowly to the expenses, and was, to a certain extent, liable to the charge of penuriousness; yet he dear-

ly loved his family, and was willing to incur any reasonable outlay, for anything he thought would promote their happiness, or secure their advancement in life.

One winter evening, after tea, when the young children had been sent to the nursery, Mary having gone to a party at a neighbour's, and Julia being seated at a table by herself, engaged in preparing her lessons for the next day, Mr. and Mrs. Moreton were sitting in their snug back parlour, by a blazing fire, talking over domestic matters, when the following conversation occurred between them:

"I think, Mr. Moreton, that we ought to send Julia to a good boarding school. She is fast growing up to womanhood; her teachers here cannot instruct her much further; and, besides, there are many advantages to be enjoyed at such a school, which she cannot possibly have at home."

"Why so? Have we not good teachers in our town, as good as any where else? I am sure that Mr. Treadwell has advanced Julia very rapidly; and I heard you tell Mrs. Winslow, the other day, that she had learned more, in the same length of time, under his instruction, than from any other teacher to whom she had ever been sent."

"Very true, my dear, and yet I discover that Julia is greatly interrupted in her studies, by the company which her sister receives; and when visitors are in the drawing-room with Mary, Julia seems to think it very hard, indeed, that she must sit up stairs, and study. I find, too, that her head is full of dress, and jewellery, and parties, and beaux, young as she is; and, when she passes through the streets on her way to school, she sees a great deal to divert her mind from her books. Besides, these mixed schools may do well enough for younger children, but Julia is too old to go any longer to one where boys and girls are taught together. In short, I think it high time that she should be sent from home, to a good boarding school, for at least two years."

"Well, but I do not see what you would gain by sending her to such a school, even on your own showing. Will she not be as fond of dress there as here, and will she not find quite as much to distract her mind from study?"

"Certainly not. In a well-regulated boarding school, every thing is taken care of, and provided for, even to the minutest details. Extravagance in dress, and fondness of display, are discouraged as much as possible; and, indeed, there are no incentives or opportunities for either, since the young ladies are seldom seen upon the streets, and the visits of young men are forbidden: while, on the other hand, by means of a systematic arrangement of time—a useful occupation being found for every hour;—the presence of teachers of the very best abilities, who have adopted the business as a profession, and not as a merely temporary means of support; and the stimulus to study which is furnished by the competition of a number of schoolmates, for the honours of the institution, a healthful ambition is excited, and habits are formed, which not only greatly facilitate the acquirements of a thorough education, but are of essential service in after days, when school-books are laid aside, and the sterner duties of life make hourly demands upon our industry, patience, and fortitude."

"And still it seems to me that, if the same system and discipline were established at home, which you say are to be met with

Mysteries of a Convent.

129

in these boarding schools, and whose importance I readily admit, the same results might be secured, and certainly at much less expense."

"Impossible, Mr. Moreton! how can I, in the midst of home distractions, and with such a family as I have, adopt any such course? The house is to be kept; the younger children are to be attended to; company to be entertained; visits to be returned; Mary requires a large share of my time and care; for her education, conducted entirely at home, is exceedingly defective; and this reminds me of one most important advantage that is derived from these schools,—the early formation of habits of *self-reliance*. Now, you know what a baby Mary is; and yet she is seventeen. She cannot move without me. All day long it is, 'Ma, show me how to do this;'—'Ma, do go to such a place with me, or out shopping;'—'Ma, will you fix my hair, or adjust my dress?'—'Ma, will you just go into the parlour with me to see my company?' I cannot go alone.' I do verily believe that it would be the same thing if she were married, and that she would not be willing to go to housekeeping without me. It is not so with Miss Ramsey, or Miss Paterson, who were both playmates of Mary's, when they were children, and you know that they were educated at boarding schools. They were amiable, modest, and accomplished young ladies; and yet they make their own dresses; assist their mother in keeping house; are handy at almost every thing; are always self-possessed and agreeable in their manners; and, for all I can see, love their parents just as fondly as Mary does hers; while they are not dependent upon their mammas, as she is upon me. I do not know what Mary would do if I were to be taken away from her, or what she will do when she is married."

"Well, my dear, I see you have thought a great deal more about these things than I have; and I am therefore willing to try the experiment, next spring, for one session. If the result is satisfactory, we will continue Julia at some good boarding-school until she graduates; if not, she must come home, and finish her education here."

"But, Mr. Morton, believe me, that is not the way to try the experiment, as you call it; it does not afford time enough to do the matter justice; and I really believe that one session only would be both time and money thrown away. Send her with the expectation of continuing for one year, or not at all."

"Be it so, then; but where shall we send her? Have you made choice of any school, in your mind?"

"I have been thinking of two schools; but really so far as I have any means of judging, there appears to be but little, if any, difference between them. Both have their ministers of high standing, who have employed, as assistants, the best teachers, I am told, within their reach; and have equal facilities, I suppose, for the education of those who may be sent to them. The one is at Philadelphia, and the other near New York; and, as the former is rather more convenient for us, as well as cheaper than the other, I should prefer it:—besides, it is in our own State."

"Ah!—these Protestant schools are too expensive for me, my dear; I cannot afford to send Julia to one of them. Why not send her to one of the Catholic schools?"

"Mr. Morton, you astonish me!—Send her to a Catholic school! Would you have our Julia to be made a Catholic?"

“And why, pray, should that be the result? I do not see that it follows, as a necessary result.”

“It may not as a necessary result, but it appears to me to be a very natural one. I must confess that my Protestant education inclines me to look upon Romish institutions with a very suspicious eye; and my observation in life has but confirmed my prejudice on this subject, if prejudice it can be properly termed. Did not Miss Williams, after having been at a Catholic school for about a year, write home to her mother, for permission to be baptized by a priest, and join the church? And you recollect that Miss Beaumont, when at our house, on her way to the nunnery school, where she had been for a year or two, told you that she believed the Roman Catholic to be the only true religion; giving as her reason that it was more probable that the translation of the Bible, which was made by the Pope and his Cardinals, should be truer than that made by one man, King James of England; and when you asked her where she had got that precious piece of information, she replied that sister Agatha had told her so. And yet the parents of both these young ladies are strict Protestants, and members of the Presbyterian Church. You, doubtless, remember, too, to have heard, also, of a young lady, whose name I do not recollect, but who was the daughter of Protestant parents, and who, having graduated at a Catholic school, determined to become a nun, and refused to leave the institution, even to pay a farewell visit to her friends, before separating herself for ever from them.” Indeed I have never conversed with Protestants who had been educated by Catholic teachers, that would suffer one word to be said, in their hearing, in disparagement of that church. Now all this confirms me in the fear that, if our daughter should be sent to a Catholic school, she will either, become a member of that faith, or be so weakened in her attachment to her own, as seriously to be injured by it, if, indeed, the result do not tend to infidelity.”

“Well, my dear, you are certainly very eloquent on the subject, and yet you have failed to convince me that your fears have any other foundation than prejudice; and while, if I thought there was any real danger, I should be quite as unwilling as yourself to expose Julia to it, I am convinced, I must give my preference to that school which costs the least, provided the educational advantages are equal, and I presume they are. I therefore prefer that Julia should go to the nunnery school.”

“It does seem to me, Mr. Moreton, that there must be some mistake as to the superior cheapness of the Catholic schools, *in fact*, while I admit that *in appearance* they are so. Are you sure that they are cheaper in the end?”

“I have seen and compared the circulars put forth by both sides; and certainly so far as these, in their respective statements of terms, &c., afford proper data upon which to form an opinion, the Catholic schools seem to have the decided advantage: but I am aware that, after all, it is exceedingly difficult to arrive at the truth of the matter in this way. The only sure method of determining the question, is to compare the bill as made out and paid at the close of the sessions.”

“Yes—and I know that many parents have been greatly disappointed when they called for their bills, and found them so much higher than they had expected, by reason of *extra charges*,

Mysteries of a Convent.

131

as more than to equal the difference in the apparent cost of education at these Catholic schools, as set forth in these circulars. And then, there is such a thing, you know, as finding a cheap article of little real value after you have bought it, when a small addition to the outlay at the time of purchase would have bought one infinitely superior, and of permanent worth.

"Well, my dear, it grows late: suppose we defer the further consideration of this matter for a few days, until I shall return from New York, where I must go, next week, for goods."

So saying, the subject was dropped for the present; and, Mary having returned from the party, after a lively conversation upon the incidents of the evening that she had spent at their neighbour's, the family retired for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Moreton visits New York—His conversation with Mr. Vandusen—Its effect upon Mr. Moreton—Mr. Vandusen's letter to the Mother Superior.

DURING the following week, Mr. Moreton went to New York, to purchase goods; and, while sitting in the counting-room of Messrs. Vandusen and Co., with whom he dealt largely, waiting for his bills to be made out, the senior partner remarked to him—

"By the way, Mr. Moreton, you have a family, have you not?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply—"a wife and five children; three of whom are daughters."

"Where are you educating them?" asked the merchant.

"The oldest has finished her education," returned Mr. Moreton—"but the next oldest ought to be sent to a boarding-school somewhere, and I must confess I am greatly at a loss where to place her. I would like to send her to the Catholic school at Bethlehem, because it is so much cheaper than our Protestant schools; but Mrs. Moreton is so opposed to trusting her daughter in the hands of the Catholics, that I do not like to say positively she shall go there."

"It is very natural, indeed, that the women should feel thus opposed to these Catholic schools. My wife, for instance, was violently opposed to them; but they are, after all, the best schools, my dear sir, depend upon it. Our oldest daughter has been for two years at the convent school, some fifty miles from this city; notwithstanding the opposition of her mother, who reluctantly yielded to my wishes in the matter; and I assure you that she is making most astonishing progress in her studies. Mrs. Vandusen, finding this to be the case, has become quite reconciled, and now sees the folly of her former dislike to these institutions."

"But you have a very excellent boarding school in your own city, I am told, conducted by a Presbyterian minister; I should have thought that you would have patronized that school, as you belong to that denomination," remarked Mr. Moreton, in an interrogative tone.

"So I do belong to that denomination, my dear sir, but I do not feel as if I were under any obligation, for that reason, to pay fifty per cent. more for the education of my daughter at a Presbyterian school, than I would have to pay at one belonging to

Mysteries of a Convent.

the Catholics. These Protestant schools are too high for me; Mr. Moreton; I cannot stand their unconscionable prices."

"That is just what I told Mrs. Moreton;"—was the reply, in a tone that evinced the gratification of the speaker at finding that he was not mistaken in his views, as expressed to his wife; for he was exceedingly tenacious of his opinions—"but she was under the impression that the *extras* which are charged in the bills, made the Catholic schools the most expensive, after all."

"It is a mistake, my dear sir, depend upon it,"—said the merchant—"at least such has not been my experience; and the 'truth of the pudding'—you know the rest... I surely ought to know all about it, after two years' experience."

Mr. Moreton felt perfectly satisfied upon the point of expense, but asked Mr. Vandusen to tell him, candidly, what he thought about the efforts of the priests and nuns to proselyte Protestant children to the Romish faith; and whether he had any reason to believe that they had tampered with the religious faith of his daughter.

"It is all humbug, sir;"—replied the latter, with some warmth of manner,— "the result of sectarian bigotry. I am astonished, as a practical man, that sensible people should have raised such a hue and cry about the proselyting disposition of the Catholics. I assure you that I do not believe a word of it."

Mr. Moreton thanked the merchant for his information, and expressed his determination to send his daughter, the next spring, to the Catholic school at Bethlehem.

"But," replied Mr. Vandusen, "is not that too near home, sir? My advice to you would be, not to send your daughter where she would be anxious to come home every week, because it was so short a distance to travel, and where she would be dissatisfied if she did not get to visit her friends frequently; but to place her at school at such a distance as to make it inconvenient for her to go home oftener than once in six months, since her mind would be undisturbed by the proximity of her relations, and her progress in her studies would consequently be the greater;" and assured Mr. Moreton that he considered the school to which he sent his own daughter, the very best in all the country.

Convinced by his arguments, Mr. Moreton thanked the merchant again, and, having settled his bills, bade him farewell, and returned to the hotel where he was stopping.

No sooner had he left the counting-room, than Mr. Vandusen, with great glee expressed in his countenance, sat down at his desk, and wrote the following letter, which he despatched to the post office.

"New York, December 6, 1810.

"To the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Annunciation.
"DEAR MADAM,

"I have just had a long conversation with one of my customers, a Mr. Charles Moreton, of Pennsylvania. He is a wealthy merchant, having two daughters to be educated; one of whom he will no doubt send to you next spring; and the other, in due time, if he should be pleased. I found his head full of the usual notions about *extras*, and *proselyting*, and all that, but succeeded in sweeping the cobwebs from his brain. I think you may certainly calculate upon his bringing you his daughter in the spring. When she arrives, you will credit my account with twenty dol-

Mysteries of a Convent.

133

lars, according to our contract. I hope my daughter's health is good, and that she progresses well in her studies. The affair of the —— comes on swimmingly. I shall, without doubt, get that money secured to the order.

"With the highest consideration, I remain

"Your unworthy servant,

"CONRAD VANDUSEN."

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Moreton's sanguine partiality to Catholic schools—Mrs. Moreton's fears and doubts—Julia sent as a boarder to the Convent of the Annunciation—Mr. and Mrs. Moreton attend the first examination—Engaging manners of the Mother Superior—Extras—The parents receive alarming intelligence—Distress and anxiety—Mr. Moreton hastens to snatch his child from her impending doom—Arrives at the Convent, and demands to see his daughter—Falsehood and treachery of the Mother Superior—Julia rushes into her father's arms, and is borne by him from the hatred Convent.

WHEN Mr. Moreton returned home, he related to his wife the conversation which had taken place between himself and Mr. Vandusen; laying great stress upon the fact that the latter was a member of the Presbyterian Church,—than which none had a more inveterate hostility towards the Catholics, or had done more to expose the errors of their doctrines, or the enormity of their practices; and, as he said, it spoke volumes in refutation of the slanders which had been heaped upon the Catholics, that a Presbyterian should bear such testimony as he had borne to the excellence of the convent school, the cheapness of its terms, and the absence of intention or effort to proselyte the children of Protestant parents. Withal, the fact that he was sending his own daughter to this same school, and his highly respectable standing as a merchant, forbade the idea of any insincerity, or want of sufficient intelligence upon the subject.

Still Mrs. Moreton was not convinced, in spite of all this array of imposing testimony; and, while her husband gently insinuated that she was very obstinate in her prejudices, she could not wholly rid her mind of apprehension, or be brought to believe that there was no real danger incurred in sending Julia to a Catholic school.

But finding that it was useless to argue the matter any further with Mr. Moreton, she reluctantly yielded the point; hoping that she might be able to fortify Julia's mind so strongly against the wiles and sophistry of a crafty priesthood, so that she might safely pass the fiery ordeal which she fully believed was about to be placed before her child; and when, in the following spring, the time fixed for the departure of Julia with her father for the convent school, arrived; and the vehicle which bore them away, receded from her view, she returned from the street door into her sitting room, with a heavy heart; feeling as though a dark cloud, surcharged with evil, had gathered over herself and family.

On his return, after having placed Julia at school, his wife had a thousand anxious questions to be answered; all of which he answered so readily, and with such apparent satisfaction to him-

self, that her fears were quieted, and hope gained the ascendant. He informed her that, on their arrival at the convent, after a fatiguing but rather pleasant journey of four days, the Mother Superior, whom he represented as a lovely French woman, in the prime of life, and of most elegant manners, received him with the greatest kindness, and throwing her arms around Julia, kissed her affectionately, welcoming her to the institution, and promising to be a mother to her, while she continued there; that Julia had found one or two old acquaintances among the pupils, and seemed to be satisfied; and that, on his expressing a wish that his daughter's principles should in no way be interfered with, she assured him, in the most frank and positive manner, that he need not entertain any fears on that subject, as they had no desire to make proselytes of the children of Protestant parents.

"In short," added Mr. Moreton, "she is one of the most agreeable ladies I have ever met with; and I feel well assured that our daughter is placed in good hands."

Five months passed away, and the summer vacation came on. Mr. Moreton and his lady had attended the examination; and, although Julia's progress did not meet their expectation, yet they supposed that this might be attributed to the novelty of the position in which she had been placed—away from home, among strangers, for the first time in her life—and they indulged the hope that she would do better, the next session.

On calling for his bill, he was surprised to find that it was larger than he had anticipated. There was so much charged as an *extra* item for this, and so much for that; so much for fuel, and for room rent, and for stationery, and for medical attendance, although she had not been sick an hour during the entire time; and so much for store goods, &c.; amounting in all to some thirty or forty per cent. more than he had expected. Unwilling, however, to dispute the account; fascinated as he was by the elegant manners of the Mother Superior, and gratified by the deference and respect which were shown to himself and wife, by all the inmates of the family, he paid the bill, without a word of complaint; resolving in his own mind, that for the future, he would take care to avoid all extras, by furnishing every thing from home, as far as practicable, and by prohibiting the opening of store accounts for his daughter's use. Besides, he prided himself, as a business man, upon his tact and foresight; and, Mrs. Moreton being present, when the settlement was made with the accountant, though she was engaged in conversation with the Mother Superior, he was very unwilling that she should know that he had been outwitted; especially when so much had been said on this very point, prior to placing Julia in the institution.

Julia appeared pleased to revisit her home; but her mother was pained to find that she did not manifest as great an attachment to it, as before leaving it for school; and that she more than once wished for the time to come when her father was to take her back. She found, too, that her daughter loved to talk of the Mother Superior, and of sister this, and sister that, frequently extolling their great kindness to her, their piety, and their happy condition; seeming to think that the life of a nun was the very beautiful, with her, of human happiness on earth. When Mrs. Moreton would attempt to combat this notion, she found Julia disposed to be wayward, and to resent the attempt as an insult, by impli-

Mysteries of a Convent.

135

cation, offered to those whom she so highly esteemed. Knowing her impulsive nature, however, and how every novelty that pleased her was wont to effect her mind, she thought this a mere girlish effervescence of momentary excitement, and that after a while, when the novelty had worn off, she would see things in a truer light.

At length came the day for Julia's return to school; and her mother, having given her much excellent advice, and made her promise to write, either to herself or to her father, once a fortnight, bade her adieu. Arrived at the convent, Mr. Moreton and Julia were received with similar demonstrations of kindness to those which had marked their first reception, while there seemed to be more of familiar cordiality in the attentions paid to them; and the former, having given the necessary instructions as to his daughter's expenses, left her; congratulating himself that he had effectually guarded against heavy bills, for the future.

The second session had expired, during which Julia's letters had been received regularly, in keeping with her promise; and, there being no vacation between that and the ensuing session, she did not come home, her father's business engagements preventing him from going to her; but, as her mother's anxiety about her was greatly quieted by the regularity with which her letters arrived, and the improvement both in style and penmanship which they indicated, it was determined that she should remain for the third term.

But after Julia had been thus at school, fifteen months, and when her parents were congratulating themselves upon the selection which they had made of a school for her—albeit Mr. Moreton had ascertained, beyond all question, that in point of economy he had gained nothing, since it had cost him something more, at this professedly cheap school, for the education of his daughter, thus far, than it would have cost him at Protestant schools, which had been denounced as being so unconscionably extravagant in their charges; a letter was received from Julia, which filled their minds with dismay and deep anxiety for the future. It was written at great length, evidently with studied care, and in a style so wholly different from her former letters, or from anything that might have been reasonably expected of her, as to convince them that she had not written it herself, but copied it from the dictation of others.

After thanking her parents, in very measured terms, for their care and affection hitherto manifested towards her, and particularly for having placed her at the convent school, where she had enjoyed so rare advantage, and spent the happiest period of her existence—she proceeded to state that, without any efforts having been made, on the part of her teachers, to bias her mind, or to change her religious faith, she had become convinced that the Catholic was the only true faith; that all beside was heresy; and that she felt it to be her imperative duty to join the Catholic church, and, at the proper age, to become a nun; but that the *respect*—that was the cold word which she addressed to her kind and affectionate parents—the respect which she entertained for them, constrained her to ask their consent, before she took so important a step—adding, that she hoped they would not withhold this, since, in that event, she must obey God rather than man, and should proceed, in spite of their refusal.

