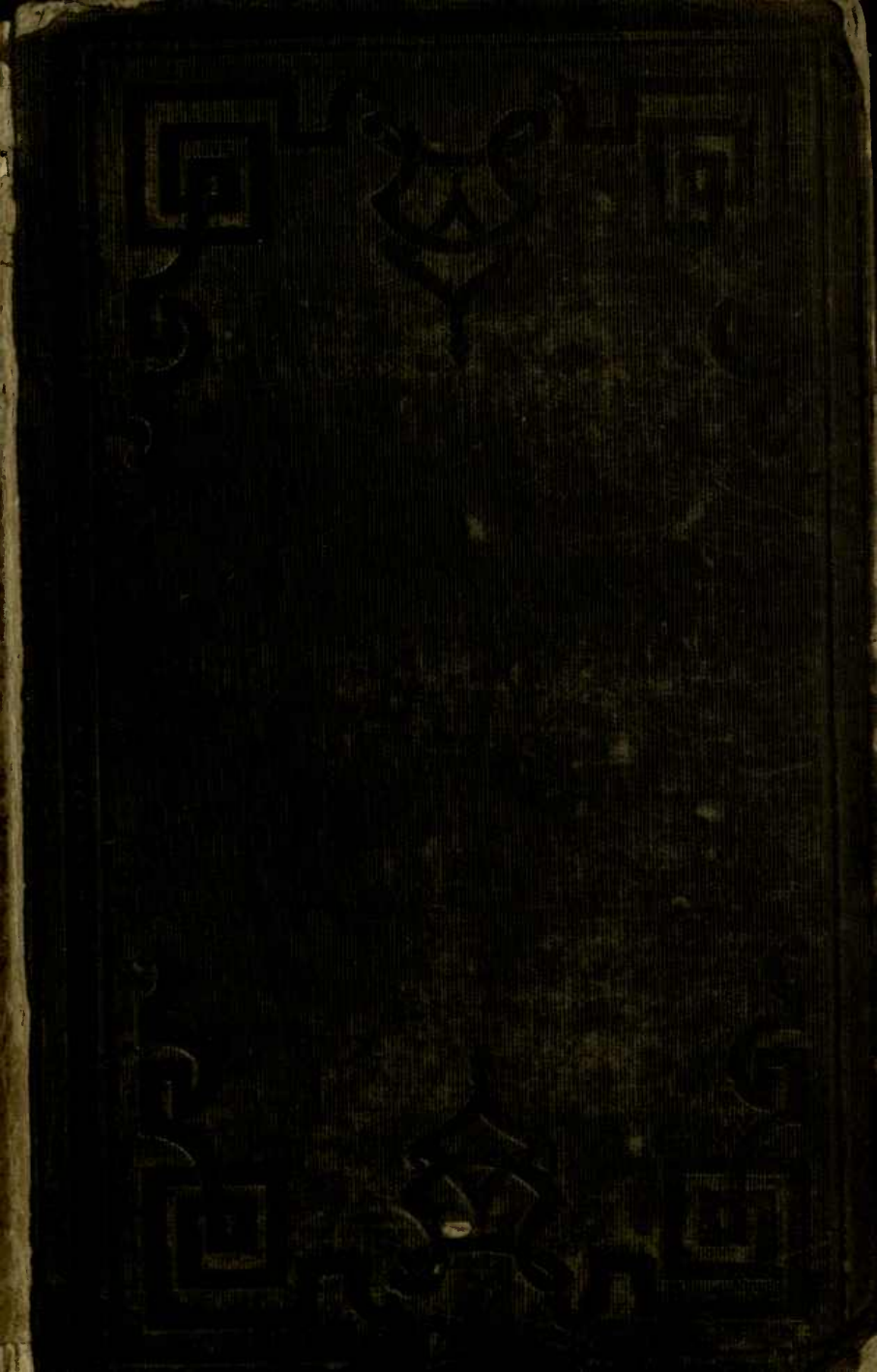

Maria Sherman Palmer.