136 Mysteries of a Convent.

None but those who live only for their children, and feel that these constitute the end and object of all their plans and purposes, can imagine the feelings which rushed tumultuously into the bosoms of the father and mother, as they perused this harrowing letter. They seemed to themselves to have been sleeping, in fancied security, on the very brink of a frightful precipice, and to have suddenly awakened to find it crumbling under them, and ready to carry them with it, in its headlong plunge into the yawning abyss beneath. The mother sat in speechless grief; while the scalding tears ran down her cheeks. The father, feeling that his own penuriousness had rendered him deaf to the warnings of his wife, when her fears led her, in the outset, to deprecate the step that had wrought this mischief, was self-reproached and self-condemned; yet, recollecting that the interposition of his authority might and could avert the impending evil, did not give way to his feelings, but stood pale, stern, and with contracted brow, thinking what course he had best pursue. For some minutes, neither uttered a word.

It was noon—and the unfasted meal had for some time stood unnoticed on the board: no member of that unusually so happy family felt any inclination to partake of it. There they sat, as if death, or worse than death, had snatched away one beloved of all. At length the mother, with a strong effort, broke the painful silence, and said, in the tones of one nerved by urgent resolution to a decisive step.

“Mr. Moreton, we must go to Julia. She cannot resist the appeal of a mother’s love. We will save her yet.”

“We will start at once,” was the prompt reply of the determined father; and, giving immediate orders that the carriage should be got ready, they were soon on their way to rescue their child from the imminent ruin which threatened.

Having travelled as rapidly as possible, they arrived at the convent, in the afternoon of the third day from home; and, while the mother remained in the carriage at the outside gate, in accordance with the plan which had been previously adopted for their government, Mr. Moreton hastened up the long avenue, heavily shaded with large forest trees, through which it wound its tortuous way—fit emblem of the practices of those who dwelt within that dark and gloomy pile of imprisonment and shame; and, knocking at the hall-door, demanded to see the Superior. The sister porter invited him into the parlour, where presently he was joined by the lady whose elegant manners had so fascinated his judgment, on their first interview, but whom he was now disposed to regard as the most treacherous of her sex; since she had betrayed the sacred trust committed to her hands by confiding parents, for he could not doubt that this woman was at the bottom of his daughter’s defection.

She met him with unusual affability, and an appearance of the utmost gratification at seeing him; and was proceeding to make inquiry as to the health of Mrs. Moreton and the family, when he interrupted her by saying,—

“I wish to see my daughter, madam.”

With a most winning smile upon her countenance, the Superior replied—

“I regret very much that you cannot now see Julia, sir; she has been somewhat indisposed, but has fallen asleep: and it would be injurious to her to awake her.”

Mysteries of a Convent.

137

Satisfied that this was a mere ruse, on the part of the Superior, to gain time, or to accomplish some other purpose of her own, the indignant father, throwing off the restraint which, until this moment, he had maintained upon himself, cried, in tones of great excitement:

"My daughter, Madam; I want my daughter. Where is she?"

"You cannot see your daughter, sir," replied the Superior, with cool self-possession, still retaining a bland smile upon her countenance. "She is ill in bed, and cannot be seen."

"I am her father, and must see her;"—and, as he thus spoke, with increased energy of manner, he took a step forward, as though he would force his way to the apartment of his daughter.

The Superior, however, anticipating his purpose, instantly rose, and, intercepting him, stood full in his way, between him and the door. Then, drawing herself up to her full height, while she assumed an air of offended dignity,—a slight flush of excitement playing upon her really beautiful countenance,—answered quietly, but firmly—

"I rule here, sir; and I say to you that you cannot see your daughter. I say to you, further, that *she* does not wish to see *you*."

"Does not wish to see her father? What does this mean?"—inquired Mr. Moreton, his whole manner indicating the greatest surprise and agitation of soul.

"Because she has renounced you, together with all the vanities of this sinful world, and claims the protection of this sanctuary;"—haughtily answered the Superior.

"It is false!"—thundered the outraged parent, who, now wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, was about to push the Superior aside, and would doubtless have committed some act of violence, but, just at this moment, his daughter, who had by some means learned the arrival of her father, or heard his voice in altercation with the Mother Superior, rushed into the room, her dress greatly disordered, and, passing by the latter, who tried in vain to arrest her, threw herself into his arms, crying, in accents which thrilled to his inmost soul—"Father, save me! O, save me!"

Clasping her to his bosom with an energy that mocked all interference, for he was a powerful man, the father cast a look of proud defiance upon the no longer mild and placid Superior—who, with the countenance of a demon, and the eye of an infuriated tigress, that had just had snatched from her jaws the prey which she was about to share with the whelps, advanced as though she would tear Julia from the grasp of her natural protector;—and, pushing her outstretched arm aside, hastened with the almost fainting child to her mother; who, meanwhile, too remote to see or to hear what had passed, waited in great anxiety the return of her husband to the carriage.

The reader can imagine how pleasant was the surprise to Mrs. Moreton, and what must have been the revulsion of her feelings, when Julia, throwing herself upon her bosom, and putting her arms around her neck, cried, in a voice almost choked with emotion—"Forgive me, my dearest mother; I will never leave you again."

Driving rapidly away, Mr. Moreton went to the neighbouring village, where he handed to a friend a sum of money necessary

to pay his daughter's bill at the convent, together with an order for the delivery of her clothing; and then turned his horses' heads towards home.

CHAPTER XV.

Julia's narrative—Specious and artful conduct of the Mother Superior—How the letter was wrote.

DURING the journey homeward, and after they had reached that dear spot,—over which had so recently gathered thick gloom and deep sorrow, but where sunshine and gladness now reigned,—Julia related to her parents what had transpired during the time that she had spent at the convent school, the most prominent of which is here summarily laid before the reader.

It seems that, on her arrival at the convent, when first brought there by her father, Julia became a great favourite, both with the nuns and with the boarders. Her vivacity, her talent at repartee, her general amiability, and her studiousness, gained the respect, and won the affection, of all, from the Mother Superior down to the lowest menial. The former soon fixed upon her as a suitable subject of which to make a useful and valuable acquisition to the order; and, with the quick perception of a strong mind trained under Jesuit influence, readily discovered the prominent traits in her disposition, and devised the plan by means of which she might best accomplish her design; yet, with all the cunning and wariness of her class, she so completely disguised her real purpose, that Julia only became aware of it at the very last moment, as it were, and then only through the instrumentality of one who had previously fallen a victim to the same artifice, and who perished in the same coils.

During the first session of the school, the Mother Superior did nothing more than gain the affections of the young girl; well knowing that this must be a first step, and that with these her confidence would be acquired as a necessary consequence. In order to do this, she treated her with distinguished kindness; allowing her many privileges which were not granted to others; and encouraging her frequent visits, in the evenings, to her private parlour—save when the Father General came to see her—where she was sure to find something nice to eat, and something that would interest her mind; her taste in both respects being carefully consulted. She placed in the hands of Julia, rare and beautiful pictures, representing the miracles and prominent incidents in the lives of the Saints of the Church and would have her to read aloud interesting passages from their history. She would also speak to Julia of these; while the silvery notes of her voice would fall like sweet music upon the ear, and the girl's enthusiastic soul would be enrapt by the magic of her descriptive and narrative powers. All day long, Julia's studies were enlivened, and her tasks made lighter, by the anticipation of spending an evening in the Superior's private apartment, where every thing was so snug and so comfortable.

But all this time not a word was said about the peculiar dogmas of the Romish religion, save in the most careless, and, as it were, accidental manner; not a disrespectful allusion to the Protes-

Mysteries of a Convent.

139

tant faith was pronounced at all, it was with the utmost apparent kindness of feeling, and with the greatest show of consideration for those who bore it. Neither was Julia required to comply, at any time, with Romish forms and usages, further than was generally expected from all Protestant pupils; but, if a peculiarly interesting or imposing service was to be performed, her curiosity to witness it was aroused, beforehand, by slow and gradual approaches which wholly concealed from view the real object; and, after it was over, it would be introduced in the most natural manner imaginable, as a topic of conversation, and so as to lead an ardent and imaginative mind to inquire into its purport.

Thus, without appearing to seek it, frequent opportunity was afforded for the explanation of Catholic dogmas, and their implantation in Julia's tender mind, before she was aware of it. No wonder, then, if with such a nature as hers, impulsive, confiding, and enthusiastic; fond of novelty, and delighting in excitement; with so much around her to furnish aliment for her mental appetites; and, added to all this, the presence of a master spirit—wise, strongwilled, unscrupulous—which knew well how to control and adjust this complicated machinery for the production of the largest results in the accomplishment of its own occult purposes; Julia should have been so fully, yet unconsciously, trained by the Mother Superior, in the short space of five months, as to be made to think and feel just as the latter might will that she should; and to be ripe for the development of her plans, on Julia's return from home, at the close of the summer vacation. No wonder, too, that, under the circumstances of false colouring which had been thrown around her, she should regard the life of a nun as being the fullest embodiment of human felicity; as all sunshine, without an obscuring cloud, or fitting rack, to dim for an instance its brightness.

On her return from home, however, after the vacation, the rich politician, into whose hands the unwary girl had so unfortunately fallen, began to narrow the circle of her toils, and to bring them to bear more directly upon the focal point of her schemings. The first object to be accomplished was to destroy her confidence in her own religious faith; and although this had, to a certain extent, been covertly but successfully, done, yet the completion of the work was to be cautiously effected, or great mischief to the plans of the Superior might be the result. The social evenings spent in her room afforded suitable opportunities for this; and, as it was more than likely that Julia would not return home before the expiration of ten months, time was not wanting. Besides, how really easy the task with a young girl who had been so imperfectly instructed, as she necessarily was, in the principles of her faith. Before the third month had elapsed, the end was gained:—Protestantism was rejected, and it became a light affair to substitute Romanism in its stead. On the day before the session closed, Julia was baptized in the chapel, and became a member of the Roman Catholic church.

All this time, there had been no compulsion. Led in silken fetters, Julia never for a moment supposed that she was captive to the iron will of another, but seemed to herself to have taken step by step, wholly of her own accord; until not only was effected what we have seen, but she had been made to believe that it was right and proper to conceal from her parents what had occurred.

Mysteries of a Convent.

Nay, more, that it was right and proper to deceive them as to the true state of her feelings, and make them conclude, from the tenor of her letters, that she was still a firm adherent to the faith of her ancestors; "the end—your devotion to the service of God and the Virgin," said the Mother Superior—"will sanctify the means;"—the deception of her best friends, her parents.

Now that she was a member of the Catholic church, she was more than ever in the power of the Superior, and subject to her control; while the latter, in her turn, found increased means of exercising that power, in the imposing ceremonies, the mystic symbols, the thrilling music, the demoralizing confessional, and the constant appeals made to the innate superstition of poor fallen human nature; indeed, in all that pertains to the ritual of that church. In these, Julia found excitement; in these, therefore, she took an enthusiastic delight; and whenever, on the reception of a letter from home, or from any other cause, old associations and old attachments would linger about the hearthstone of memory, and rekindle its embers, the Mother Superior, from whom she concealed nothing, would promptly but adroitly smother them, until she became completely weaned from all that were once most dear to her; and her great anxiety now was not to be recalled home, from the scenes and pursuits in which her happiness seemed to be so completely involved.

She was now in a fit state of mind to be influenced to take the remaining steps, and to be made a permanent member of the family in which she resided; in other words, to become a nun. As this was a step, however, in which she could be forcibly controlled by her parents, at least until she was of age; and as the Mother Superior had now gained all that was immediately necessary to the ultimate accomplishment of her great design; she determined to await the close of the ensuing session, which was to be her last, before anything further should be done; and, meanwhile, to do all in her power to confirm and establish Julia in her new faith.

Thus things progressed until within a few weeks of the termination of the third session, when the Mother Superior, having prepared a letter which she thought would answer the purpose, placed it in Julia's hands to be copied. After numerous alterations and corrections, which suggested themselves from time to time, had been made, this letter was finally sent to Mr. Moreton, but, by some unaccountable detention in the post office, did not reach him as soon as it should have done, by at least ten days. This delay was the salvation of Julia, as will be shown in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sister Theresa, her sufferings and death—Her dying warning to Julia—Its effect upon Julia—The Mother Superior's rage in the chamber of death—The Father General's base scheme to enrich the order—The Mother Superior in a dilemma.

It appears, from Julia's recital to her parents, that, while rambling over the convent building, one day, she found, lying upon a pallet of straw, with ragged and insufficient bed-clothing spread

Mysteries of a Convent.

141

over her, in a small room, in a remote and rather unoccupied portion of the vast pile, a poor nun, whose countenance bore the traces of great beauty, but who was fearfully wasted by disease and suffering. Discovering, on conversing with her, that she was greatly neglected by the members of the household, Julia requested, and obtained, permission, from the Mother Superior, to visit this nun, which was the more readily granted because the latter really knew nothing about the true condition of one who had long been lost sight of by her as an helpless and ruined victim, save as her name was from time to time reported upon the sick list. From that day on until the poor nun died, Julia spent an hour or more by her bed-side, every day, and occasionally sat up with her, a portion of the night. Her kindness to Sister Theresa—for that was the name of this poor nun, whom the reader will recollect as having had an interview with the Father General, in the convent garden at midnight—soon won her grateful affection; and, as her light footsteps would be heard daily ascending the stairs on her errand of mercy, Theresa's countenance would beam with gladness. Sometimes, when Julia would be seated by her bed-side, she would look up in her face, with a smile of heartfelt gratitude, and would press her hand earnestly, while the big tears would start to her eye, and trickle down her cheek, as she whispered a prayer to the Virgin, for blessings on her benefactress.

On the morning of the very day upon which Mr. Moreton reached the convent, as related in the chapter preceding the last, Julia paid her usual visit to her patient, as she called her, and was alarmed to find her a great deal worse than she had been previously. Taking her by the hand, Sister Theresa said to her, in tones of deep emotion,—“Dear Julia, I am dying: I feel that I cannot live much longer; and because I love you for your love to me, and for your charity to a poor deserted nun, I wish to give you a solemn charge, as from the lips of a dying woman; which it would embitter my last moments to withhold from you, while it is the best return I can make for your exceeding kindness to me. Never consent to become a nun.”

Julia started back, as though she had been stung by an adder, and seemed to doubt if she had heard aright, or as if she thought that the poor nun, might be out of her head.

Sister Theresa read her thoughts; and, again taking her hand, and pressing it earnestly in her own, repeated the charge in a still more solemn and impressive manner than before. Julia would have spoken, but the nun said to her—“Listen to me. I had thought that my melancholy story would have died with me; and, indeed, I know not that I shall have strength to relate it to you; yet, deeply indebted to you as I am, I cannot better employ my remaining strength than in communicating that which may save you from a fate like mine. In the narrative which I am about to give you, you will find abundant cause for the charge which has filled your mind with astonishment.”

“I am,” continued Theresa, “the only child of wealthy parents in the south, who placed me here, some years since, as a pupil in the convent school. For two years after my arrival, the Mother Superior lavished upon me acts of kindness similar to those which she, I know, has exhibited towards yourself and others, and with the same motives. By degrees—for I have not the strength to relate to you all of the particulars—she led me to

abandon my own Protestant faith, and to embrace Romanism—until, at the end of the second year, I found myself a novice, fully committed to take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—and eventually I became a nun; my parents, however, being kept in profound ignorance of the whole matter, until the final step had been irretrievably taken. My mother, as I have since learned accidentally, when informed of it, took to her bed, and never left it until carried to her grave. My father has more than once applied at the door of the convent, for permission to see me, but without my knowledge, and in my name has been refused; being told that I did not wish to see him; and, when it was too late, I have been told of his visit, for the purpose of harrowing my feelings, and making my sufferings the greater. I know not whether he is yet alive or not.” Here Sister Theresa’s tears interrupted her narrative; and she was compelled to pause, for a few minutes, while she gave vent to them. Then, resuming the story of her misfortunes, she said—

“After the imposing ceremony, which attending my adopting the religious habit, had been gone through with, and I had time to sit down, and calmly reflect upon what I had done, I found myself a prey to the keenest self-reproaches for my folly, and to irrepressible longings after my home and my dear friends. I found, too, that the manner of the Mother Superior was wholly changed towards me. She no longer invited me to her private parlour, where I had spent so many happy hours. She no longer met me with kind words and loving looks: but, in the place of these, had assumed towards me an aspect of cold and haughty control, and kept me at a most cruel distance. I was subjected to menial offices, to heavy tasks, and to severe penances, which seriously affected my health. I had no amusements, no relaxations—I was cut off from all those associations and endearments after which my heart yearned, and for the enjoyment of which I felt myself qualified by the possession of a warm and generous nature. In short, I was buried alive. In vain I sought for some one into whose bosom I could pour the tale of my sorrows, even among those around me who were as unhappy as I; for so completely were they under the tyrannical control of the Mother Superior, that, when once or twice I sought consolation from this source, my confidence was betrayed, and severe punishment was the consequence. My Father Confessor made dishonourable proposals to me, and I spurned him from me; but the tempter came in the garb of an angel of light, holding the olive branch of friendship in his hand, and with the sweet words of sympathy upon his oily tongue—I could not resist him—and fell. O horrible fall! how fearfully punished! The tempter was the lover of the Mother Superior; she found it out, and, not daring to punish him, although it led to a terrific scene between them, which had like to have resulted in very serious consequences to both, but was at length compromised, and a reconciliation took place; her jealousy and wrath found their mark in me; and my untimely and painful death is the result. But what wonder that I fell beneath the insidious approaches of the wily Father General, who knew all the loneliness of a poor nun’s life, the yearnings of her heart after kindness, and the sufferings and bitter disappointments which I had previously endured. What wonder that I should first feel grateful to him who spoke to me the only words

Mysteries of a Convent.

143

of soothing which fell upon my greedy ears; that I should then love him; and then——. But, dear Julia, do not despise me—do not forsake me. I have repented in dust and ashes; I trust there is mercy in heaven for me, who have been so bitterly deceived on earth. For years I have endured a living death; and since my health has failed me, and I have no longer been able to render any service to the establishment—a period of thirteen months, during most of which time I have been confined to my bed—I have been wholly neglected by both the Superior and the nuns, save as necessity required their attention at distant intervals. Even the Father Confessor has visited me but once, and then at my own most urgent request: until you, my dear Julia, accidentally discovered me, and began that series of kindnesses which has lit up the gloom of my sick room, and alleviated my sufferings to so great an extent. God bless you for it, noble-hearted girl!”

It had cost the nun a great effort to make this recital to Julia; and it had been frequently interrupted by a gush of tears, or the hard, dry cough which was rapidly taking her to the grave; and, when she had concluded it, she fell back exhausted on her pallet. Her kind nurse administered some cordials which she had brought with her—the purchase of her own pocket-money—and, after lying quietly for some time, Sister Theresa, turning to her with a countenance upon which the seal of death was legibly impressed, said to her:—

“May heaven reward you, dear Julia, for your goodness; I cannot in any other way than by my poor thanks. But let me most earnestly entreat you to heed the warning which I have given you, in this relation of my sad life since I entered this prison. O, if you would not bring sorrow upon your relations; if you would not have every kindly affection, every generous emotion, every faculty of mind, crushed, and seared and withered—if you would not live with a burning void within your bosom—a craving appetite after friendship, and love, and social happiness, which is doomed never to be satisfied; if you would not witness scenes which curdle the blood, and freeze the very soul—if you would not loath yourself and all about you—if you would not be tempted, as I have been, almost daily, to commit suicide, as affording the only means of escape from conventual pollution and imprisonment—if you would not die, at the last, away from your kindred and friends, deserted by all, as I am—by all but you, whom God seems to have sent to me as an angel of mercy, to pity her whom her race contemns—O! if you would escape all of those evils, aye, ten thousand more; I beseech you, never consent to become—”

“Vile wretch! what means this?” cried, or rather shrieked, the Mother Superior, who, for the first time, alarmed at Julia's long visit to the sick nun, had crept stealthily up stairs, and arrived in time to overhear the last sentence or two of the charge which had just been uttered, or rather so abruptly interrupted by her exclamation. When Julia, almost beside herself with terror, looked around to discover the source from which this interruption came, she beheld the Superior, standing in the doorway, pale with rage, her eye flashing fire, and her hand uplifted as though she would smite the poor victim, lying helpless on the couch of suffering.

144 / Mysteries of a Convent.

But that victim was beyond the reach of her malice—she was dead; and the other, whom she was about to immolate on the altar of religious bigotry, had escaped her coils. The scales had fallen from her eyes; the delusion had been dissipated, as the morning mist; she seemed to have awoke from some dream which had fast bound her senses in illusion, and to have become sensible of the realities which surrounded her, threatening her destruction.

The Mother Superior saw it all at a glance—saw, too, that her passion had betrayed her, and had served to make the matter worse; but, confident in her own abilities, and fondly hoping that she could yet recover the ground which she had lost, set herself about the work, with infinite address. It was, however, too late. Overcome with excess of emotion, Julia sat weeping as if her heart would break. The Superior, putting her arm around her, and gently bidding her arise, left the death-chamber, carefully locking the door behind them, and led her down stairs to her own bed-room, where, laying her upon her own soft couch, she told her to compose herself, and try to sleep. Then, entering the adjoining room, which we have said was fitted up as an oratory, and which contained an escritoire in which she deposited her valuable papers, she took, from a secret drawer, a letter received that morning, and which she perused with great attention. It ran thus:

“New York, July 10, 1812.

“To the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Annunciation.

“DEAR MADAM,

“I have just been informed, by the Father Beaupres, resident at Bâton Rouge, Louisiana, that the father of Emilie de Vere, now the Sister Theresa, a member of the convent under your spiritual government, has recently died, leaving an immense estate, and making provision, by his last will and testament, that his only daughter, this same Emilie, shall inherit ‘the whole property, if she will renounce the Roman Catholic faith, and leave the convent in which she is;’ and that, in the event of her refusing to do so, the said property shall go to distant relations, in France, the daughter having nothing.

“I wish you to converse with the Sister Theresa, and devise some plan by means of which this inheritance can be secured to the order. I shall repair to the convent on the fifth day from the date of this letter.

“I remain as ever, yours,

“FRANCOIS JUBERT.

“Father General, &c.”

The Mother Superior felt greatly agitated, as she perused this document, and scarcely knew what to do. Here was an immense fortune within the grasp of the order; but she upon whose life it depended, was dead. True, no one knew it as yet, besides herself and Julia; but she had reason to believe that Julia had heard enough, from the lips of the dying nun, to have influenced her mind unfavourably towards the order, and, perhaps, to have undone the entire work of the last fifteen months. O, how deeply she regretted her want of consideration, in permitting Julia to attend upon the sick nun; but so fully had she succeeded, as she thought, in the work that she had planned and executed as re-

Mysteries of a Convent.

145

garded the former, and such was the tyrannical dread in which she held every member of the household, that she could not suppose it possible that the latter would have dared to say one word to Julia about the past; until her apprehension having been excited by her pupil's long absence,—for she had not come down to the dinner-table, as usual,—she had ascended to the sick chamber, and there overheard a portion of what passed, as has already been seen. Should Julia, when she went out among the boarders, make known the fact of the nun's death, it would for ever destroy all hope of securing the inheritance; and even if she could prevent this, which would be a very difficult affair, because of the impression that it might make upon her own mind, still the dead body was in the house, and must be disposed of in some way, without the knowledge of any member of the household. She bit her lips in very intensity of thought; and her feelings were wrought up to a high pitch of excitement, by her malignity to the dead nun, who, she feared, had achieved, although unconsciously, a wonderful retribution upon herself and upon the order, for the wrongs which she had endured at their hands; by apprehension that Julia was lost to the convent, unless something could be done to prevent it; and by anxiety to bring order out of this chaos, and victory out of this apparent defeat; when she heard a gentle rap at her chamber door. Instantly passing from the oratory into her bed-room, where Julia still lay upon her couch, she opened the door, where stood a servant to inform her that a gentleman wished to see her in the parlour. Not supposing, for a moment, that it might be Mr. Moreton—whom of all other persons she least wished to see at that time,—she hastened to the room where he awaited her; neglecting, as she left her chamber, to close the door behind her. Presently, Julia, overhearing the altercation between her father and the Superior, and recognising the voice of the former, flew down the stairway, and rushed into her father's arms, as has before been related, and thus escaped from the dangers which were becoming so imminent around her.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Mother Superior outwitted—Cursing and praying—Hasty summons to the Father General—Insulting the dead—Jesuitical conduct.

WHEN Mr. Moreton bore Julia away from the parlour of the convent, the Mother Superior stood in speechless amazement, for an instant, and then, hastening to the front door, watched his rapid progress along the avenue, until he was lost to her sight, when, like one who had been spell-bound under the influence of the night-mare, she seemed to become suddenly aware that something must be done, or Julia, her victim, would be lost to her for ever, and the harvest of all her schemings be destroyed, just at the moment when it was ripe for the sickle of the reaper.

Pulling violently the hall-bell, she ordered the servant who answered the summons, to call two male servants that belonged to the establishment, and were at work in the garden; but whether, during the interval that elapsed before they made their appearance, she had concluded that any further steps would be impru-

dent, on her part, at that time, or because she thought it too late to attempt to bring back the fugitives, her purposes were changed; for, when the servants came, she dismissed them, and, with a dignified, though somewhat quickened step, ascended the great hall stairs to her private room.

Here, carefully fastening the door, she threw herself at full length upon a lounge, at one side of the room; and, placing her hand upon her forehead, as though she were in pain, while her eyes were almost ready to start from their sockets, she gave vent to the most violent outbursts of passion; bitterly cursing all heretics, and calling down the direst maledictions upon Mr. Moreton and his rescued daughter. And then, her thoughts recurring to the scene which had taken place in the room of the dying nun, she arose hastily from her recumbent position, and strode towards the door, as if she were about to execute some hurriedly-formed purpose; but, ere she had placed her hand upon the fastening, she paused, for a moment, and, retracing her steps, continued to walk from one end of the large apartment to the other, for some length of time; her steps at first rapid and excited, but gradually becoming more measured; until, at length, entering through the secret pannel into her bed-chamber, and thence into the oratory, and kneeling down before the crucifix, she remained for some time with her head bowed in prayer, occasionally heaving a convulsive sob, indicative of the extent to which her feelings had been excited.

Arising presently from her kneeling position, with the traces of tears upon her cheeks, she approached the escritoire, and, drawing forth the necessary materials, wrote a note, of which the following is a copy:

“Convent of Annunciation, July 12, 1812.

“To the Reverend Father General.

“MOST REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

“Your favour of the 10th instant was received by me this morning. Business of the utmost importance connected with its contents, requires your presence here without delay. Please lose no time in coming.

“Yours, most respectfully and truly,

“FRANCES.

“Mother Superior, &c.”

Having folded and sealed this note, she returned to her chamber, and pulled hastily the bell-cord which hung near her bed. On a nun appearing, in answer to the summons, she placed the note in her hands, and bade her give it to the Porter, with orders to take it instantly to New York, and, riding day and night, deliver it to the Father General. Then, re-entering the oratory, to see if all were there in a position to be left, she fastened her escritoire, and went up stairs to the death room.

How silent was all there! The cold and pallid remains of the Sister Theresa lay upon the pallet, just as when the Mother Superior had left the room with Julia, after having precipitated the death of the poor nun, by her sudden appearance and harsh exclamation, but a short while before. Although fearfully emaciated and wasted with disease, the death-like features still showed traces of former loveliness; and there sat upon the marble

Mysteries of a Convent.

147

countenance a smile, as though, just at the moment of departure, the penitent had caught a bright vision of Mercy stooping from Heaven to pity and to save.

The Mother Superior stood for a few moments, looking upon the face of the dead, and, catching at length the expression of that smile, ground her teeth with very rage.

"What," said she, as though speaking to the lifeless body—"smiling art thou? Smiling at me, as though thou hadst gained a victory over me? Dost thou mock me, now thou art dead, as thou didst thwart me while living? Would thou were capable of feeling, that I might punish thee, vile remains of a most worthless being. But know, Emilie de Vere, whether thy polluted spirit hovers still in this room, or is suffering purgatorial pain in the regions of woe; know that Louise St. Aubyn has never been defeated yet. She has been cruelly deceived; but she has had her revenge. Aye, and she will yet be still more fully avenged upon the vile paramour that wrought thy fall:—the only virtuous act of all his life. Know, too, that, though thou didst turn traitor, and reveal to Julia that which has poisoned her mind against my order, I will be revenged there. Poor fool! she thinks that, because she is in her father's house, she is beyond my power. But, by the Holy Virgin, and by all the Saints in Heaven, I swear to move the skies above, and earth and hell beneath, to work her ruin. She shall not escape me. Julia shall yet be the vile, polluted, worthless thing thou art and has been."

Thus insulting the lifeless clay, and venting her rage upon its unheeding ears, the Mother Superior stood for some minutes, until the approaching shades of evening reminded her that she had but little time left for the accomplishment of the purpose which had brought her to that death chamber; which was, to gather together whatever papers she might perchance find in the trunk of the deceased, that could possibly be made to subserve the interests of the order, in procuring possession of the coveted inheritance. Finding nothing, however, she closed the door, carefully locking it, and, leaving the dead neglected as the living had been, descended to her room.

Let not the reader imagine, for a moment, that the character of the Mother Superior has been too darkly drawn. It is the character of one who, under the influence of a dark and gloomy form of superstition, and under the training of a master mind, was fully prepared for the indulgence of every evil motion, the perpetration of every crime; while the black heart within was covered over with a self-control which was imperturbable, when circumstances required its exercise; and an hypocrisy, refined, elegant, and exquisite. In short, the Mother Superior was a Jesuit, and a fair type of her order. None but a Jesuit could have gone from that death scene, and from the agitating deliberations of the oratory, into the presence of a man whose anger she had just reasons to dread, and yet preserve a cool self-possession, and a control over her temper, which would indicate a life free from all disquiet and given up to religious devotion, but most strikingly in contrast with the emotions which were at that moment agitating her bosom. None but a Jesuit could have risen from prayer, and, in a few minutes after, stand by the dead body of one who had fallen a victim to her jealousy and wrath, and deliberately mock and curse that helpless mass of inanimate clay. She was a Jesuit; and, when

148 Mysteries of a Convent.

this is said, we cease to wonder at what would otherwise be inexplicable.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Father General obeys the summons in haste—Meeting between him and the Mother Superior—A vile plot conducted between them—The Mother Superior in a new character—The Father General turned gravedigger—Revolted manner of burying the dead.

THE messenger who had been despatched with the note to the city, with orders to ride day and night, had complied strictly with his instructions, and arrived at the residence of the Father General, by daylight the next morning; and the missive which he bore was handed to the latter, before he had yet risen from his bed. Having read its urgent contents, he immediately ordered a horse for himself, and a fresh one for the messenger, and, as soon as he had eaten an early breakfast, started for the convent; where by dint of riding very constantly, and as fast as his animal, which was a very fleet one, could safely be pushed, he arrived at five o'clock on the afternoon of the day after the nun's death.

The mother Superior met him at the front door, as he dismounted from his jaded horse, and conducted him at once into the oratory, where, with as little delay as possible, she made him acquainted with the present position of things, both as regarded the decease of the Sister Theresa, and the escape of Julia, and asked his advice.

The Father General saw, at once, the difficulties which were involved in the affair; but, with the readiness of invention for which the Jesuit is so remarkable, and for which he in particular was so distinguished, proposed that the dead body should be buried, that night, quietly, without the knowledge of any member of the family; and, in order to this, the Mother Superior and himself must perform the duty. This being accomplished, it would be their next business to substitute some one for the deceased, who might bear some resemblance to her; to procure witnesses from without the establishment, to swear that she was the true Emilie de Vere. This could be more easily done, as the proof would have to be made in Louisiana, and not in New York. The members of the convent knew nothing of the death of Sister Theresa, and could be kept in entire ignorance of it, by raising a report, in the establishment, that she had fled, which would account for her absence; though, indeed, such was the neglect with which the poor nun had been treated in the last few weeks of her illness, especially as it was generally known by those who had previously attended to her at all, that Julia had undertaken to be her nurse, that not a single member of the household knew any thing about her real condition, during that time. As for Julia, she would in all probability never hear of the matter of the inheritance; and, if necessary, she could be watched. Should she or any of her friends make any attempt to interfere in the affair, she must be kept out of the way, and silenced, at all hazards, and by whatever means.

This outline of a plan of operations was freely discussed by the two counsellors, and at length adopted, as the very best under

Mysteries of a Convent.

149

the circumstances. The Mother Superior then ordered some supper for the Father General to be placed in the private parlour; and, leaving him to finish this, she went up alone to the death chamber, to prepare the body for burial; while he would repair to the garden, to see what could be done there towards preparing a grave.

Taking with her a needle and some thread, she entered the room where the body lay, and was surprised to find it much in the same state in which she had left it on the previous afternoon, and that there was a very slight indication of decay perceptible. The same smile sat upon the countenance, and produced the same state of angry feeling in her mind, but she was in no mood to tarry in that remote and lonely part of the convent, without any other company than that of the deceased nun, she hurriedly and rudely sewed up the body in the sheet upon which it was; and, leaving it thus without any other preparation, returned to the room in which she had left the Father General.

The latter had in the meanwhile, selected for the grave a sunken spot in the extreme distant corner of the garden, which was depressed some two feet in the earth, and which, indeed, had much the appearance of an old grave. This spot he had noticed before, in walking through the garden; and it had instantly occurred to him that it would serve the purpose, with very little preparation. There was an abundance of quick lime always kept about the establishment; and, by digging the grave a foot deeper, putting on the body plenty of this lime, and filling up the opening to within a few inches of the surface, covering the whole with rubbish, it would never be discovered; especially as it was situated where nothing was cultivated, that season. Had there not been sufficient reasons why no member of the family should have any knowledge of what was transpiring, lest it should come to the ears of some of the many boarding pupils then in the establishment, the body might have been disposed of in a deep vault under a wing of the building, which was constructed there for the purpose of receiving such remains as they did not wish to bury, or to attract much notice to; where these were speedily destroyed by means of quick lime. But, as this was only accessible by going through a portion of the establishment where they could hardly hope to avoid notice, the spot in the garden was preferred.

Sometime after the convent clock told the hour of ten, an hour at which by the rules of the house, every inmate of the family must be in bed, the Father General proceeded to the garden, and, furnishing himself with the necessary tools, from a small building in which they were kept, had succeeded, in the course of a couple of hours, in making ready the receptacle for the last repose of the very nun, who, three years before, had met him in that same garden, at the dead hour of midnight, and whom he had so basely ruined afterwards. One might suppose that the whole scene would have come up in his mind, and that the image of that then lovely being would have haunted his memory and harrowed his his soul, while he was thus engaged in preparing a spot to hide her body; and so it did, but the Jesuit shook off all sense of uneasiness, and set about the work with all his physical strength, while he kept his thoughts busied with planning for the future. In spite of himself, however, when, as the clock sounded midnight,

and, returning to the house for the corpse, he passed the plum tree beneath which he had stood, three years before, with his arm around the unfortunate Sister Theresa, he started involuntarily, and with a shudder, as, by the light of the moon, he thought he saw her advancing to meet him; and it was no small relief to his feelings, when he discovered that it was the Mother Superior, who was coming to see what progress he had made.

Fully realizing the extreme delicacy of his position, under the peculiar circumstances which surrounded both of them on this occasion, and in the existence of recollections which came up fresh to the memories of both, while neither dared to make any allusion to them, the Father General gracefully offered his arm to the Mother Superior, and, playfully complimenting her upon her good looks, led her to the house.

Here, quietly ascending to the room in which the dead nun lay, the Superior locked the door, and bade the General enter; narrowly observing his countenance as he approached the bed-side, while she held a candle in her hand, and, as she perceived a slight shudder to pass through his frame as he took the body in his arms, and threw it upon his shoulder, a scornful smile might have been seen upon her proud features; but which she took good care should not be witnessed by him.

They thus passed down again to the garden; the Mother Superior bearing in her hand a bucket of lime, which she had previously placed near the door steps; and, in the course of half an hour, the remains of Sister Theresa, unshrouded and uncoffined, were resting in the narrow bed prepared for her, and the spot marked only by the up-piled briars and rubbish; while the Father General and the Mother Superior were seated in the oratory of the latter, plotting how they might secure to the order the large estate of her father, left to her on the condition of renouncing the Catholic faith, and throwing aside her nun's dress; a condition with which she would most gladly have complied, had she been alive, and had it been in her power; though poverty for her life long, and not unbounded wealth, had been the result. She had, however, exchanged her religious habit, it is to be hoped, for one of glorious sheen, and her prison-house on earth for a noble mansion in the skies. The quiet smile of hope which played upon the cold features of the clay which her freed spirit had left behind, gave token that, though unfriended here, she had found friends there, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are for ever at rest."

An Omiscient eye, however, had beheld this deed of darkness; and, though the perpetrators might baffle and deceive their short-sighted fellow-creatures, yet they could not escape the detection of Him who seeth all things.

The next morning, just at daybreak, the Father General was seen to enter his own room on the first floor, by the Sister Porter, as she descended to ring the bell for matins. She knew not where he had spent the night, but had her own surmises, which, however, prudent woman that she was, she kept to herself.

Mysteries of a Convent.

151

CHAPTER XIX.

Duplicity—The plot thickens—Reward offered for the missing nun—A substitute found—A third party in the plot—Threatened tumult.

WHEN about to sit down to the breakfast-table, the next morning, the Mother Superior, turning to Sister Martina, in the most natural manner imaginable, as if it were an every day occurrence, told her to go to Sister Theresa's room, and see if she wanted anything; remarking, as she did so, to the Father General, that this Sister had been sick, for some length of time, and that she was afraid she would continue to be so, for some weeks longer, though she did not apprehend a serious result in the case.

The morning meal was nearly finished, when Sister Martina glided into the room, and, in what was designed to appear as a whisper, but at the same time to be overheard by the Father General, she told the Mother Superior that Sister Theresa was not in her room, and that it seemed to be in confusion, as if she had left it hastily.

"Not in her room?" repeated the Superior, with well-affected surprise.

"No, madam," answered the nun.

"She must be in some of the other rooms, in the same part of the house, then," returned the Superior; "go, my good Martina, and see if she is not."

"I have looked into them all," was the response; "but I cannot find her anywhere."

"'Tis very strange," remarked the Superior—"I do not know what to make of it. Go, Sister Martina, into every room in the house, and see if you can find her, and let me know immediately, for I feel uneasy about her." Then, turning to the nuns and boarders, as they sat in long lines at the two tables, she asked if any of them had seen Sister Theresa that morning; and, as might be expected, was answered in the negative.

On report being made to the Mother Superior that the missing nun could not be found anywhere about the house, orders were given that the well, the cistern, and all of the places into which it was possible that she might have fallen, if in her weakness of body she had attempted to pass about the yard, should be strictly searched; but in vain, she was still unfound.

The Superior's countenance betrayed a great deal of well-feigned anxiety; the Father General seemed to be greatly disturbed; the whole house was in an uproar—nuns running here and running there—others standing about in groups, in earnest conversation—all completely mystified, and lost in wonder at so strange an occurrence, while none seemed to be more so than the two individuals present, who knew all about the affair.

At length, when all further search appeared to be useless, the Mother Superior, speaking so as to be heard by most of those present, requested the Father General to accompany her to her private parlour, in order, as she said, that she might consult him further in reference to this truly mysterious disappearance of one of their number, and as to the steps which it might be necessary to take in the premises. Having spent a half hour thus, as the family supposed, they again appeared in the parlour, in the midst

Mysteries of a Convent.

of the assembled nuns and boarders; and the Father General announced it as his deliberate opinion that the missing nun had escaped from the convent, during the previous night, by the aid of some person or persons unknown; and, calling for his horse, intimated his intention of making diligent search for her, that she might be apprehended and brought back; at the same time, requiring the Superior to degrade the Sister Porter from her office, for want of due vigilance in the discharge of her duties, unless it could be made to appear that she was not to blame. So saying, and giving his blessing to all present, the Father General mounted his horse, which had meanwhile been brought to the door, and returned to the city.