A New Year's Gift from her Aunt

Louisa M Hart.

Stonington Jany 1st - 1849.

THE CONVENT;

A NARRATIVE,

FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY R. McCRINDELL,

AUTHORESS OF THE "SCHOOL-GIRL IN FRANCE," "THE ENGLISH GOVERNESS," ETC.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."
Ps. cxix. 105

NEW YORK:
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PREFACE.

The following pages are presented to the public under peculiar, and somewhat melancholy, circumstances.

The Authoress, no stranger in the literary world (having acquired some degree of fame by her former works), spent a great part of the last year of her life, in preparing the narrative now published.

I have said the "circumstances were melancholy," yet why should I say so? To her emancipated spirit most joyful has been the change. Her *life* was one of painful suffering, and *death*, to her, brought no sting.

For many years she had been a faithful follower of Jesus, and, in her hour of utmost need, she received that support He never fails to give to those who trust in Him.

Most anxious were her desires to benefit the rising race, and to set before them, in all their soul-destroying power, the doctrines of Popery.

Having passed several years in Roman Catholic countries, and witnessed much of its persecuting spirit, she was well prepared to show the system practised to deceive the simple-minded; and many

hours of bodily suffering were endured, while endeavoring, by her writings, to impress upon the minds of British youth the blessing and privilege they enjoy, in having the Word of God taught them from their youth up; and daily did she pray, that they, like the youthful Timothy, might *know* "the Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation."

That her efforts, for the benefit of the young, have not been in vain, pleasing evidences have been given; her "labor of love" has been acknowledged by her Heavenly Master, in more than one instance. Her "SCHOOL-GIRL in FRANCE" has been particularly useful, and as the present work was undertaken and carried on in a prayerful spirit, and with a view to His glory, no doubt that He, who has promised His blessing to those who "ask any thing" in His name, will vouchsafe to acknowledge the present attempt to spread the knowledge of the truths contained in His own holy word.

The outline of the Narrative is founded on fact. The substance is *true*, but woven together by such circumstances as her imagination suggested as likely to occur to persons situated as were the novices.

CLAREMONT HOUSE,
Dec. 11, 1847.

THE CONVENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONVENT BELLS.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the living faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

Speaking lies in hypocrisy: having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.—1 TIMOTHY iv. 1, 2, 3.

"LIST! oh, list to the convent-bells!" exclaimed Cecilia Montague, as leaning over the side of the luxurious pleasure-boat, around whose gilded prow the deep-blue waves of the beauteous Mediterranean sportively danced and sparkled, she bent a delighted ear to the sweet, plaintive melody, that came pealing over the waters, from the spire of a convent at a short distance from the shore. It was the vesper chime, and the sounds seemed to derive additional softness from the liquid element over which they were borne, and the balmy evening air on which they floated. The sun was

just sinking below the horizon, and his parting rays tinged with a golden splendor the placid bosom of the sea, and the lofty turrets of the neighboring monastery. The lovely coast of Sicily, along which they were sailing, presented at every turn objects of the most varied and romantic beauty; and there was a feeling of calm and delicious enjoyment in the hour and the scene, which was well calculated to hush every jarring passion into peace.

"Do let us step ashore, mamma, and go to see the evening service in that convent-chapel. The sound of the bells is so sweet! and, listen! do you not hear a distant murmur of music, like the echo of seraphic voices?"

"Silly, romantic girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Montague, a quiet, gentle, good-natured woman, "I really doubt if I am doing right in indulging your wayward fancies." Yet Mrs. Montague, in spite of this doubt, gave the necessary directions to the boatmen, and, with the assistance of a Sicilian count, who accompanied them, the two ladies were soon landed, and entering the fine old avenue that led to the convent. It was a venerable Gothic building, in a state of excellent preservation, and the wilderness of chestnut, olive, and orange-trees by which it was surrounded, invested it with an air of sombre majesty, that suited well with the character of the edifice, and the purpose to which it

was devoted. The wild solitude and picturesque seclusion of the place did not fail to captivate the imagination of our young enthusiast.

The party followed the windings of a noble avenue, till they came to the chapel, which they immediately entered. A few poor old people, from the neighboring cottages, composed the whole visible congregation; but, beyond a double grating, rendered impervious by a curtain of crimson silk, were heard the apparently fervent responses of the nuns, while the officiating priest proceeded with the usual Latin service. The effect was considerably heightened by the rich notes of the organ, and the melody of several very beautiful voices, whose thrilling accents made the fretted roof resound with a music almost celestial; and while the ear drank in their fascinating sweetness, and the heart yielded to the enchanting spell, the mind did not pause to reflect, that those sounds were repeated in an unknown tongue, and were, therefore, neither the utterance of the understanding, nor the language of enlightened devotion. The choral strain had ceased, the nuns had retired, and the few peasants were leaving the chapel, before the entranced Cecilia and her party moved from their places. At length, Mrs. Montague rose to depart, and after many a "longing lingering look" of admiration from her daughter, at the turreted walls, and

lovely woods of the convent of Santa Rosalia, they re-entered their boat, and returned to their abode at Palermo.

"Oh! mamma, how I should like to be a nun!" exclaimed Cecilia, suddenly arousing herself from a long and deep *rêverie*, during which she had neither heard the flattering speeches, nor noticed the assiduous attentions of her Sicilian suitor. "How lovely the solitude; how sweet the quiet of that secluded spot! Surely, none of the cares, anxieties, sins, or sorrows of life can gain admittance there! The life of the nuns must glide away in one uninterrupted flow of calm and peaceful serenity, hallowed by the glow of seraphic devotion; and they must almost insensibly pass from earth to heaven, with the blissful certainty of a glorious and happy future. Oh! that such a lot were mine!" A deep sigh attested the sincerity of the wish, and the poor girl really thought herself actuated by the purest feelings of true and spiritual piety, while thus displaying her utter ignorance both of her own heart, and of the nature of real religion. Her mother was somewhat more enlightened, but the worldliness of her character was conspicuous in her reply.

"Cecilia! how ridiculously you talk! Can any thing be more foolish than the idea of *your* becoming a nun! You, who are so fond of gayety, and so well fitted to shine in the brill-

iant circles of fashionable society! Why, you would be miserable before the end of a week; pining after those amusements and pleasures which you now enjoy, and which, I am sure, are quite indispensable to your happiness."

"Indeed, mamma, you are greatly mistaken in your opinion. I assure you, that, although I seem so fond of gayety, I am very often, not only tired, but heartily sick of it. The pleasures of the world do not yield me half the satisfaction I expected from them; and, now that their novelty is past, they generally leave behind them a painful void, and a feeling of self-reproach, which make me often unhappy. I am convinced that religion would make me much happier."

"Come, come, child, no more of this nonsense. If you wish to become religious, you can do so, without shutting yourself up in a convent. You greatly deceive yourself, in thinking there is nothing but peace and happiness in those places. Depend upon it, there is quite as much of the spirit of the world in them as there is outside their walls; while the passions, left to prey upon the very vitals of their unhappy victims, cause quite as much misery there as elsewhere. Besides, you know you are a Protestant, and could not enter a Roman Catholic convent."

Cecilia was silenced, but not convinced.

Her ardent imagination was strongly impressed by the kind of mysterious *prestige* that seems to hover round a convent-life; and, though the impression was at length effaced by newer and more exciting images, yet it greatly tended to prepare her for an easy surrender to the wiles and fascinations of the Romish system.