In the papers of the following day, an advertisement appeared, couched in such language as this:

"FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD.

"Left the Convent of the Annunciation, on the night of the 13th instant, in a state of mental derangement, produced by fever, a nun, who is doubtless not far from the establishment, but who has not yet been found, although diligent search has been made for her. The humane will greatly relieve the distressed feelings of her sister nuns, by giving any information that they may have in the premises, and receive the above reward for the restoration to

"FRANCOIS JUBERT,

"No. 87, Chamber Street, New York."

"*July 14th, 1812.*"

Anxious to give this pretended escape of the sick nun as much publicity as possible, without appearing to do so, the General, during the day, sent some of his confident emissaries into different parts of the city, to talk about the affair in various crowded resorts, as an item of news, until, by noon, it was noised abroad everywhere, and produced quite an excited state of feeling. Various parties of zealous Catholics visited the convent, and conversed with the Mother Superior, during the week following; and others scoured the surrounding country, in search of the fugitive, but without success. The excitement at length died away, and the affair was well nigh forgotten.

Meanwhile, the Father General had, by means of his own indefatigable industry, for he dared not entrust the matter to the agency of any third person, succeeded in finding a nun of about the same age, height, colour of hair, complexion, and general contour of person and features, with the deceased nun; and, in bringing her, unseen and closely veiled, travelling in a close carriage, and principally by night, from the convent in Canada, where he had discovered her, to the dwelling of Mr. Wilmot, in New York city, where he stealthily left her, about one month after the pretended disappearance of the missing nun.

This Mr. Wilmot was a member of the Episcopal Church, nominally, but really a lay Jesuit in disguise—and with him the Father General had arranged the whole matter, with the connivance of the wife of this supposed Episcopalian; a handsome douceur being the reward of their iniquity. It may be proper, also, to say that Mr. Wilmot was a small grocer, at the corner of two streets, somewhat remote from the centre of the city. It was nearly midnight when the nun entered the house, disguised in an ample travelling dress, which completely concealed her religious habit.

Mysteries of a Convent.

153

Next morning, Mr. Wilmot took care to mention, in confidence, to some of his customers, that during the previous night, and just as his family was retiring to rest, between ten and eleven o'clock, a beautiful nun, who bore traces of recent illness, had knocked at his front door, and, appearing greatly terrified when he went to see who it was, rushed into the passage, and, falling upon her knees, implored him to take pity upon her, as a poor nun who had fled from most dreadful persecutions in a convent, some distance off, and to afford her protection, until she could write to her father to come and take her home. He then gave quite an interesting account of the reception which he and his wife had given to the poor creature, and told his friends that he had no doubt, from her story, that she was the nun concerning whom a reward of fifty dollars had been offered, about a month ago, in the city newspapers; but that he should scorn to betray the innocent sufferer into the hands of those wretched priests, and would protect her, as long as she choose to stay in his house.

As might naturally be supposed, and as was intended by the crafty grocer, who had his cue from the Father General, these friends of his, to whom this secret was confided, thought it too good to keep, and so relieved their burdened minds by sharing their confidence with some of their neighbours. These, in their turn, thinking that a division of responsibility was "within the line of safe precedents," imparted the secret to their friends, until, by ten o'clock that morning, a large crowd had gathered about the grocer's door, clamorous to see the escaped nun. Closing his shop door, however, and sending off post haste for a body of police to protect his dwelling, and for some two or three clergymen of different denominations, as well as a lawyer of some eminence with whom he wished to consult as to what course he should pursue, he, in the meantime, appeared at an upper window, and told the assembled crowd, which was every moment increasing, that it was true that he had given protection to a friendless nun, who had claimed it at his hands, and that he was determined to guard her with his life, until she should go forth from his house, of her own accord, or he had had time to take counsel with those for whom he had sent, and who were more experienced in such matters than himself.

This declaration was heard with cheers by the Protestants, and hisses and groans by the Catholics, instigated, but held in check, by the emissaries of the Father General, who, from a neighbouring house, in which he had concealed himself—the house of a member of that church—directed the movements of his party.

"But the nun is crazy," shouted some of the Catholics, "and does not know what she is doing."

"She is not crazy,"—replied the grocer;—"she is no more crazy than you are. She is an exceedingly sensible woman, and knows very well what she is about."

"I demand that you give her up to me," said a very genteelly dressed man, who now made his appearance in front of the mob. "I make this demand in the name of the Spiritual Father who has the charge of her."

"I shall do no such thing," said the grocer.

"You must, or we will take her by force," replied the spokesman, who looked around him, to see how many he could depend upon, in the crowd, to aid him in the assault.

"I command you to keep the peace," said a magistrate, followed by a bevy of police, who advanced, and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the belligerent.

"I shall permit no violence here, my friends,"—he added—"the proper authorities must decide this matter; and I know you are too good citizens to wrest it out of their hands."

"That is the right way. That is right!" cried out a score of voices—"let the law decide it."

Meanwhile, the persons sent for had arrived; and it was determined that the nun should present herself, under a strong escort of police, before the city authorities, and claim their protection, as being stronger and more efficient than that of any private individual.

In a few minutes, a carriage was brought to the grocer's door, in which the nun, together with Dr. Chine, an Episcopal minister, the Rev. Mr. Scott, a Presbyterian clergyman, and the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, of the Methodist church, were seated; while the magistrate and his civil force surrounded the carriage, and effectually guarded them from the show of resistance and attack, which was made by the Catholic portion of the crowd, but which was too well trained, however, to strike without a signal from their leaders, who were thickly interspersed among them, and held them in perfect control, although there were not a few hot-headed Irishmen in the midst.

CHAPTER XX.

The pretended nun undergoes a judicial examination—Jesuitical manoeuvring—An apt pupil—The inquiry terminates in favour of the supposed nun.

ARRIVED at the mayor's office, the nun, who gave her name as Emilie de Vere, otherwise called by the appellation, as a religious, of Sister Theresa, stated that, in consequence of persecution and neglect in the Convent of Annunciation, she had fled from that establishment, about a month ago; had reached the city on the last evening, and now claimed the protection of the city authorities, until she could write to her father, who resided in the south, and from whom she had not heard for many years, to come and take her home; declaring, in the most solemn manner, with hands uplifted to heaven, and tears in her eyes, which drew tears in turn from almost every eye in the house, his honour the mayor not excepted—that she then and for ever abjured Roman Catholicism, and all allegiance to pope or priest—beseeching those before whom she then stood, not to suffer her to fall into the hands of her enemies again, as, in that event, her life would most inevitably be the forfeit. She acted her part to perfection, and completely imposed upon all present.

Francois Jubert, the Father General, then stepped forward, and declared that he had the spiritual charge of the nuns belonging to the Convent of the Anunciation—that the nun was correct in stating that she had fled from the establishment, about a month since, and that she was the same for whose recovery he had offered a reward of fifty dollars, on the 14th of July last, but that it

Mysteries of a Convent.

155

was not true that she had been persecuted or neglected—on the contrary, he affirmed that she had been most kindly cared for by the Mother Superior, and by all the members of the family; adding, that the nun had become crazy by means of a severe spell of sickness, the traces of which her pale countenance still bore, and that this state of mental aberration had led her to take the step which she had. He concluded by expressing the hope that his honour, the mayor, would not suffer the Catholic Church to be scandalized by the wild ravings of an insane nun; but that he would order her surrender to him, that he might take her back to her kind friends, the Mother Superior and the sisters of charity, whose hearts were now filled with disquietude at her absence, and with apprehensions for her safety. While thus addressing himself to the mayor, he cast looks of paternal regard and pity upon the nun, and even shed a tear, as if in commiseration of her unfortunate condition.

The ministers present, however, in their turn, expressed their confidence in the sanity of the nun, and declared that they could not believe, without further evidence than they had, that the declaration of insanity, made by the priest, was anything more than a ruse to get the poor girl back into his possession.

The mayor then sent for two of the ablest physicians in the city, and requested them to examine the nun fully, and to satisfy themselves as to the condition of her mind. This request they complied with; and, having conversed with her there in the open court, for more than an hour, assisted at times by questions from the clergymen—they declared, upon oath, that, so far from her being crazy, she was in the full possession of vigorous faculties of mind, of extraordinary power, and was, upon the whole, one of the most intellectual women they ever conversed with in their lives.

The Father General here interfered, and, stated that hers was a case monomania, and that, while she could converse intelligently enough upon every other subject—if they would introduce a topic which he would name to them privately, they would find that, in a few moments, she would become perfectly wild upon it.

Having whispered this topic in their ears, in reference to which he had declared her to be a monomaniac, the physicians proceeded to converse with her upon it, for some time; and, although it was one of her exceeding delicacy, and she was talking with those who were entire strangers to her, yet such was the modesty of her replies, and so rational were they, that her interrogators indignantly affirmed that it was an outrageous trifling with the time of the court, and more especially, with the feelings of the interesting lady; for she was perfectly free from all traces of insanity as any individual of them all there present.

His honour the mayor then asked the nun if she had any place in the city in view, where she would wish to stay, until her father could be written to; and receiving, for answer, that she would prefer remaining in the family whose protection she had first claimed, if it was thought safe for her to be there; and Mr. Wilmot stating that he would give bond and security, in any sum required by the mayor, for the safe keeping and rendition of the nun whenever called upon to do so, it was ordered that she be returned to his house, and there suffered to remain unmolested.

The Father General bit his lip, as if in angry disappointment, and left the room; while Mr. Wilmot took charge of the nun, and,

under the escort of a police officer, re-entering the carriage which had borne them to the mayor's office, was driven to his residence.

Here the nun soon exchanged her religious habit for a secular dress; and, as she dwelt a quiet inmate in his family, never going out into the street, except at night, and to visit the dwelling of the Father General, no further excitement occurred in the public mind. The Catholics, who, under other circumstances, would have raised an ungovernable storm about the poor nun's ears, being controlled and kept quiet by their superiors.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Father General's residence—The library—Splendid furniture and fittings of the establishment—The Father General's letter to the Mother Superior—Plot upon plot.

THE residence of the Father General, in New York, was a handsome three-story brick building, of the first class of private houses, having a basement with dining room and kitchen attached; a suite of drawing rooms, richly furnished, on the first floor proper; two large chambers on the second, and as many in the third, with a neat little room, over the hall, on both; and a fine attic, well finished, for the servants of the establishment. In the rear was a small yard, which his taste had caused to be handsomely arranged in little flower-beds, in which were some most rare and beautiful plants, carefully attended to by the gardener from the city convent, who came at regular intervals to spend a day or two in working the beds, and seeing that everything was in nice order. Between this residence and the adjoining house, was an alley of some three feet and a half in width, with a front gate opening upon the street; the alley running back into the garden. The front chamber of this dwelling, in the second story, was occupied by the Father General; the rear one appropriated to his guests, and the small room over the door, as a cabinet where he kept his most valuable papers in an iron safe, did all of his writing, and transacted his private business. The only opening to this room was through his chamber; as he had the door formerly leading from it into the passage, built up, so as to render himself the more secure from eaves-dropping.

The front room in the third story was fitted up as a library; having shelves arranged on all sides, upon which was found a magnificent collection of books, in all languages, and upon almost all subjects; many of them very rare and of great value. A map-rack stood on one side of the room, provided with maps and atlases, some of which were especially prepared with a view to exhibit, at a glance, the points on the face of the earth, where the Jesuits had established themselves. A very large terrestrial globe, also, stood near these maps. An oval table, covered with green cloth, and of large dimensions, occupied the centre of this room, upon which were bundles of letters and papers tied up with red tape, and neatly labelled by the secretary of the Father General, a young Italian by the name of Pietro Lodetti, who spent most of his time in the library, during the day, and occupied the adjoining bed-room, at night. It may be as well to state, here,

Mysteries of a Convent.

157

that this secretary had been sent out from Italy, by the head of the order there, of his own accord, to the Father General in the United States, with the real, though not avowed, intention of acting as a spy upon the actions of the latter; such being the suspicious jealousy of these Jesuits, in reference to each other.

It was altogether a rare establishment in its entire fitting up; and, save that it had throughout that masculine tone which seems to be inseparably connected with all bachelor residences, from which the mellowing hand of woman and her delicate taste have been excluded, it might have been a model for the whole city, in point of neatness and elegance. In the drawing rooms were hung some of the best specimens of the old masters; in the chambers were found all possible luxurious contrivances for ease and comfort; in the cuisine, every arrangement necessary for the perfection of good living; and in the cellar, carefully placed under lock and key, a choice store of the richest old wines, duly labelled with the dates of the respective vintages, upon his profound acquaintance with which, the Father General greatly prided himself. It is true that all this contrasted strangely enough with the Jesuit's vow of poverty; but, if you had asked him to explain the glaring inconsistency, he would, doubtless, have replied to you, with great readiness, that, as the head of the order in the United States, he had dispensation to live thus; the importance and dignity of the office which he filled, requiring that he should live in corresponding state.

On the evening of the day upon which the nun representing Emilie de Vere or the Sister Theresa, had been taken before the city authorities, the Father General was seated at the round table covered with green cloth, which stood in his cabinet, busily engaged in writing a letter, in cypher, to the Mother Superior; a quiet smile, meanwhile, playing upon his features.

After giving her a detailed account of the events of the day, he thus proceeded:

"Thus, you will perceive, our plot works admirably. The Canada nun, about whom I have already written to you, has played her part to perfection; and I have succeeded, by her help, and by the manner in which I have managed this whole affair, in making the mayor and the good citizens of New York believe the nun to be the veritable one whom I advertised, last July, and that we Catholics are the most barbarous people on the face of the earth. But, while they are under this impression, we are steadily advancing towards the desired object, and can afford to be covered with the dust which is thrown up by our carriage wheels, whose revolutions bear us to the acquisition of a vast inheritance. It is of the utmost importance to us, that every possible suspicion of connivance in this matter should be avoided; and the worse, therefore, the attitude in which we appear to stand to the pretended Sister Theresa, the more improbable it is that collusion should be suspected or detected.

"I have written to Father Marin, to make every possible effort to introduce into the family of Mr. Moreton, a servant under the control of our order, that we may have a spy upon Julia, and be able to countervail any mischief that she or her friends may attempt to do so.

"On to-morrow, the nun will write a letter as from Emilie de Vere to her father, requesting him to come and take her home,

which I shall take care to send to the executor of the estate, in such a way as will avoid all suspicion, and put the affair a step further forward in the process of completion. Meanwhile, she is safely housed with Mr. Wilmot, whom all the world believes to be a good Episcopalian, while he is one of us, and as true as steel. Ha! ha!

"I will keep you advised of further proceedings."

To this letter he added the following postscript, in the same cypher:

"If you have any clothing of Emilie de Vere, worn by her previous to her assuming the religious habit, or any articles which her friends, if there be any, would be likely to recognise as hers—box them up carefully, and send them to my address."

Despatching this letter to the post office, by a servant who answered the signal bell wire which communicated with the kitchen, the Father General applied himself to the examination of a large mass of documents which he took from the iron safe, and to the perusal and answering of several letters which lay upon the table before him some in cypher, and some in a plain hand; and, as the great town clock, on the City Hall, told the hour of two in the morning, jaded and worn out with fatigue, he entered his bedroom, and, mumbling a sleepy and hasty prayer, threw himself upon his luxurious couch of down, and slept soundly until the rap of the servant at the door, which was carefully and doubly locked, aroused him to a late breakfast.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Father General's anxiety—His interview and transaction with the false Emilie de Vere—The fabricated letter—The Italian secretary—Plot and counter-plot—Pietro and Alice—The intimacy commenced.

THE next evening, about nine o'clock, the Father General might have been seen seated at his cabinet, at the little green table, on which were placed writing materials, anxiously awaiting the arrival of some one; for he frequently arose, and, going to the window, looked out into the darkness, and as often returned to his chair, with an evidently increasing uneasiness of manner.

At length, he was about to seize his hat, and leave the room, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps; the gate opening into the alley creaked upon its hinges, and he hastened down stairs to meet the expected visitor, who turned out to be the pretended Sister Theresa, dressed not in the garb of a *religieuse*, but that of a woman in the middle walk of life, plain but neat. She was accompanied by the secretary, in a secular dress, who, with his quiet, down look, glided silently by her side, and, crossing his arms upon his breast, with a low inclination of the head, as he met the Father Jesuit, passed on to his own apartment; leaving the nun whom he had been sent for, standing in the hall with the latter.

"I will call for you in two hours," said the General to the secretary, as the former turned to ascend the stairway along with the nun.

"Yes, sir," was the reply of the secretary, again crossing his arms, and bowing his head.

Mysteries of a Convent

159

When the General had introduced the nun into his cabinet, carefully locking the door of the bed-room, he looked sternly at her, while he said, in an impressive tone :

"You are an hour behind your time. Why is this?"

"My lord," replied the nun, somewhat alarmed by his earnest manner, "I was detained by some company that came to Mr. Wilmot's, after tea, and whom I could not leave without appearing to be abrupt, and excite suspicion."

"It is well. You have acted your part nobly so far; continue to be true and faithful, and you will deserve well of the order. Betray my trust, and—you know what will be the consequence," said the Father General, while a slight tremor passed over the poor girl's frame.

"Now," continued the Jesuit, "sit down at that table, and write as I shall dictate to you."

"New York City, August 18, 1812.

"To Mr. Charles de Vere,

Bâton Rouge, Louisiana.

"My dear, dear father, can you, will you, forgive me, for the base part I have acted, in bringing so much sorrow upon you and upon my dear mother, of whose death, some years ago, I have heard? Oh, if she were but alive, how would it rejoice my heart to fall upon my knees before her, and implore her forgiveness, too! but she is gone; and you are my only remaining parent. Will you forgive me, dear father, when I tell you that I have repented in dust and ashes—that I have fled from the hated convent, and renounced Roman Catholicism for ever? O, come to me, beloved father! and tell me that you do forgive me; and take me away from this region, where I fear, every day, that the dreadful priests will find me out, and use violence to my life. You will find me at the house of a Mr. William Wilmot, a grocer, at the corner of Hudson and King-street. Mr. Wilmot is a Protestant, who has kindly taken me into his family, and so far protected me against the efforts of the vile Jesuits. But hasten to me, dear father—every day will seem an age until I see you.

Your repentant child,

"EMILIE DE VERE."

"There, that's a good girl," said the General, patting the nun on the head. "Let me see what you have written."

"Ah! that is just right," he added, after having carefully perused the letter—"just what we want. Ma foi, but you write a pretty hand, just like those pretty fingers with which you wrote it," continued he, as he looked archly at the pretty woman, while a blush mantled her cheeks."

"Come now, my dear, direct this on the back," said the Jesuit, as he handed her the letter, which he had meanwhile folded and enclosed in an envelope—"and write the address in a little larger hand than you have used within, in order that it may be sure not to miscarry. Yes, that will do; thank you, my pet."

Leaving the pretty nun with the Father Jesuit, while he instructs her fully in that part which she is to act in the plot, let us go up stairs, and look in upon the secretary. See, there he sits, in that room filled with books, surrounded by a pile of papers, which he seems to have been engaged in arranging and filing. But he no longer has that quiet, down look; his feet are placed upon the edge of the table: as he leans back in his chair, he

twirls his pen between his fingers, and his piercing black eye is dancing in its socket, as, with a look full of intelligence, he seems to be solving some mental question which deeply interests him. Presently, as if unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, he threw the pen upon the table, with a gesture of impatience, exclaiming—

“I will find it out, in spite of him. It is no mere love intrigue, I am sure. If so, why should this nun have come all the way from Canada, as she told me, to-night, she had; and why all this pretence about her escape from the Convent of the Annunciation, and about her being a sister somebody instead of herself? why this personation of another nun, and all this uproar at the mayor's office? Why is she staying at Wilmot's? There is some grand plot on hand; and I will have a hand in it—I vow to the Holy Virgin, I will.”