Mrs. Montague and her daughter were, at this time, peculiarly circumstanced. They had, some years before, accompanied Mr. Montague to Constantinople, where he held a lucrative appointment, connected with the English embassy. Death had, however, about a twelvemonth before the period of our story, deprived them of an indulgent husband and father; and they had availed themselves of the first favorable opportunity for returning to England, where they possessed considerable property. But their voyage had been unfortunate; their vessel was captured by a French ship of war, stationed in the Mediterranean, and they were taken as prisoners to Sicily, which was then under the domination of the French sovereign. They were, however, treated with the greatest politeness, and allowed to reside in lodgings of their own, under the *surveillance* of the French governor. This gentleman used every means to lighten their captivity; they were allowed to associate

freely with the best society in the island, both French and native; parties of pleasure and delightful excursions, were continually planned for their amusement; and Cecilia, being not only a very pretty girl, but known to be an heiress, soon became the object of pursuit to numberless suitors.

Not many weeks after the conversation just related, all the fashionable world of Palermo assembled at the principal church, to witness her abjuration of Protestantism; and but another month had elapsed, when the rich, the gay, the beautiful Cecilia Montague bestowed her hand on the Conte Leonelli, and the whole island rang with the *fêtes* that were given to celebrate the event. Mrs. Montague's objections had been overcome, and she consented to spend the remainder of her days in the superb mansion of her daughter.

And was that convent of Santa Rosalia—that venerable and interesting edifice, with its sweet scenery, and its lovely air of seclusion and tranquillity—was it *really* the abode of peace, forgetfulness of the world, and undisturbed happiness? Let us take a peep into its interior, and we shall be able to judge.

On the same beautiful evening which has been already mentioned, but a few hours later, when the moon in tranquil majesty was holding her court in the deep blue expanse, amidst

hosts of brilliant stars, and the delicious repose of nature was only interrupted by the sweetly-plaintive voice of the nightingale, two ladies were walking in the convent-garden, and conversing together in low and cautious tones. They kept their walk sedulously confined to the most shady parts, and were evidently anxious to escape observation.

They were both interesting in their appearance, yet very different in person. The younger was a blooming girl of about sixteen, tall and graceful, with the sparkling Italian eye, but fairer in complexion than the natives of the south generally are. There was a laughing sprightliness in her countenance, but ill-disguised by an affected gravity, and its prevailing expression was that of ingenuous and happy youth, but lately emerged from the careless playfulness of childhood.

Her companion was, in many respects, a perfect contrast to the happy-looking girl. Her age might be about twenty; her complexion was of the dark hue which the tints of health render so rich and glowing; but her cheek wore a paleness that was almost death-like, and her eyes, of the deepest and most striking expression, were clouded by a melancholy which might almost have been called despair. It was a face of sad and touching beauty, and there was something very painful

in its character of silent anguish, varied by occasional flashes of mild and troubled passion.

They both wore the white veil of the novices; and from the first part of their conversation, did not seem to have been long acquainted.

"Dear signora," said the younger,—then, correcting herself, she changed the expression into "Dear sister,"—"I am very sorry to see you so sad. You have now been here a whole week, and I have never once seen you smile. But, pray, let us get deeper into this grove, for, though I could not refuse to walk with you in the garden, after all the family were retired to rest, as I thought, I might, perhaps, be of some service to you, yet I am not quite sure that I am doing right, and I fear the *madre* would be highly displeased if she knew of our being out at this hour."

"For myself I care not!" replied the other lady, in a tone of reckless determination, "but, for your sake, gentle girl, I would not willingly draw their observation upon us. *I* am quite resigned to any thing they may inflict upon me. I have neither joy nor hope on this side the grave, and it is of little consequence how the short remnant of my wretched life may be passed; indeed, I rejoice that I may have the opportunity *here* of atoning for my sins by misery, and every sort of privation, and so,

perhaps, attaining to forgiveness, and future peace."

"You have drawn a very gloomy picture in your own imagination, of the life we lead here. I assure you, you are mistaken, and that we are generally very happy. We have, of course, penances to perform, or endure, when we have done wrong; but, otherwise, we enjoy a very peaceful and agreeable life."

"What! with such a superior over you as the madre Santa Teresa! I am sure *her* appearance and manners are haughty and austere enough to repulse and frighten any body!"

"She is very strict, certainly, and her manners are not prepossessing. She is not at all like our late dear *madre*. You must know that she has not been long our superior. She was, for about one year, sub-superior, under our late excellent and beloved *madre Santa Maddalena*, who had been at the head of this convent for thirty years. Oh! *she* was a kind and amiable superior! She brought me up from my infancy, and was indeed a mother to me. We all loved her with the most devoted affection, and her death was a bitter and heart-rending grief to us. Every day since, we seem to feel her loss more and more, for her successor is very different, and has introduced severities into the convent which we never knew before,

and which make our lives much less comfortable than they used to be."

"Poor child!" exclaimed the other lady, in a tone of compassion, "and have you then been here ever since your infancy?"

"Even so, sister, I was devoted to God before my birth, and brought hither as soon as I was weaned, and able to walk."

"Are you an orphan, then, Rosa?"

"No, signora; I have both a father and mother, and also a brother and sister."

"Who are your parents, then, and from what possible motive could they sacrifice so sweet a child?"

"My mother is Contessa di Belfiore, in her own right; but she married an English gentleman of the name of Melville. It was a clandestine match; they eloped into France, where they were united, first by a Catholic priest, and afterwards by a Protestant minister, as they were of different religions. My father has, since then, embraced the true faith; but after her return to Sicily, my mother's conscience was so troubled by the sin she had committed, in marrying a heretic, especially as the rites of the church were refused her in consequence of it, that she made a solemn vow to devote her first-born daughter to the service of God, with a dower of considerable amount. Thus she expiated her offence, and reconciled herself to

the church, into whose bosom my father also was soon after received. Hence, I have never known any other home than this house; and, through the tender care of the good *madre*, and the kindness of the nuns, my life was one continued scene of sunshine, till within the last three months, when her lamented death, and the very opposite character and conduct of her successor, have thrown a heavy gloom over all our former happiness."

"And do you ever see your parents, or your brother and sister?"

"Oh! yes; my dear papa comes very often to see me, and so does my brother, whenever he is at home; for he has always been enthusiastically fond of the sea, and nothing could prevent him from entering the navy. My mother and sister also come sometimes; but all the community are like mothers and sisters to me, except the superior, and two or three of the nuns who came with her, and whose favor I have not been able to gain, though I have always done all I could to please them."

"Poor child! How much I pity you!—but why should I say so? You are happy in your innocence and ignorance; you have never known any other kind of life; and, therefore, I have rather reason to envy you."

"But, dear signora, you have not told me

why you asked me to take this midnight-walk, nor what I can do to serve you."

"Rosa!" exclaimed the other lady passionately, grasping both the hands of her young companion, while a bright beam of moonlight, streaming down through an opening in the thick chestnut-trees above her head, strongly marked the contrast between her pale and agitated countenance, and the smiling serenity of that on which she gazed. "Rosa! I have watched every face in this house, ever since I have been here, with the most anxious desire to select a friend, to whom I could communicate my wretched history, and my miserable feelings, and from whom I might hope to receive sympathy, kindness, affection, and advice. I have seen none but yours, to whom I could venture to open my heart. The superior is to me, a woman of most repulsive appearance, and, among all the nuns, I have seen nothing but indications of senseless bigotry, doting superstition, absurd frivolity, malignant censoriousness, and all-pervading selfishness. In no countenance but yours can I trace either mental refinement, true sensibility, frankness, or genuine kindness and feeling. You are very young, it is true; but yet I feel that I can trust you, and that your friendship will be a consolation to me."

The countenance of the young girl assumed

an expression of doubt, and almost of fear, as she replied,

"Sister, you are much too severe in your opinion and remarks. I assure you there are many of the nuns whom, when you know them better, you will find very excellent and amiable women. For myself, I feel much obliged by your good opinion, but pardon me if I rather dread than wish for your confidence, and beg you will reflect, before you intrust to an inexperienced girl circumstances, respecting which she cannot be qualified to give any advice, and which, perhaps, it is scarcely proper for her to know. Had you not better wait a little, and choose some fitter confidant among the nuns; or consult the father confessor?"