“But how shall I go about it? Ah! I see. I will make love to this nun—and then, Mr. Father General—my Lord, the representative of the Great Head of the Jesuits in these United States—then see if I do not get from her all she knows about this matter: and she must necessarily know a good deal. Aha! Pietro, you have got him now.”

So saying, the young priest seemed to be greatly elated; but, just in the height of it, and while he was still planning and plotting, in his own mind, how he should carry out his newly-formed scheme, a signal, which apprised him that the Father General required his presence to attend the nun to her home, interrupted his reverie, and called him down stairs. Here he found the latter awaiting him, with averted countenance, outside the chamber door of the General; and the two, descending to the yard, soon found their way to the street, and rapidly walked towards the part of the city in which Mr. Wilmot lived.

During the fifteen minutes which elapsed before reaching the residence of the nun, the secretary had made such good use of his time, that she had promised to take a walk with him, for the benefit of her health, on the following night; it being agreed upon, between them, that, at dark, she should retire to her room, on pretence of a headache, while he would walk slowly before the house, on the opposite side of the way; and, when she discovered him, she was to steal quietly out into the street, and join him.

The truth is, that the nun found it a very tiresome affair to be cooped up in a small house, day after day, with nothing to do; while the busy scenes in the street upon which she looked, day after day, excited her woman's curiosity to know more of what was going on in the world around her; and, as she did not dare to go out alone, by day or by night, she looked upon the offer of the handsome young Italian as affording her just what she wanted, an opportunity for rambling about unobserved, and of taking a peep at men and things as they existed outside of the walls of a convent.

They did ramble about, for two good hours, that night of their appointment; and, while the secretary continued to amuse her childish curiosity, by means of many strange sights and sounds which attracted her observation and fell upon her ear, he managed most adroitly, and all unconsciously to her, to draw from her, indirectly, a number of items which gave him, unitedly, some

Mysteries of a Convent.

161

clue to the grand plot whose existence he suspected, and of whose nature he felt anxious to have some knowledge.

These nocturnal ramblings were kept up for a considerable length of time; but, as they did not occur oftener than once, or at most, twice a week, and great care was taken that they should not be extended to such an hour in the night as would be likely to place the nun in the position of being locked out after the family had retired to rest, they were not discovered; while they led to consequences which will have an important bearing upon future events in the progress of this story.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Alice's parents—Placed in a convent at an early age—New feelings produced by new scenes—Evening rambles—Mutual attachment—The dawning of light—Its effect upon Pietro and Alice—Their conversation and resolution.

THE nun, whom the Father General had found in a convent in Canada, and brought to New York, to personate the deceased Sister Theresa, was the daughter of Colonel Soule, a French officer of distinction, who had been killed in a duel, near Montreal; and whose widow had placed the young Alice, then only five years old, in the care of the Abbess, while she returned to France, to see after her husband's property. The French Revolution had, in the meantime, broken out, and Madame Soule died, a prey to anxiety and grief. The orphaned Alice had, therefore, grown up in the convent, without having ever been outside of its walls from the day upon which she entered them, until that when, in company with the Father General, she had started for the city:—she having previously passed her novitiate, and been a nun for some two years.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that, when this young creature, inheriting all the vivacity of the French character, and trained amid the gloom and monotony of conventual scenes, was placed, wholly inexperienced, in the midst of a large and crowded city, like New York, full of novel sights, which excited her curiosity and called into active exercise her ardent imagination, with what she saw and heard around her contrasted so strangely with the austere aspect of things as they existed in the prison-house in which she had been reared, she should be fascinated with the new world into which she had been so suddenly ushered, and should look forward, with dread, to the period of her return to that living tomb. Especially is not this to be wondered at, when it is remembered that her *Cicerone* was a young and handsome Italian, of noble family; whose accomplished manners and whose brilliant talents had, at first, been employed to win from her all she knew in reference to the plot of the General; but which had accomplished results, to both, but little dreamed of by either; for he had awakened feelings in her mind, to which she had hitherto been a stranger; while, in his turn, he felt that the flame which he had kindled in her bosom, burned also in his own.

Indeed, the circumstances of these two young persons were somewhat similar; for he had been placed, for family reasons, at a very tender age, in a monastery at Rome; and had been

educated wholly within its walls, in all the artifice and trickery of the Jesuits, until, discovering peculiar talent for intrigue, he had, at the age of twenty three years, been selected by the head of the order there, and sent to this country, in company with the Legate on his visit of installation, as private secretary to the Father General; for the double purpose of acting as a spy upon the movements of the latter, and of obliging the rich and powerful family of the Lodetti, who had their own reasons for desiring that Pietro should be removed as far from them as possible. Since his arrival in the United States, he had, as a quick observer and an intelligent reasoner, acquired new views of men and things. Life presented itself, to his mind, in an entirely novel aspect; and he began secretly to form conclusions, even to project plans, which startled himself, accustomed as he had been previously to a blind submission to the will of his Superiors, and to have his thoughts take their complexion from the colouring of those who had assumed to think for him. Yet the very novelty and daring of these new conceptions had a peculiar charm for his excitable and naturally enterprising disposition, and were, therefore, readily indulged by him.

If, then, Alice felt like a bird let loose, for the first time from a cage in which it had been raised, and disposed to soar aloft into the blue ether, upon those pinions which hitherto had beaten in vain against its prison bars; his feelings resembled those of one who, shut up from infancy in the dark cavern, by and by emerges upon green fields, lit up by the gladsome sunshine; and, after standing for a time, gazing in mute amazement upon the freshly developed beauties of nature, at length longs to roam over those fields, and become better acquainted with those beauties.

Their rambles through the city, by night, had served to attach these two beings to each other, in strong and mystic ties:—the stronger because they had become mutually acquainted with each other's history; and their souls so mingled in sympathy and affection, that their confidence was perfect—no thought which sprang up in the mind of the one, being held back from the other.

During one of these excursions, they happened to pass near a Protestant church, in which the regular night service was conducted. Prompted by curiosity, they entered, and took their seats in the first pew they came to. Here, unobserved themselves, because seated in the rear of the entire congregation, they looked with deep interest, for the first time in their lives, upon the simple form of religious service—so plain, so fervant, so rational;—and could not help contrasting it with the complex and pompous ceremonial of their own church; and, when the minister arose, and in earnest tones gave out his text—"Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free;"—they listened with rapt attention to his delineation of true spiritual freedom, the means by which it is attained, and the result of this freedom, to the individual, the nation, the world at large. As they listened, new views of human rights, of human happiness, of divine truth, all consonant as they were with right reason, sprang up in their minds, and placed themselves in striking opposition to the dogmas in which they had been instructed, and the slavery, mental, moral, and physical, in which they had been hitherto held. They felt as did the monk of Eisleben, when he found the long neglected Latin copy of the Holy Scriptures, in the library of his

Mysteries of a Convent.

163

convent; and, while reading it, "his soul kindled with new energy, as he saw how truth had been wronged by ignorant piety and hypocritical infidelity." And as contact with the opinions of freemen, who regarded liberty as their birthright, had induced opinions and feelings in the minds of those who, under the leading of La Fayette and his gallant associates, had crossed the broad Atlantic to aid the colonies in America in achieving their liberties,—which had led to the attempt—unsuccessful though it was—to accomplish the same result in France, on their return home,—so, in reference to the young secretary and Alice, they felt that their birthright had been withheld from them and, that God and man would justify the effort to secure its restoration.

The service concluded, the secretary and his companion left the church, and directed their steps towards Mr. Wilmot's;—walking slowly, for their minds were busy with the solution of problems which had been presented to them, for the first time, that night. At length, the former said to Alice, in tones which indicated deep thought, as well as honest conviction:

"Alice, we have been asleep. Immured within conventual walls, we had no knowledge of the existence of any other world than that we found around us. Instructed in the dogmas of the Catholic Church, we have been taught to believe that all besides is heresy,—damnable doctrine, unworthy of our belief, and insulting to Heaven, as well as destructive of the soul. But we have awaked to find that there is a populous world outside of the microcosm in which we have been reared;—a populous world, whose inhabitants enjoy life, and liberty, under the benign influence of a religion which is simple in its forms, but which appears mighty in its effects; a religion embraced by millions, and which is at once dignifying to man, since it frees him from tyranny; and honourable to God, since it represents him not as enslaving the mind and heart of man, but as the great deliverer from thralldom. I feel that I have awaked to a new existence; methinks I breathe a purer atmosphere than I did in Rome. I am a freeman! How is it with thee, dearest Alice?"

"Pietro, I feel strange;"—replied Alice, while her voice trembled with emotion. "I do not know what to think, nor what to say. I am bewildered, 'Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free.' Pietro, what is truth?"

"Truth, in the abstract, Alice, is accordance with fact and reality. Moral truth must be in conformity with the character and will of Him who is the great Moral Governor of the world:—the great moral principles laid down by Him for man's government, finding their developement in the administration of divine grace and providence, ultimating in the retributions of Eternity, and justified by the results, in the sight of men, of angels, and of devils. You and I, Alice, have been taught to believe that the truth is alone to be found within the pale of Holy Mother Church: but, if so, how is this assertion to be reconciled with the corrupt and tyrannical practices of the church; where is the accordance between the revealed character of Jehovah, and the grand distinctive features of Catholicism, and what, I begin to fear, are its direct and necessary tendencies? Where is the accordant truth—this freedom of which we have heard, to-night for the first time in all our lives? We have hitherto seen neither. On the contrary, we have been taught that the very essence of our reli-

gion consisted in submission to the will of our superiors, and in our religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience;—which sooth to say, seem to be solemn mockeries in the estimation of those to whom we made them: if, indeed, we are to consider their lives as commentaries upon their principles—we have been led to surrender ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to their control. I very much fear that the dogmas of our church are incapable of bearing the test of truth; and I long to share that liberty which seems to be the birthright of man, and to be so largely enjoyed by the people in whose midst our lot has been so strangely cast. I fear that I am fast becoming an heretic; but I cannot help it.”

“It is strange, Pietro, that I have much the same thoughts and feelings: and it is passing strange, as you say, how we have been thrown into this new world of thought and feeling, of freedom and happiness. You must instruct me, Pietro; I know not how to bring my little bark to shore, from the midst of the billows which arise tumultuously around me.”

“I will, Alice, with all my heart,”—replied Pietro. “But,”—continued he, taking her hand in his, and pressing it tenderly, while he spoke in soft, yet distinct tones, which thrilled through her woman's heart, pulsating as it did in every throb for him, and for him alone: “promise me, Alice, that, in good or ill, in weal or woe, whatever may be our future lot, our lives and our fate shall be one and inseparable,—that we shall never be separated.”

“Never!”—said Alice, clinging to his arm, and looking up into his face, with a countenance which was suffused with the blush of maiden modesty, but which spoke the deep trust of her soul, and the firmness of her decision.

“Heaven bless thee, dearest Alice, for that word. Now will I protect thee with my life, and lead you, as best I may, to the enjoyment of that liberty for which we both pant. The vows that we made, were made in ignorance; they must be displeasing to God, because evidently repugnant to the truth of things: He will absolve us; and His truth will make us free from the tyranny of man. All will be right, Alice. Trust, and be prudent. Let us bide our time. We shall yet be free!”

He had become so much excited, while uttering the last few words, that his voice was raised to a pitch which would have endangered their safety, had any prying one been nigh; but fortunately none observed the interesting pair, or heard the words of treason against the interests of Rome, save the loved one to whom they were addressed, and the Great Being who had witnessed the plighting of their troth, and who doubtless approved the act, notwithstanding the vows which they had made to the Holy Mother Church, in ignorance and in superstition.

They soon reached Mr. Wilmot's door; and, as they stood a moment, before parting for the night, Pietro said to Alice:

“It seems to me that we both need a guide in our new situation, as regards both our position to the church, and our inquiry after truth; and, as I have no longer any confidence in our old ones, which serve but to bewilder and mislead us, I shall, on tomorrow, procure a copy of the Protestant Bible, and read it for myself. I shall also get a copy for you, Alice, and bring it with me, when next I come. Meanwhile, we will come to visit that Protestant church, every Thursday night, where we heard such things, this evening. Farewell, dearest—be prudent, and look to

Mysteries of a Convent.

165

the Great Source of Light, Life, and Liberty, for help and for guidance. Good night."

So saying, he turned away, while Alice sought her room, and, kneeling down, not in prayer, as usual, to Mary—"the refuge of sinners"—but to *Him*, who is "*the way, and the truth, and the life*," she poured out her soul in devout supplication that He would lead them into an acquaintance with the way of salvation, and guide them in their present difficult circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Alice's ignorance of the true nature of the plot she was engaged in—Her anxiety on that account—Her determination to act right—Arrival of Mr. Prentiss—Alice's perturbation and alarm in consequence—Her interview with Mr. Prentiss—Alice divulges the particulars to Mr. Prentiss—His astonishment at the recital—His determination to befriend Alice—Escape of Pietro and Alice.

THREE months had now passed since Alice had written the letter to the south, in the name of Emilie de Vere, which had been dictated to her in the name of the Father General. Mr. Wilmot, if he knew anything of her intimacy with the secretary, said nothing about it; and the latter, together with Alice, was almost ready to make a public recantation of Roman Catholicism, and to profess the Protestant faith, when a circumstance occurred, which placed her in an exceedingly embarrassing situation, and had like to have ruined the plot of the Jesuit, ere yet it had matured.

Alice, on being brought to New York, had been told that, for reasons which involved the interests of the order, and which it was not necessary she should then be made acquainted with, she was to personate Emilie de Vere, a young girl, who was about her own age, height, complexion, &c.; whose father was a Mr. Charles de Vere, formerly a resident of New York city, but, for some years, of the parish of Baton Rouge, in Louisiana, a wealthy planter; and whose mother had been dead for many years. She was further told that the part which she was expected to act, from time to time, would be communicated to her, as it became necessary, and that she was on no account to take any step, or to answer any questions, beyond what was stated to her, without leave and instructions from the Father General. The part which she had acted before the mayor's court, had all been arranged for her beforehand, and the very language, as far as practicable, dictated to her; as the General had anticipated, to some extent, the course which things would take under his direction, aided by his accomplice, Mr. Wilmot.

At that time, she never dreamed, for a moment, that she had a will of her own, or that it would be anything short of perdition for her to question the right of her superiors, whenever required to do their bidding. She was a mere automaton, moved as they might please. But now that new light had broken into her soul, and that she had acquired new views of her rights and duties as an accountable moral agent, who owed an allegiance to high heaven, paramount to any that she was under to any earthly power, she felt exceedingly distressed at the part that she had acted here-

tofore, and hardly knew what course to adopt for the future. She had consulted freely with Pietro upon the subject; but he felt himself wholly incompetent to advise her. If she went forward to the mayor, and confessed to him the truth, her former acting in the part which she had played before him, would cause him to suspect her sincerity now, and might place her in circumstances of danger to her personal liberty: for he would probably regard her as insane; consider the idea of insanity, as formerly set up, and disregarded through the testimony of the examining physicians, as being founded in fact; and order her to be returned to the Father General, who would not fail to inflict most severe punishment upon her, while Pietro would be in no situation to protect her. Once in the power of the General, and she knew her separation from Pietro would be final and for ever. She could not consult with Mr. Wilmot; for he was but the creature of the General. She could not throw herself upon the mercy of the latter, and beg him to procure the services of some one else in the deception in which she was made to bear a conspicuous part, for this would enrage him, and separate her from Pietro; since she would be instantly sent back to the convent; and she dreaded the fate that would await her there. "Perhaps," thought she, ignorant of the magnitude of the plot in which she was involved—"perhaps, after all, it may be a small affair, and that I may have but little more to do with it. I must bide my time, and act as circumstances may require. I will not, if I can help it, act dishonestly. God help me to do right."

That prayer, though but an ejaculation, was made in sincerity, and was heard in heaven. God did help her, and did reward her for daring, novice as she was in ethics, to do what her conscience approved, in spite of the difficulties which surrounded her.

While sitting in her room, one morning, reading the Protestant Bible which Pietro had given her, with her door locked, lest, though in a professedly Protestant family, her secret should be betrayed to the Jesuit General, a gentle rap announced that some one wanted her. Hastily concealing the blessed volume which had already given her moral courage as well as moral freedom, she opened the door, and was surprised to see Mr. Wilmot himself standing there, who informed her that a Mr. Prentiss, of Louisiana, desired to see her in the parlour.

"I suspect," he added, "that it is some one connected with that business of yours in the south, from a question or two that he asked of me."

Alice felt her heart beating violently within her breast, and as if she were about to suffocate; but suddenly, and with great effort, rallying herself, she informed Mr. Wilmot that she would be in the parlour in a few minutes, and turned to her toilet, as if to adjust her dress. As soon, however, as he had closed the door, and gone down stairs with his message, she burst into a flood of tears, and, throwing herself upon her knees, for a moment or two, earnestly implored guidance and help from on high. Then, arising, and bathing her eyes, she arranged her hair, and went down to the parlour.

On her entrance into this room, she saw, seated upon the sofa, a venerable-looking gentleman, of some fifty-five years of age, very genteelly dressed in a full suit of black—his countenance expressive at once of intellect and of great benignity. Rising from

Mysteries of a Convent.

167

his seat, as Alice entered the room, he advanced to meet her, and, with a manner full of sympathy for one whom he looked upon as the victim of Romish oppression, he said—

“I have the pleasure, I presume, of taking by the hand the daughter of my much-esteemed friend, Charles de Vere. Let me assure you, Miss Emilie, for that I believe is your name, that it affords me great satisfaction to see you looking so well, and in such good health.”

Thus saying, and shaking her most cordially by the hand, he led her, with the finished manners of a polished gentleman, to a seat on the sofa; and then, seating himself near her, entered into conversation with her, as to the circumstances which had prevented him from sooner paying a visit to her. He was surprised to find, however, that she was exceedingly bashful and reserved; that her colour came and went with fitful frequency; and that there was something about her whole deportment, which seemed to him singular. Yet, recollecting that she had been reared in a convent, had been for some time a nun, and was now a refugee from its walls, he felt disposed, in the kindness of his heart, to attribute it all to the past, and to account for it on the score of the scenes which she must have passed through, on her abandonment of a conventual life; Mr. Wilmot having painted to him, while waiting for Alice, in very florid colours, her arrival at his house at night, the assembling of the mob, the next morning the visit to the mayor's office, and the result—taking care to represent himself in the most favourable light possible.

Mr. Wilmot having left the parlour a few mementos after Alice had entered it, Mr. Prentiss exerted himself to place Alice at her ease with him, preparatory to conversing with her upon business; but, finding this impossible, and that every effort seemed to agitate her the more—he said to her,

“Your letter addressed to your father, Miss Emilie, was received in due time, but was not read by him. He had made his will, and entrusted his business to me, as his executor. He was dead.”

Here Alice's feelings completely overcame her with shame at the part she was called upon to act; and she wept freely. Thinking this most natural, under the circumstances, Mr. Prentiss proceeded—

“Do not weep, my dear Miss Emilie, so bitterly. You have every reason to comfort yourself. Although your letter did not reach your father, in time to assure him of your recantation of Roman Catholicism, and desire to return to him, still he loved you very dearly, and felt assured of your affection for him, in spite of the past. He regarded the steps that you had taken, in becoming a nun, as the result of deception upon the part of the Mother Superior of the convent, or on that of some of the priests; and, although he bitterly regretted it, yet he died at peace with you, and, in proof of this, made you his sole legatee, on condition that you would renounce Romanism, and, forsaking the convent, cease to be a nun. His estate amounts to something more than half a million of dollars. Your letter informs me that the condition had been complied with, before you became aware of its existence; you are, therefore, the undisputed possessor of this vast fortune—and will enter upon its enjoyment as soon as some technicalities of the law can be complied with, which will require but a brief delay. Meanwhile, as I presume you may want some

Mysteries of a Convent.

funds for immediate use, I shall have the pleasure of handing you a thousand dollars, which I have brought with me for that purpose. The relations of friendship in which I have stood to your father, and the attitude in which I stand to the estate, and to yourself as the heiress of its wealth, will warrant me in tendering to you my services, as a protector; until you shall have made such other arrangements as you may please."

So saying, the old gentleman drew from the breast-pocket of his coat, a large pocket book, and was about to take from it the thousand dollars, when, to his utter astonishment, she threw herself upon her knees before him, and, while the tears ran down her cheeks, begged him to take pity upon one who was an orphan, indeed, but not the one he took her for, and to promise her upon his word of honour, as a Christian man and a gentleman, that he would not divulge, to a living being, what she was about to relate to him.

The old man looked upon the beautiful girl, kneeling there before him, with a heart full of compassion; and acquainted, as he had been for very many years past, as a practising lawyer of great ability, with almost all grades and phases of human crime, and to look upon the faces of timid, as well as of undaunted, rogues and criminals of both sexes, he had become a most excellent judge of human character. He read guilt and self-condemnation in her countenance, and yet, at the same time, the evidence of contrition; and wholly unable to account for what was transpiring before him, he lifted the kneeling girl to her seat, and, making her the required promise, requested her to relate her story; assuring her that he would befriend her, whomsoever she might be, if he could do so consistently with the dictates of honour.

Thus reassured, and now throwing off that restraint and painful embarrassment which she had exhibited at the commencement of this interview, and while hesitating at the course that she ought to pursue, but which disappeared when the victory was determined for conscience—Alice proceeded to tell Mr. Prentiss all that had transpired, so far as she was concerned with the affair of the substitution of herself for Emilie de Vere, from the moment of her first introduction to the Father General, in the parlour of the convent in Canada, up to that moment; assuring him, however, that, until that late hour, she never knew why she was required to personate Miss de Vere, nor who she was; much less that she was heiress to a large estate, and that she, Alice, was to be made the instrument of getting this estate into the hands of the Jesuits.

Mr. Prentiss was thunderstruck. He was a Protestant, from principle, and a member of the Methodist church. His feelings were averse to Romanism; but that so daring a plot should have been concocted in the midst of an enlightened people, involving an immense property, and should have come so nigh succeeding, for he could not doubt, for a moment, that the witnesses were all provided to establish the identity of Emilie de Vere in the pretended Alice; that this damning proof of the high-handed wickedness of the Jesuits should stare him in the face, there, in the great city of New York, staggered his belief; and he was almost disposed to look upon Alice as crazy, or as attempting to deceive him. But, when he looked at her really intelligent countenance, as it now beamed with honest satisfaction—the truth having been

Mysteries of a Convent.

169

told;—when he thought how straightforward and connected her narrative, and that she could not possibly have any interest to subserve, while she ran a great risk in thus confiding her story to a stranger, who, if he were disposed, might do her vast injury; he was forced to the conviction that she had made a truthful confession to him and that it had become his strange privilege to look upon one of the dark plots of Rome.

“Your story,” said he to Alice, “shall never pass my lips. But what do you propose to do? If I can befriend you, and I see plain enough that you stand in need of a friend, I promise you to do so.

“Your frank avowal of this plot, so far as you stand connected with it, or are aware of its features, has saved you, my child, from very serious consequences; and it would deeply interest me to know by what steps you have been led to adopt the course which you have pursued. But for this we have not time. You will tell me that the Father General resides in the city, and that this Wilmot, with whom you are staying, is a creature of his. No doubt he is already apprised, by Wilmot, of my presence here; and he will be anxious to know the result of the interview between us. Tell me, have you no friends in the city, who could be of service to you in this extremity?”

“I have but one friend, sir, in this world, so far as I know, besides yourself, and he is not in circumstances to aid me.”

“Ah! who is he?” inquired Mr. Prentiss, with eagerness, as he felt interested in the welfare of the interesting girl; and, the more he thought about it, the more certain he became that the Jesuits would sacrifice her to their disappointed avarice, if they should discover that she had been the means of their defeat.

“He is a young priest,” replied Alice, “the private secretary of the Father General.”

“A young priest, and the private secretary of the Father General!” repeated Mr. Prentiss, with astonishment marked in his countenance and tone of voice. “This is more mysterious still. I fear, my child, that you are, indeed, hopelessly entangled in the coils of the wily Jesuits. Who is this young priest? Tell me all about him—for I would serve you if I can.”

Alice then related all that has been detailed to the reader, of her first acquaintance with the secretary—their night rambles about the city—the effect, upon both their minds, of what they saw and heard—their first visit to the Protestant church, and the sermon they had heard—its effects upon them; and their subsequent study of the holy scriptures, according to the Protestant version, and subsequent private abnegation of Catholicism, with the determination of making public profession of the Protestant faith, on a convenient occasion, and their betrothment in spite of their monastic vows.

“And you say,” replied Mr. Prentiss, “that you and your young friend, the secretary, only await a convenient opportunity to renounce the Catholic church, and to get married. Well, truth is assuredly stranger than fiction. Here is a villainous plot concocted by this Father General of the order of Jesuits in the United States, to get possession of an immense fortune in Louisiana, by the substitution of another person for a certain nun, in order that she may procure that fortune. A substitute is brought all the way from Canada to personate the deceased or refractory

Mysteries of a Convent.

nun; she becomes acquainted with and betrothed to the private secretary of this arch-plotter; they embrace the Protestant faith, renouncing their own; and, by means of this conversion from error to truth, this very substitute herself defeats the plot, by revealing it, and saves the estate from passing into the hands of the conspirators against truth and justice. Truly, this is wonderful. There is a God that ruleth in the heavens, and among the affairs of the children of men.

"I am not wealthy," continued Mr. Prentiss, who seemed, for some moments, to be lost in deep thought, "but you are honest, child; and I think that you and this priest-love of yours would do very well if you were down in my country. What say you to going with me? I will pay your expenses and his there. You can be married, and live with me, while he is studying; and, after that, my word for it, if he is the man you represent him to be, he will never suffer you to want."

"Come," added the good old man, who seemed to be delighted with the prospect, "we will see this lover of yours this very night, and make all the necessary arrangements. You must communicate with him, somehow, and get his consent to the plan. Mind, I shall take no refusal. But we must get away from here tomorrow morning, early; or the blood-hounds will scent us out, and get on our track."

"This is Thursday," said Alice—"if the Father General does not hear that you are in town, Pietro will call for me, as usual, to go to church with him; and if he does hear it, he will be sent for me. So that, in any event, I shall get to see him. If you will stand at that corner,"—here Alice pointed out of the window to the corner of the next square, below the house in which they were—"between half-past six and seven o'clock this evening, we will pass that way, when you can join us, and we can further talk of your most generous offer."

"Agreed," said Mr. Prentiss; and, shaking Alice cordially by the hand, he bade her be of good courage, and all would yet be well.

Fortunately for all of them, the Father General was, that night, at the Convent of the Annunciation; having been sent for, post-haste, by the Mother Superior, who had some important communication to make to him. Pietro called, as usual, for Alice, who informed him briefly of what had occurred, and of the generous offer made to them by Mr. Prentiss; and, in a few minutes, they joined the kind-hearted old gentleman, who was waiting for them at the corner.

The three walked together for some length of time; and, before they parted, the offer was accepted, and the arrangements all made for their departure, the next day; both Pietro and Alice having most heartily thanked their benefactor, and invoked the blessing of heaven upon him.

The mail stage of the next day, going South, bore the old gentleman, together with the ex-nun, and former private secretary; the two latter bearing no token whatever by which the most scrutinizing could have discovered that they ever wore sacred orders.

Mysteries of a Convent.

171

CHAPTER XXV.

Despotic rule of the Mother Superior—A revolution in the convent—The insurrection quelled by the Father General—Alarming intelligence, on his return to New York—His frantic conduct in consequence.

THREE days had elapsed after the departure of the fugitives, under the charge of Mr. Prentiss, when, late in the afternoon of the fourth, the Father General returned home, care-worn and gloomy. He had been called suddenly to the convent, to quell a revolt among the nuns, occasioned by the tyrannical rule of the Mother Superior, who had become so capricious in her temper, and so captious in her administration of the government of the establishment, that those under her spiritual care, despairing of redress unless effected by their own act, had risen, with one accord and without a solitary exception, in open rebellion; and, deputing a committee of twelve of their number, consisting of the most influential ones among them, to present to the Superior a list of their grievances, and to demand redress, under pain of being reported to the Father General, in the event of her refusal, they ceased from all their usual avocations, and roamed about the building, at their pleasure.

Deeming it her best policy to take the lead in calling for the intervention of the General, she told the committee that she would take the matter into careful consideration, if they would resume their duties in the convent, and, as soon as they had left her room, privately despatched a messenger for that dignitary, requesting his presence at the convent, with as little delay as possible.

By some means, it became known to the nuns, shortly after his departure, that a messenger had been sent to the city; and, enraged at the duplicity of the Mother Superior, their revolt assumed, if possible, a more serious character than ever; and, when the Father General arrived, it was raging at its very height.

By dint, however, of persuading some into a good humour, flogging others who were more resolute and obstinate, and reforming some of the abuses of which complaint had been made, the General succeeded in restoring subordination and quiet among the rebellious nuns, who, accustomed as they were to blind and implicit obedience to their superiors, must have had serious grounds for complaint before they would have ventured to take a step of so grave a character as open revolution. But, during the time that he had spent at the convent, he had heard enough to satisfy his mind that the temper of the Mother Superior was becoming entirely too impetuous and uncertain to have the charge of so important a position as that which she occupied. Yet, such was her acquaintance with his own past history—such, too, the estimation in which she was held at Rome, as a woman of extraordinary talents, and one to whom the order was greatly indebted for her services in promoting their interests in the United States; and such, also, her powers as an intrigante, that he dared not remove her, without some act, on her part, which should be of so flagrant a character, and capable of so clear and decided proof, as to admit of no possible evasion of its results; and this he could hardly anticipate as possible.

Mysteries of a Convent.

In this state of mind, he returned to his residence in the city, and, it may well be supposed, in no mood to meet the startling intelligence that awaited him. Giving his horse to the groom at the door, he entered the hall; hastily unlocking a small box, which was placed there for the purpose of receiving whatever documents might be intended for him, in his absence from home, he took out of it several letters and notes, and hastened to his cabinet. Here, throwing these upon the table, and helping himself to some fine old French brandy, which he kept in a liquor-case, he sat himself down to their perusal; for, elevated in dignity as was the office which he held, it was no sinecure; and, whether at home or abroad, his lot was to labour, labour, labour incessantly, save when at his meals, or during the five hours' sleep, which was all the time he could allow even to this necessary purpose, and from which he was aroused every morning by an alarm clock, placed upon the mantel-piece in his chamber, and fixed at the early hour of four o'clock, winter and summer; he knew not what rest was. How great the pity that his truly splendid talents and indefatigable industry had not been applied to a more valuable and laudable purpose than in promoting the machinations of Jesuitism!

Having read several letters before him, he took up one of the notes, which read as follows:

"New York, Thursday, 9 o'clock.

"MOST REVEREND SIR—

"I have just called to inform you that a Mr. Prentiss, from Louisiana, is now conversing, at my house, with Miss Emilie de Vere, in reference to her father's estate; and, finding you from home, your servant not being able to tell me where, I write this note to let you know about it. I will call again at twelve o'clock.

"Your very humble servant,

"WM. WILMOT."

Putting this down, he took up another, whose address was in the same hand-writing, and which read thus:

"Thursday, 12 o'clock.

"MOST REVEREND FATHER—

"I have called again, according to my promise, but still find you absent. Mr. Prentiss and Miss Emilie had a long interview, this morning; but what was the result of it I know not, as I had no opportunity of listening, and I cannot make much of her looks; though I can see a manifest change in them, and suppose their conversation must have been of an agreeable character to her. I will call again, this afternoon.

"Your devoted servant,

"WM. WILMOT."

A third note remained upon the table, whose contents were as follows:

"Friday Morning, 8 o'clock.

"MOST REVEREND FATHER GENERAL, &c,—

"Reverend and Dear Sir—I know not what to say, or what to do. I know that you will be angry with me; but I assure you, most solemnly, that I am in no wise to blame. O, that you were at home! But I must tell you, at once, that Emilie de Vere has left my house, and gone, I know not where. As she did not come down to breakfast, this morning, at the usual hour, we sent up to the room, and were astonished to learn that she had not spent the

Mysteries of a Convent.

173

night at home; at least, there was no appearance of the bed having been used, which she commonly occupies. Her trunk is in her room, unopened as yet, and everything is in order; while not the least trace can be found of where she may be. If I knew where you were, I should immediately despatch a messenger for you; but, in the mean time, I will spare no pains to find her, if she is in the city. When I called at your residence, I asked, in your absence, for your private secretary; but was informed that he was not at home, and had not been since last night. Whether his absence has any thing to do with that of the missing girl, I cannot tell. Of one thing I am sure, however, that neither myself or family gave Miss Emilie any cause of dissatisfaction; and this only makes the whole affair the more mysterious.

"Awaiting your orders, I remain, with the greatest respect,

"Your faithful servant,

"WM. WILMOT."

The Father General had read this last note with profound astonishment, increasing at every fresh line, until, almost beside himself with anxiety and rage, he was about to seize his hat, and hasten to see Mr. Wilmot, when his eye rested, for an instant, upon another note, lying upon the table, in the superscription of which he immediately recognised the hand-writing of the secretary. Seizing this, and tearing it open, with an earnestness which indicated the feverish excitement of his soul, he read the following astounding intelligence:

"*New York, Thursday Night, 11 o'clock.*

"To the Father General of the order of Jesuits in the United States.

"REVEREND SIR,

"Before this letter will have reached you, the writer will have been placed at a distance from the city, which will effectually prevent the possibility of his being overtaken by you. Where he is gone to, or what his business, will perhaps but little interest you, when he informs you that he has for ever renounced Romanism, and embraced the cause of Protestant Christianity. Your past kindness to *me* would not permit me to leave you, without bidding you farewell, and expressing for you, personally, my warm wishes for your future health and happiness.

In the first drawer of the table in the library, you will find the instrument of my conversion to Protestantism; and the best pledge I could give you of my sincerity in wishing you well, is the request that you will read that blessed volume, as I have done, until you "shall know the truth, and the truth shall make *you* free," as it has *me*.

"Very respectfully yours,

"PIETRO DI LODETTI."

It would be impossible to portray, in language, the state of excitement into which the Father General was thrown by the perusal of this note. There he stood, pale with rage,—his eyes flashing fire, his teeth close set together; while the breath came thick and fast, hissing through his expanded nostrils. Presently, dashing the note to the floor, he stamped upon it, as though it had been the cause of his wrath, instead of being the mere vehicle through which the infuriating information had reached him.

"Purgatory and perdition!" at length exclaimed the infuriated Jesuit; "What is all this? Is the whole herd of infernal spi-

rits let loose upon me? What next, I wonder? This nun, that I have brought all the way from Canada, in order to play so important a part in the great game for a fortune for our treasury;—she, too, I suppose, will be found to have embraced that religion of fools—Protestantism—and to have eloped with this pious secretary of mine, who, instead of attending to my business, has been reading *the Bible!* St. Ignatius grant me patience! The vile hypocrite seduces the nun from her allegiance to Heaven and to the Church—runs off with her—and then, with frozen impudence, prates to me of ‘the instrument of his conversion to Protestantism!’—Conversion to infamy, he should have said:—and tells *me*—aye! tells the supreme head of the Jesuits in America!—to ‘read *that* BLESSED volume!’—Curses upon it, and upon the brazen-faced knave!—‘as he has done, until I shall know the *truth*’—which his infamous conduct has proved to be falsehood—‘and the truth shall make *me* free, as it has *him*;—yes, he means, shall make me as great a scoundrel as himself. Holy Virgin! how can I bear such insolence as this?—But why stand I here thus, when every moment is precious—when they already have four days start of me? I will away, and take instant measures for their apprehension and return to New York; if, indeed, this is not all pretence about their having gone from the city. Who knows but they are now skulking in some vile hole in this very place; while this precious villain seeks to cover their retreat by throwing me upon the wrong scent? I will put my blood-hounds upon their track, be they where they may; and it shall not be my fault if they are undiscovered within twenty-four hours, if they have not left the city. If they have, I swear, by all the Saints in Heaven, to pursue them to the death. Ah! they little know my power, if they imagine that they can find a hiding-place from my fury, in any spot on this green earth. Thanks to the Patron Saint of our order, we are spread all over the wide world; and our agents are everywhere. Let me but get them once in my power, and they shall realize the fearfulness of my wrath, which they have so boldly provoked, and set at defiance.”

So saying, the enraged priest descended to the street, and, in a few minutes, was at the dwelling of Mr. Wilmot, and seated in his parlour, waiting his return from some business errand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The fugitives arrive at Baltimore—Reside with Mr. Barnum—A private wedding—Proceed in a vessel for New Orleans—Pleasures of a sea voyage—Alarm at the appearance of a supposed pirate—Preparation for action—Groundless alarm—Arrival at New Orleans—Piety and prosperity of Pietro and Alice.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Prentiss had reached Baltimore, with his companions, Pietro and Alice, and put up, for a day or two, at the Indian Queen, then the best hotel in the place, and kept by that prince of landlords, since gone to his long rest, old David Barnum. Being an old friend of Mr. Prentiss, the latter soon took an opportunity of mentioning to him, in confidence, that Pietro and Alice were two young friends of his, who had run away for the purpose of getting married; that he would much oblige them by bringing to the hotel some minister, to marry them at six o'clock that evening; but that it must be done in the most pri-

Mysteries of a Convent.

175

vate possible manner, without letting any of the inmates of the family know anything about it. Mr. Barnum promised secrecy; made all the necessary arrangements; and, at the appointed hour, the two fugitive lovers were united in holy matrimony, in a private parlour of the tavern, by the Rev. Dr. Inglis, then pastor of the First Presbyterian church in the city; no other witnesses being present, save Mr. Prentiss and Mr. Barnum.

The next day, it was thought advisable for the newly-married couple to remain as much in-doors as possible, and even for them to take their meals in their own room, to avoid all possibility of encountering any one who might be on the look-out for them; whilst Mr. Prentiss made the necessary arrangements for their departure in a fine ship of some three hundred tons, which was to leave for New Orleans, on the following day.

At ten o'clock, the next morning, the anchor had been weighed, the sails unfurled, the passengers all on board, when the signal was given, the canvass filled with the freshening breeze, and bidding Mr. Barnum farewell, our little party, in high spirits, and hopeful of the future, were borne away from the wharf at Fell's Point, by the noble vessel on whose deck they stood. Passing Fort McHenry, they, after a while, emerged into the beautiful waters of the Chesapeake, and, with a smacking breeze, soon passed Annapolis, and reached the Capes, in twenty-four hours after leaving Baltimore. Here, the pilot having been discharged, the ship passed out into the waters of the ocean, and soon lost sight of land.

There was nothing novel to Pietro in a sea voyage; but to Alice it was a source of wonder and delight. The wide expanse of water—the upheaving waves—the blue sky reflected in the great mirror beneath, where the ever changing surface broke in ceaseless beauty—the finny monsters disporting in the briny fluid—the novel characters around her, found in the weather-beaten seaman,—the young sailor who was making his first voyage,—the bluff mate, and the tyrannical little captain, as he strode the deck, monarch of the kingdom, his ship, over which he reigned with an iron rule—the strange sounds which constantly fell upon her ear—these all afforded her food for pleasurable excitement, when, indeed, she was well enough to be on deck; for, although she had escaped sea-sickness, to a considerable extent, yet she suffered a good deal, at times, from nausea, which compelled her to lie down in her berth, for hours.

They had already passed these points so formidable to seamen, Bermuda and Cape Hatteras, and were off Bahama, already rounding into the Gulf of Mexico, between Cuba and the Florida Reefs, when, one morning, at day-break, the look-out from the mast-head cried, "sail—ho!" Instantly the cry was responded to on deck; and the captain, whose morning watch it was, having sent for his spy-glass, swept the horizon with it, until at last he discovered the two topmasts of a rakish vessel, peering just above the sea, while the hull, as yet, seemed buried beneath its waves. When first seen, the stranger was standing athwart the ship, and crossing her path in the rear; but, as soon as the latter was discovered by the former, she changed her course, and, bracing sharply up in the wind, followed directly in the wake of the ship, with the manifest intention of overhauling or overtaking her. As soon as this manoeuvre was perceived by the captain, he instantly

ordered the guns, of which he had several, to be cleared for action—the large brass swivel, which stood amid-ships, to be loaded with grape-shot, and those at the sides with chain-shot; the swords and small arms to be got ready, as well as the boarding pikes, and, in short, all hands to be called, and every preparation made for defence. While this was being done, Mr. Prentiss, who had heard the uproar, came on deck, followed, in a few moments, by Pietro, who had also been awakened by the unusual tramping of the men overhead. The former immediately offered his services to the captain, in any way that he might be useful; while the latter, doing the same, hastily returned to the cabin, to acquaint Alice with what was going on, and to see that her safety was provided for, in the event of an action. Having arranged it so that she could retire into the hold, beneath the water line, the ship not being fully laden, whenever the presence of danger should make it necessary, and having soothed her fears as much as possible, he belted upon his body a pair of large pistols with which he had provided himself before leaving Baltimore, and went upon the deck.

He found that the stranger was gaining rapidly upon them; for, while the direction from which the wind blew was unfavourable for the rapid progress of the ship through the water, it was the very one most suitable to the greatest speed of the clipper brig which was coming upon them with giant strides. Her top-masts had first been seen, then her topsails, then her lower sails, and then her hull, rising black and threatening, as it were from the bosom of the ocean—her masts having that peculiar rakish appearance, for which this class of vessels—the *clipper-built* brigs of Baltimore—is so remarkable. Now she was within eight or ten miles, “walking the water, like a thing of life;” while the ship seemed to creep at a snail’s pace. On she came; her sides bristling with cannon; her deck filled with dark-looking men, armed to the very teeth, with cutlasses and pistols stuck in their belts.

“A pirate!—a pirate!” passed from lip to lip of the stalwart crew on board the ship; while not a cheek blanched, nor a nerve quivered, as, standing in squads by their guns, the men looked each other in the eye, and felt that they could trust each other, and make a good defence, in the hour of need.

“A pirate;” said Mr. Prentiss to Pietro, while the lip of the latter quivered, and the moisture was in his eye, as he thought of Alice.

“A pirate!” said the Captain, in low tones, to the crew, while his small frame seemed to expand and grow larger, as, with fire-flashing eye and flushed cheek, he looked proudly upon them, as brave defenders of his gallant ship, and added, “boys—let each one be true as steel. Hold your fire until I give the order; and we will blow him out of the water.”

“Aye, that we will, sir,” replied a score of voices, in tones which manifested their confidence in their commander and in each other.

“Up with the ensign,” cried the captain—“let us see what colours he shows.”

Up went the stars and stripes, floating languidly in the breeze, from the spanker gaff. This was immediately followed by the exhibition of the same flag from the stranger.

Mysteries of a Convent.

177

"What does that mean?" asked the captain, of the mate.

"I do not know, sir, unless it be to deceive us. We had better keep a good look out, or we shall have a bow-chaser speaking to us, in a few minutes."

"See," said the captain, "there it comes even now."

And, while he spake, there was a cloud of smoke, a flash, a report; and a shot from one of the bow guns careered harmlessly past the ship, and sank hissing into the water just ahead of the good vessel.

"I do not know what he means!" remarked the captain, "unless he wishes us to heave to; and that I do not mean to do, unless he comes abreast of us."

On came the brig—she was now within a few yards of the ship; and, shooting ahead, wheeled round her bows, and, brailing up the lower sails, floated broadside to the ship, distant some one or two hundred feet.

"What ship is that?" cried the captain of the brig.

"The ship Mercury, of Baltimore—nine days out, bound for New Orleans. What brig is that?"

"The privateer Hero, of Baltimore, cruising on the coast for the enemy. Have you seen anything of him?" was the response of the clipper captain.

"Nothing!" answered the commander of the Mercury; and, with a hearty cheer from his crew, replied to by three times three from that of the brig, both vessels filed away, each pursuing her own track, and were soon out of sight of each other.

The guns on board the ship were again covered—the arms and ammunition put away, while the captain invited his passengers to breakfast, and, drawing forth a bottle of fine old wine, offered as a toast—"Success to the privateer!" which all drank with enthusiasm.

In due time our travellers arrived at New Orleans, where Mr. Prentiss procured horses for the three, there being no better means of conveyance, at that early day; and, in the course of a week, Pietro and his lovely wife were domesticated in the hospitable dwelling of their kind host and his most amiable companion, who, being apprised, by her husband, of the interesting history of their guests, had given them that hearty welcome for which the South has always been so proverbial.

Here Alice soon made herself useful and beloved, as well as remarkable for her simple and consistent piety as a Protestant Christian, while Pietro, bending the energies of his powerful intellect to the study of the law, soon mastered its intricacies, and was admitted to practice as a partner of his patron, Mr. Prentiss. In the course of ten years, Pietro had become one of the most prominent lawyers in all that region of country, and was elected to Congress, where he stood high as an intelligent, honest, and eloquent statesman, and was distinguished for his high-toned patriotism. He accumulated property, as well as gathered great honours in the practice of his profession; and, when he died, left an ample fortune to his two children, the young Pietro and Alice, who were worthy scions of a noble stock.

Mr. Prentiss never regretted the trip that he had made to the North, in pursuit of his ward, Emilie de Vere, nor his interview with Alice Soule, which had resulted so mysteriously in the rescue of a most interesting couple from the hands of a cruel and

blood-thirsty persecution, which would have been the sure result, had this singular interposition of Divine Providence not been made in their favour—and it was to him a source of high gratification to relate the particulars of their history to his friends, whenever occasion served, and to leave them recorded among his papers, as a reminiscence of events which had occurred in his own history in a diary of his life, which he made for the use of his children.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Father General's interview with Mr. Wilmot—An angry disputation—Crimination and re-crimination—The arch-plotter vows vengeance against his tool—Proceeds to put his threat in execution—Interview with Mr. Ketchum—The Father General's orders to him—Scouts sent in all directions, in search of the fugitives—All search in vain—Mr. Wilmot and his family ruined, and turned out in the streets—Tidings of the lost fugitives, from Father Beaupres.

WE left the Father General seated in the parlour of Mr. Wilmot, awaiting his return from some business errand in town, and will now look in upon the interview which occurred between these two worthies.

When Mr. Wilmot returned from down town, as he called it, he found the Father General in no amiable mood; and, no sooner had he opened the door of the room in which the latter was seated, than the General began a tirade of abuse, which was of the fiercest character. He upbraided him, in the coarsest language, for connivance at the escape of the nun, and told him, to his face, that he was a liar and a scoundrel. Mr. Wilmot, although a Catholic, and a pliant tool in the hands of the Jesuits, having accomplished for them many a dirty piece of intrigue, was yet a man of some independence of feeling, as well as of very strong and irritable temper, and could not wholly repress the risings of resentment at the unreasonable conduct of the General, who, borne away by disappointment at the flight of Pietro and Alice, would listen to no excuse upon the part of Mr. Wilmot, but sought to wreak his vengeance upon the latter, whom he persisted in considering as an accomplice. This the latter resented, and, forgetting himself, indulged in some imprudent retorts, which but incensed the priest the more; until both were excited to the highest pitch, and fiercely hurled at each other epithets which could have only come from the lowest and most degraded convicts of our prisons and penitentiaries. At length, the General, full of malice, and convinced in his own mind, that it was wholly impossible that the escape of Alice should have been without the connivance of Mr. Wilmot, said to him:

“You shall smart for this, you scoundrel. You have, for purposes of your own, and disregarding of the interests of the church, dared to brave my anger, and aid this girl in her escape, or at least connived at it, to the great detriment of those interests—'tis well; you shall feel the weight of my anger before forty-eight hours have rolled over your head. Mark well what I say. William Wilmot, your doom is sealed!”

So saying, the General left the parlour, slamming to the door with violence behind him, and, with his countenance flushed with anger, went forth into the street, and sought, with hurried steps, his own dwelling.

Mysteries of a Convent.

179

Having arrived at home, and ascended to his cabinet, he drew from the iron safe a large red pocket-book, and opening it, took out a small packet of notes of hand for various amounts, and from these, three, to which was affixed the name of William Wilmot, all of them dated some time back, due one day after date, and amounting together to six thousand seven hundred and fifty-two dollars, with interest from their date; and, hastily penning a note, rang the bell to summon a servant. On the appearance of the latter, he handed him the note, and bade him take it to Mr. Ketchum, the lawyer, and bring back an immediate answer.

In about twenty minutes, the servant returned, and informed his master that Mr. Ketchum awaited his pleasure, in the drawing-room below.

"Show him up," was the response of the Father General, who was deeply engaged in the examination of some papers which were lying upon the table before him.

Mr. Ketchum, meanwhile, was introduced into the cabinet, within whose walls he was, by the way, quite intimate, having frequently visited them before; and being seated, the General proceeded to tell him, as much as he deemed necessary of the arrival and subsequent flight of the nun, requesting Mr. Ketchum to take immediate steps for the quiet search, throughout the city, for the fugitives; telling him that he would give him one thousand dollars, if successful, and pay all the expenses incurred. The lawyer, having received from the General a written description of the personal appearance of the fugitives, was about to retire, for the purpose of instituting search after them, when the Father detained him, for a moment, to say that he wished him to take the three notes which he handed to him, present them for immediate payment, and if not paid at sight, to bring suit upon them, and get the money immediately.

The lawyer, who was a nominal member of the Baptist church, but really a Jesuit in disguise, bowed low, and, promising to comply with the instructions of the General, and to lose no time, withdrew to carry them into effect. In the course of two hours, not less than thirty men were exploring the city, in every direction, in pursuit of the runaways, and inquiring at every probable or possible source for information, but in vain; while so quietly was this investigation made, and so systemized, as to the district or quarter of the city in which each of the agents pushed his inquiries, that not one of these thirty agents knew anything of the rest, or that there were others besides himself engaged in the pursuit.

Meanwhile, an officer appeared at the store of Mr. Wilmot, and, taking him to one side, presented the three notes for payment, informing him that, if they were not paid instantly, suit would be brought upon them, and the money made, without regard to the consequences.

Mr. Wilmot turned deadly pale, and told the officer that he could not possibly, at so short notice, raise such an amount; but that, if he could have four or five days in which to do it, he thought he might possibly save himself from ruin, by procuring assistance from some of his friends. The officer informed him that his orders were peremptory, and on his being told that Mr. Wilmot had not the money, and could not pay the notes, he served a writ upon him, and took the legal steps necessary to secure the property in the establishment from being made away with.

In ten days from that time, the store of Mr. Wilmot, with all its contents and the furniture of his dwelling, were sold under execution, and himself and family turned into the streets, beggared. The Father General was avenged.

No efforts, however, that he could put forth, by means of agents, by writing letters abroad, or otherwise, could procure any tidings of the fugitives, until at length a letter came from the Father Beaupres, at Bâton Rouge, informing him of the arrival, at that place, of Mr. Prentiss, together with a young man and his wife, both of foreign features, who were Protestants, however, and inmates of his family, but about whom he could learn nothing. From the description given of their persons, nevertheless, the Father General became convinced that they were the fugitives, and immediately wrote to his correspondent at Bâton Rouge, stating his conviction on the subject, and requiring the priest there to give him constant information of their movements, and to learn all he could about them. Such, however, was the high respectability of their protector, and his and their own vigilance, as they knew that they would be watched, and their lives be in jeopardy, that neither the General nor his subordinate ever dared to do aught against them, or to their injury.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Growing abuse of power by the Mother Superior—The Father General resolves to remove her by a violent death—The Mother Superior determines on a similar fate for him—Double-dealing of Sister Martina—By her exaggerated reports of the Father General's intrigues with the nuns, the Mother Superior wrought up to a state of frenzy—Fiendish exultation of Martina at the success of her scheme—The instruments of death—Soliloquy and prayer of the Mother Superior—Change in her deportment.

MEANWHILE, the Mother Frances was becoming more and more involved in difficulty as regarded the administration of rule in the Convent of Annunciation. The nuns were turbulent and rebellious. The Father General received, from his private agents in the establishment, accounts of the tyranny and oppression of the Mother Superior; but, as yet, nothing had been done by her, which would afford him the opportunity for which he had so long waited—nothing that would justify her removal or degradation.

At length, wearied out, and his patience exhausted, for he was frequently called upon to visit the convent, and to interpose his authority for the adjustment of the difficulties which daily arose between the ruler and the ruled, he at last determined to take the matter into his own hands, and to adopt a course which would accomplish the desired end, without leaving any possibility of disagreeable consequences to himself. In short, he determined to hasten the departure of the good Mother from the scene of her tribulation and trial, and to place her in a situation to be canonized as a saint; rightly believing that the nuns of the Convent of the Annunciation would much rather worship her as a saint, enrolled among the departed worthies whose names are so numerous among the devotees of the Catholic church, than obey her as a tyrant on earth; and that once out of the way, no particular inquiry would be made by the inmates of the convent, as to the mode of her death; while her friends and admirers abroad could be put off with any plausible tale. Having arrived at this

Mysteries of a Convent.

181

amiable conclusion, the General only awaited a fitting opportunity; and for this he did not wait very long.

The Mother Superior, on her part, however, had strangely enough arrived at a determination, not less full of good intention and of canonization for the Father General, than his for her. She had become apprized, in due time, not only of what had taken place between the General and the deceased Sister Theresa; but through Sister Martina, whom the former had unwittingly offended, and who, at once, to avenge herself upon the General, and to mortify and annoy the Mother Superior, concealed nothing of what she knew to have transpired, for years past, in the history of his connection with the nuns of the convent, the Superior had learned all about his intrigues and coquettings with the fair sisterhood. Nor had the statement made to her been one of plain, unvarnished facts, but had been greatly exaggerated.

Sister Martina told her that the Father General never visited the convent, without spending a portion of his time in the room of this or of that nun; that he sometimes met them in the garden, and sometimes received visits from them in his own room; that she had more than once gone to the door of the latter, when she knew that he had a nun with him, and, putting her ear to the key-hole, had listened to their whispering conversation, and had overheard remarks made about her, that were of the most offensive character. Indeed, the Sister Martina, in these conversations with the Mother Superior, spared not her imagination, but delighted to draw largely upon it, while she rejoiced in her very heart at the writhings of her listener, as the poison of jealousy and hatred diffused itself through her dark and malignant soul. With all the self-possession of the Mother Superior, the workings of her mind would betray themselves—would speak out from her countenance, as the blood boiled in her veins, and thoughts and purposes of vengeance sprang up, clamorous for execution.

Sister Martina had, by her address, wormed herself into the confidence of the Father General, and had made herself necessary to his purposes. She was, in fact, at that very time, carrying on for him an intrigue with a young and handsome nun in the convent, who had but recently taken the vows of the order, and who was one of the converts from Protestantism, made out of the family of boarding pupils. This intrigue she did not hesitate to communicate to the Mother Superior—and to apprise her that, on that day week, Sister Paulina had consented to see the Father General, in the garden of the convent, in a pretty little summer-house that had been erected about a year before, and was now covered thickly with clematis and other pretty vines in full bloom; the hour of their meeting to be midnight. Thanking her for the information, the Mother Superior kissed the Sister Martina, with great apparent affection, and, bidding her be discreet, and say nothing to the General about the conversation that had taken place between them, dismissed her, for the present, saying that she would resume it at another time.

Sister Martina turned away with an expression of high satisfaction upon her wrinkled and ugly features; while her deformed person receded from the presence of her Superior, with the stealthy tread and almost tortuous windings of a serpent; and, when she had reached her room, she exclaimed with a laugh, which was like that of a fiend who has accomplished some infernal purpose.

“Ha! ha! how the poison works! How she writhed in my hands, as I let loose the scorpions of jealousy and rage in her soul! How pale she became, and then how flushed! Ha! ha! It does me good to see her thus tortured. I know how to play with her feelings, and my revenge for all the insults and injuries she has heaped upon me, shall be to take her in my hand as I would a poor earth-worm, and my soul shall sate itself with vengeance, as I see hers writhing in agony before me. Thus, too, will I have satisfaction for the insult offered to me by the Father General. He called me the dwarfish virgin, did he, when talking with Sister Paulina, and laughed at the idea of my never having had ‘an offer of matrimony?’ ’Tis well, I will goad this Mother Superior until, driven to desperation, she shall commit some deed of violence; and then will I be revenged on both.”

The Mother Superior had retired to her oratory, and there was engaged in walking up and down the small room; her countenance now deadly pale, as though she were suffering mortal agony, and now suffused with crimson, as though the feverish blood would burst the veins, and leap forth impatient of restraint. Violently agitated, she gesticulated angrily, while she at times muttered to herself words of angry resolution and of dark and bloody purpose. At length, she paused for a few moments, and, with her fore-finger and thumb supporting her chin as it rested upon them, her arms folded upon her bosom, she stood sternly thinking; then, approaching the escritoire, she unlocked it, and drew forth a short dagger, enclosed in a silver sheath, and, taking it from the scabbard, felt its point, with great care, as if she would assure herself of its sharpness and readiness for use. Apparently satisfied, she replaced it, and then, approaching a small table on one side of the room, upon which stood a beautiful work-box, inlaid with mother of pearl—the gift of the Father General in other days—she unlocked it, and drew forth a small, white paper, neatly folded, which, on being opened, was found to contain a whitish powder. This she looked at, for a moment, with a mingled expression of joy and sadness, and, putting it back into its receptacle, resumed her walk, from time to time, audibly expressing herself thus:

“’Tis a life of toil, and care, and anxiety, at best: why should I wish to live?”

“He, whom alone I have loved in all the world, has ceased long since to care for me—has long deceived me—and now, loves another—he must atone for his infidelity to me.

“His vile paramour shall perish in his arms.

“I will be avenged!”

Thus, communing with her own thoughts, she spent an hour or more, and then, throwing herself upon her knees before the crucifix, bent her head in prayer to the Virgin, while she implored “the Mother of God” to aid her in the purposes which she had formed. Thus do the self-deluded devotees to a soul-destroying superstition, insult high Heaven, by imploring their objects of worship to assist them in the accomplishment of the most diabolical of crimes.

Having completed her orisons, she arose, calm and tranquil, and went forth from the oratory, with firm determination written upon her brow, and with a placidness of manner which did not fail to attract the attention of the inmates of the family, and was re-

Mysteries of a Convent.

183

verted to by more than one of them after the occurrence of events which transpired within the next ten days, and whose recital will occupy the ensuing chapter. Indeed, more than once, during this interval, the attention of the nuns was attracted to the very peculiar deportment of the Mother Superior, who seemed, at times, to be greatly abstracted in thought, yet to have suddenly grown kinder in the treatment of those around her, and voluntarily to commend herself to their regard, by the reformation of some abuses, and the institution of some regulations which conduced to their comfort

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Father General's visit to the convent—His courteous and affable reception—The Mother Superior suddenly changes her demeanour, and accuses him of inconstancy—He solemnly denies the accusation—She reiterates the charge, and requests him to swear, by the virgin, that it is false, ere she will believe him—She stabs him, while taking the oath—Paulina, another victim to her guilty passion, stabbed by the Mother Superior, in the arbour—Destroys herself by poison.

SOME eight days after the time of the last conversation which occurred between the Mother Superior and Sister Martina, as related in the preceding chapter, the Father General paid a visit to the Convent of the Annunciation.

He was received, by the Superior, with an unusual degree of kindness and affability; an unusual manifestation of gratification at his arrival, which did not fail to attract his notice; and when, on inquiry of several of the nuns, in private, they informed him that, for a week past, a remarkable change seemed to have come over the spirit of their ruler; that, in short, she had spoken to them in tones of kindness—had made several important changes in the establishment, of her own accord; and had, during that time, been very much reserved, it is true, and had worn a very pensive countenance, yet had given no fresh occasion for complaint—the General was surprised, yet pleased, and began to imagine that, at length, without any effort on his part, the Mother Superior had determined to change her policy; while he was not a little gratified to think that he would not be compelled, after all, to resort to a mode of redress which was really repugnant, even to his feelings, unscrupulous as he was in regard to the adoption of means for the accomplishment of his ends; ever acting upon the prime motto of the order, that "the end sanctifies the means."

He was introduced into the parlour of the convent, where the nuns and boarding pupils were assembled to greet him. The Mother Superior exerted herself to entertain him; her noble conversational powers appearing to be taxed to their utmost, to make the visit a most agreeable one. The tea-table was supplied with several unwonted delicacies, which were freely shared in by all present. Happiness and contentment sat, for the time, on all faces, while none seemed to enjoy the occasion more than the Superior. The Father General was surprised, yet deceived—and sought in vain to read the countenance of the Superior. She met his eye without quailing, and appeared to look upon him with unusual affection. Whatever were her real feelings, they were so completely disguised as to be beyond the reach of detection. No one for a moment dreamed of the possible occurrence of any-

thing, in the course of a few hours, which would fill every mind with horror, and cause even the dark-hearted Martina to tremble with affright. It was a scene of masterly acting on the part of the Superior; only finding its counterpart in that which took place in her private parlour and in her oratory; within the two or three hours immediately succeeding the pleasant interview of the members of this numerous family around the tea-table—or in those in which, at different periods in the history of the Jesuits—their brightest geniuses have exhibited the most perfect control over every thought and feeling, as well as over every physical organ which could outwardly convey an idea of what was passing internally, and in which the mantle of fairest hypocrisy has been thrown over the darkest and most damnable intents and purposes.

Rising from the tea-table, the Mother Superior, with her most graceful and winning manner, invited the Father General to the private parlour, for conference, as she said, upon the affairs of the convent, and, preceding him, led the way to that room which had witnessed so many curious interviews between these two remarkable characters.

Having entered this retired apartment, where no prying eye could reach them, the Superior, having fastened the door, as she usually did when she had any very important communication to make, most courteously invited the General to be seated, and, placing herself by his side upon the sofa, took his hand in hers, and, in tones of the softest note, recalled images of the past, scenes which had long gone by, and, while the tear stood in her eye, lingered upon reminiscences of endearment and of fondness which were common to them both, and which, while they cast a sadness upon her features, touched his heart, and melted it into an unwonted mood, covered over as it was with the crust of selfishness, and indurated by the feelings and dark purposes which had so long dwelt there. He joined freely in the conversation, and seemed to take pleasure in gratifying the state of mind into which the Superior had fallen.

Thus passed away an hour, when the Superior arose, and, pushing aside the sliding panel which separated the private parlour in which they were seated, from the bed-chamber, invited the General to visit her oratory, where she had, she said, something to show him. Passing through the chamber, they soon stood in the room beyond, where, opening a small cabinet, she showed him the various presents which she had received from him, from time to time, arranged together upon the shelves. Here was the pretty work-box inlaid with mother of pearl; a richly bound breviary, with golden clasps; a beautiful crucifix in ivory; a variety of ornaments in gold, gemmed with rich jewels; several volumes in elegant bindings; and many articles of price and vertu; all of which she seemed to have treasured up with great care, and to have preserved as tokens of affection. Putting her arm around him, and reclining her head upon his shoulder, while she pointed to these gifts thus arranged in their beautiful receptacle, she said to him, in accents which fell upon his ear with peculiar significance, and which caused him to tremble, he knew not why, yet so as to be evident both to her and to himself,—

“Francois, once you loved me; but now you love me not. The evidences of your former affection I have gathered together here, and have delighted to look upon them. It is pleasant to do so

Mysteries of a Convent.

185

still, although that affection is now transferred to another, and has been shared with others, while I fondly thought it was all my own."

"You wrong me, Louise, indeed you do," replied the General.

"Nay, Francois, do not attempt any longer to deceive me, nor yourself. You love me not. Another, now in this building, has your affections—you know it—God knows it."

"'Tis false as midnight is remote from noon-day!" cried the Jesuit.

"And yet at midnight—but two hours hence—you are to meet Paulina in the arbour in the garden. Is it not so?"

"It is not so," replied the General. "Paulina! Paulina!" he added, suddenly assuming a thoughtful attitude, as if endeavouring to call some one to his mind whom he had forgotten—"Paulina—I know no one of that name—who is she?"

"The young nun who but recently took the veil."

"Ah! I recollect her now," responded the General—"I recollect her now, but have never seen her since the day upon which, in the chapel, she assumed the religious habit. Who can have told you that I was to meet her in the garden to-night?"

"No matter who told me," said the Mother Superior, "if it be not so. You know how I loved you—with what rare affection. It is no wonder that I should be jealous, when I am conscious that I grow old, and that my attractions are not what they once were. But no matter—if you are sincere in what you have just said—if you really are not pledged to meet Paulina in the arbour to-night, at midnight, place your hand upon that crucifix, and swear, by the Virgin, that it is not so; and I will believe you, and love you with all my heart's deepest love."

Without a moment's hesitation, the Jesuit approached the crucifix, and, standing with his back towards the Mother Superior, placed his hand upon the symbol of his faith, and made the solemn declaration of his undivided attachment to, and affection for, her.

Meanwhile, as he had advanced to the crucifix, and while his hand was placed upon it, the Superior had drawn forth, from her bosom, the dagger whose point she had examined with such care a few days before, and, stepping up quietly behind him, just as he pronounced the words—

"I call upon thee, most Holy Mother of God, to witness that I love Louise, and Louise on earth—"

She plunged the dagger to his heart, crying, as she did so—

"Perjured wretch! die, and go to perdition, with the damning falsehood yet trembling upon thy lip. Go, reap the abundant harvest of your falsehood and treachery, in the regions of eternal infamy and woe!"

With a cry of mortal agony, the Father General fell to the floor, suddenly turning half round, as the weapon penetrated his vitals, so as to fall not upon his face, but upon his side; and the blow, having been but too fatally aimed at his heart, a convulsive throe or two ensued, and Louise stood alone, there in her oratory, with the dead body of Francois Jubert lying at the foot of the crucifix, upon which he had but the moment before perjured himself.

Louise, the Mother Superior, drew from her pocket a handkerchief, with which she carefully wiped the blade of the dagger;

and then, replacing the latter in its sheath, and throwing the handkerchief upon the floor, she stood for a few moments with her arms folded, looking down upon the dead body, and thus exclaimed—

“If there be an hereafter, Francois Jubert, you are now in perdition, and I am avenged for the wrongs you have done me. Two hours more, and she, whom you would have ruined, this night, as you have ruined me, will be in eternity too! I, too, shall quietly follow. The morning’s sun will arise to see us pale and ghastly, and to tell to the world the story of woman’s love, of woman’s revenge! Francois, I will soon be with you.”

So saying, she turned away, locking the door of the oratory behind her, as she entered the bed-chamber, and throwing herself upon the bed, remained quietly there until the convent clock told the hour of midnight.

Arising from her couch, she threw a cloak around her, and, drawing the hood over her head, passed through the private parlour, carefully locking the door, and groping her way along the corridor, and down the great stairway until reaching the back door, she went out into the dark night, and stealthily advanced to the garden. Here she found the gate closed; and, rightly supposing that no one as yet had passed before her, she entered, and hastened to the arbour. Here, listening for a moment to ascertain if any one were there, she entered, and, taking her seat, awaited the coming of the Sister Paulina.

The arbour was constructed of lattice work, with large intervals, but was so thickly overgrown with clematis and other running vines, as that whatever little light was emitted from the stars was entirely excluded, and all was darkness within. Yet, as the entrances were at either end, one seated within could very distinctly recognize the person of him or her who should seek to enter.

The Superior had not been long seated before a light step was heard advancing towards the arbour; and presently she distinguished the figure of the Sister Paulina peering into the darkness, as if endeavouring to ascertain if any one were there.

“I will seat myself for a while,” she said, “until he comes. He will be here presently.”

So saying, she entered, and seated herself directly opposite to the Superior, who, having previously drawn forth the same dagger which she had used, a short time before, for the destruction of the Father General, suddenly sprang forward, and, seizing the trembling girl, before she had time to scream or to make the least resistance, plunged the weapon into her bosom, exclaiming, as she did so—

“Die, base wanton; I am the Mother Superior.”

The poor girl was not instantly killed; and the Superior, finding this to be the case, gave her two successive stabs with the sharp instrument, before signs of life ceased to be exhibited; then, throwing down the weapon, by the side of the dead body, she left the arbour, and, regaining the building, went up stairs to her chamber; leaving the door, leading directly into it, unlocked. Going to a table upon which stood a decanter of water and a goblet, she took from her bosom the folded paper, which she had looked at in her oratory, a few days before; and pouring its contents into the water, she drank the poisoned liquid, without pausing or hesitation. Then, lying down upon her couch, she composed her limbs decently, and soon fell into a lethargy, from the effects of

Mysteries of a Convent.

187

the poisonous drug she had swallowed. Anon the potion began to work its deadly office; and, ere the light of morning dawned on the convent, the Mother Superior, burdened with all her crimes, was summoned into the presence of her Maker.

Thus perished, by her own hand, this extraordinary woman, who, had she been early trained up in the principles of a pure and holy religious life, might have become an ornament to her sex. Deprived, in early life, of the care and attention of her mother, and subjected to the stern and almost unparental temper and disposition of her father, she, no doubt, early imbibed some of those incipient traits of character which so awfully marked her future guilty career. And then, another important adjunct in smothering her better feelings was, the circumstance of her being subjected, in the days of her youth, to be a sufferer from the direful events which overspread her unhappy country, during the reign of terror that marked the French revolution. But the great source from whence sprung the turbid streams which blackened and defiled her future life, was unquestionably to be traced to the soul-destroying dogmas and vile superstition which so peculiarly characterize the Romish system. She was undoubtedly a woman of strong passions; and, for the accomplishment of her purposes, and the attainment of any object she had bent her mind upon, no obstacle appeared too difficult for her to surmount, nor any crime too heinous for her to perpetrate, so that, by so doing, she might be enabled to gratify her pride, her lust, and her ambition. To rule and domineer over others was her darling object; and woe be to that daring individual who called in question, or endeavoured to thwart, her authority! No subtlety or cunning could circumvent her vigilance. She was a thorough Jesuit; and duplicity and subterfuge were allies which she had ever ready at command, to assist her in any nefarious project on which her mind was bent. In short, she was a fit instrument to carry out the great object which Popery has ever aimed to accomplish, namely, to increase the number of its deluded victims, however base and dishonourable the means employed to accomplish that object, and to destroy heretics, and every other obstacle that opposed the success of this unholy design.

CHAPTER XXX.

Alarm and consternation in the convent—Discovery of the dead bodies—The bodies of the Mother Superior and Sister Paulina laid in the same grave—All efforts to elucidate the mystery in vain—The offices of Father General and Mother Superior filled up—Partial revelations and suspicions of the dying Sister Martina—Closing remarks.

GREAT was the consternation, the next morning, in the convent, when, after matins, from which the nuns missed both the Father General and the Mother Superior, as well as the Sister Paulina—a servant went to the room of the Superior, and found her, after ineffectually knocking at the door, stretched lifeless upon her bed; her very handsome features wearing a very slight indication of a momentary pang of pain.

The servant was horror-struck at what she beheld, and soon raised the alarm, by her cries, when the room was quickly thronged by the astonished and terror-stricken nuns, who, gazing at the corpse, and then in one another's faces, seemed to ask of each

other the question—"Who has done this?" No answer, however, was returned: and all was enveloped in mystery, perplexity, and fear.

As soon as the excitement respecting the deceased Mother Superior was somewhat abated, the attention of the nuns was directed to the missing Father General. Search was made for him, throughout the convent, in every room to which they could gain access, but he was nowhere to be found; and they gave over their endeavours to find him, under the impression that he had left the convent.

The anxiety of the nuns, on account of the non-appearance of the Sister Paulina amongst them, was not so great; as they imagined she might be detained in her cell, through indisposition. Great, however, was the consternation and dismay of the whole sisterhood, when, an hour or two after finding the body of the Mother Superior, two or three of the nuns, who were walking in the garden, entered the arbour, and there found the dead body of Sister Paulina, stabbed in three places, and surrounded by a pool of blood. They were almost petrified with astonishment and dread, and looked around, expecting that some assassin was lurking near, and that they might probably be the next victims. Recovering, however, from their stupor, they summoned assistance, and had the body conveyed into the house.

At length, on the afternoon of the second day, after they had interred the Mother Superior and the Sister Paulina, and that most strangely too, in the very same grave, it occurred to some of the nuns that they had not looked into the oratory. This they found locked; but, on breaking into the room, how they were shocked to discover the lifeless form of the Father General upon the floor, lying at the foot of the beautiful crucifix. Everything in this room, as in the bed-chamber and in the private parlour, wore an air of intense repose. There were no signs of violence, or of mortal struggle between contending parties. Who could have perpetrated the dark deeds which met the gaze of the nuns, and of the priests who had been summoned to their aid, in the oratory, the bed-chamber, and the arbour in the garden?

It was a mystery which none could unravel. And, taking into consideration the high position of at least two of the parties—the head of the order of Jesuits in the United States—the Superior of the Convent of Annunciation—there was a daring attached to the perpetrator of the deed, which showed that the assassin was of no common order.

Every nun, every inmate of the family, was carefully and most rigidly scrutinized, questioned, and cross-questioned, but all in vain: nobody knew aught about it, save those who had been actors in that dreadfully tragedy, and they were past being questioned. Sadness and gloom fell upon the inhabitants of the convent. The suite of rooms, hitherto appropriated to the Mother Superior, were carefully locked up—everything remaining just as she left it, and continued so for years.

The place vacated by the death of the Father General was duly filled—that of the Mother Superior was also supplied—the dead had been buried and well-nigh forgotten, when, at length, the Sister Martina came to lie upon her death-bed; and, conscience prompting her, she sent for the then Superior of the convent, and related to her the events, in the life of her predecessor, with which

Mysteries of a Convent.

189

the dying nun stood in anywise connected; the conversations which had taken place between the Mother Frances and herself; her jealousy and writhings under the feelings which the conduct of the Father General had awakened in her bosom; and the suspicions that were aroused in the mind of Sister Martina, on the discovery of the dead bodies, that the Mother Frances herself was the murderer of the General, of the nun, and then had taken poison to destroy her own life.

There seemed, to the Mother Superior, to whom this relation was made, but too much ground to believe that it was as the dying nun suspected; but, beyond these suspicions, there was but little positive evidence of any kind.

The threats uttered against Julia Moreton, as recorded in another portion of this work, and their fulfilment, will, together with the events transpiring in the life of Pietro di Lodetti and his wife, subsequent to their settlement in Louisiana, afford material for a continuation of the story, should the reception of that which is now given to the public, be such as to induce the writer to venture upon a second application of his pen to a sort of composition to which it has been hitherto a stranger. He does not pretend to say that any of the personages of this drama are real, nor any of the events which he has recorded are true; but he does believe that events, not wholly dissimilar, have occurred, and may occur again. He does believe that the true spirit of Jesuitism has been portrayed; and that dark, and forbidding, and abhorrent, as may be the picture, it but too faithfully depicts the principles and practices of an order which requires vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, only in order to wealth, to impunity, and to sensual indulgence—to the subversion of civil, religious, and intellectual liberty, and to the substitution of an iron oppression and a bloody superstition. He has, in short, written his story in as strong terms as he was capable of, in order to symbolize that which cannot be too darkly or too strongly coloured, and in reference to which, after all that has or can be imagined of it, it may still be affirmed that *truth is stranger than fiction*.

CONCLUSION.

Summary—Lessons to be gained from a right use of the narrative—The duty of parents—Cautions to young persons—Connection between Poverty and infidelity—Sure downfall of error and superstition—Earnest entreaty to embrace the truth.

IN reviewing the foregoing narrative, the reader may perceive some very important lessons. The first is, that, when we sustain the responsible office of parents, we should be very careful in the training and culture of the minds of the children committed to our care. The second, that the impressions we imbibe in the days of our childhood and youth, have much to do with our career in after-life. The third, that we should be very cautious how we give ear to those who are ever ready to iustil into our minds erroneous and pernicious principles and tenets, which, if fostered and cherished, may, eventually, peril the safety of our never-dying souls. There are other important lessons to be gained by the careful perusal and diligent study of this narrative; but these, for the present, shall suffice for the purpose of a short comment.

There are few parents but wish the temporal and eternal welfare of their offspring ; and yet, how often is it the case that, from a mistaken policy or want of proper judgment, the course they take for the attainment of the object they have at heart, is the one diametrically opposed to the accomplishment of their wishes. This has been exemplified in several instances in the course of this narrative. Parents, who had a conscientious dread of the evils of Popery, yet, without seriously reflecting on the step they were taking, have placed their children in the very vortex of the evils they most dreaded. Beware, then, I say again, parents, how you act in regard to the training and culture of those who are dear to you.

But what shall I say to those who are in the morning of life ? —whose prospects are bright and glowing with fancied happiness in store for their future years ? You have not yet begun to experience the realities of life ; but, be assured, those realities will be dark and troublesome, or bright and cheering, according as you commence your career in life's journey. You are surrounded by temptations ; and one false step may be productive of incalculable misery in this world, and everlasting woe in another. Store, then, your youthful minds with the truths of God's word ; these will guide and direct you in the devious path which you may have to tread ; and will prevent you from listening, with a willing ear, to the wily sophistry of those who would endeavour to lead you astray from the path of rectitude and truth, into the way that ends in destruction, misery, and eternal death.

The present age is peculiarly remarkable for the strenuous exertions which the enemies of the pure and unadulterated religion of Jesus Christ are making to bring discredit upon its divine doctrines and precepts. Infidelity (and I consider the Romish superstitions as nearly assimilated to infidelity as any false system can be) is openly and unblushingly advocated in the ears of congregated thousands of our fellow-creatures. There are Jesuits,—not belonging to the Romish system only,—going about the length and breadth of our land, striving to propagate their soul-destroying principles, and imbue the minds of the ignorant and unwary with error, superstition, and unbelief. But what avail ? All their puny efforts will be abortive, and will recoil upon their own heads.

Who, that have read the foregoing pages, but must shudder at the harrowing scenes and the dreadful acts therein portrayed ?—And these are the consequences of the blind implicit faith in a system repugnant to the genius of Christianity. Roman Catholicism, as it is believed and practised in most of the monasteries and convents, is a system that is fraught with the grossest delusions, and pregnant with the most calamitous results to those who believe in its fallacious doctrines. Many who have held high places in the Catholic church, in past ages, have been tainted with the blackest crimes ; and, even in the present day, there are dignitaries in that church, on the continent of Europe, whose lives and conduct are as different from the lives and conduct of the Apostles, as light is from darkness. I would not be uncharitable, and denounce all who are connected with that denomination. There are good men to be found amongst that body ; but, taken as a whole, the great majority are designing, base, hypocritical, and treacherous. But it is the system—religion it can scarcely

Mysteries of a Convent.

191

be called—which I denounce: it is closely connected with infidelity, and is the source of more crime and suffering than any other system that prevails amongst mankind. “Come out of her, then, my people, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing, lest ye be defiled.”

The time is approaching, when Popery, and every other false form of worship, shall give place to the genuine and unadulterated worship of the true and living God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ:—when the mists of ignorance and superstition shall be chased away by the light of the life-giving beams of the Word of Truth. Yes, Babylou must fall; the Mother of Harlots must be brought low; and images and crucifixes, and every other idol, shall be cast away; and peoples and nations shall bend the knee to Jesus, and acknowledge him Lord over all, blessed for evermore! May all who read these pages, be instrumental, through the blessing of Almighty God, in hastening that glorious time, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of God, and of his Christ.

End of Book

(Page Break for margin correction and notes)

SECRET PLAN OF THE JESUITS.

(Page Break for margin correction and notes)