"Cease, cease!" exclaimed her companion, with a gesture of impatience, "cease, I beseech you, to annoy me with these doubts and suggestions. You are the friend my heart has chosen, but you need not fear that my confidence will do you any injury. It is, indeed, a confession of crime, of deep and awful guilt; but it is not such as will tinge your cheek with blushes, though it may make it turn pale. Sit down with me on this mossy seat, and you shall hear my short, but tragical history."

"I am the only daughter of a Spanish merchant at Malaga. I was his joy and pride, and unfortunately, brought up in the indulgence of

every whim, and the gratification of every wish. My mother was a *beata*, an exceedingly devout woman, and endeavored to imbue my mind with the strictest principles of religion. But I was fond of the world, and, as my will was never thwarted, I formed what connections I pleased, and lived in a constant round of gayety.

"About two years ago, I became acquainted with a young Englishman, a clerk in a neighboring merchant's establishment. He paid me marked attention, and we became passionately attached to each other. Our intimacy, however, was discovered and prohibited by my father, who, on this occasion, exerted an authority which he had never assumed before, and to which I was by no means disposed to submit. Bitterly does my conscience reproach me, for the numberless instances of disobedience, ingratitude, and deception, of which I was guilty during the ensuing twelve-month. I frequently saw Frederick Morton during that period; but my father, having been apprized of it, locked me up in my room, and threatened to send me to a convent, if I did not relinquish this forbidden connection.

"With shame and grief I confess, that these harsh measures, and still harsher menaces, only stirred up my proud spirit to more determined rebellion. I found means of communicating

with my lover; our plans were arranged, and I succeeded in escaping from my father's house. A small vessel had been provided, in which we embarked, sailed to Gibraltar, where we were immediately married.

"You shudder, Rosa, at my wickedness, and well you may; but I was soon punished in so dreadful a manner, that you will not, cannot, refuse to pity me. We spent a few weeks at Gibraltar, in a dream-like happiness too exquisite to last; but my conscience soon awoke from its slumber, and its scorpion-stings compelled me to implore the pardon of my parents. I wrote repeatedly, the most submissive and penitential letters; but no answer was returned to any of them; and I became so miserable, that my beloved Frederick consented to take me back to Malaga, that I might, on my knees, endeavor to soften the anger of my justly-offended parents. O my excellent and affectionate husband! Never can I forget your kindness, your tender indulgence! Never can I cease to mourn the hour when I induced you to grant me this fatal opportunity!"

Here the unhappy novice, totally overcome by her agonized feelings, leaned her head on the shoulder of the sympathizing Rosa, and yielded to a torrent of tears, accompanied with convulsive sobbing. Her companion entreated her to desist from so distressing a narration;

but, after this burst of feeling, she persisted in resuming it, observing that she would make it as brief as possible.

"It would be impossible for me to give you a description, or even a clear idea of what followed. Scenes of horror and bloodshed flit before my memory, half veiled in a mist of delirious uncertainty. All I know is, that my father and my husband encountered each other, the very evening of our arrival; my father attacked Frederick with furious rage; they fought desperately and blindly; and the result, —Oh! Rosa! that I should live to relate it! The result was, the death of both, almost instantaneously!"

It was not till some considerable time after, that the unhappy Spaniard was able to conclude this account of herself, which, however, she insisted upon doing, notwithstanding the entreaties of the weeping Rosa, that she would at least defer it.

"What became of me, after all these horrors, I scarcely know. I awoke from a long and horrid lethargy, under the roof of my father's dwelling; and the first piece of information I obtained was, that my unfortunate mother had died of grief, and that I was the murderess of both my parents, as well as of the object of my dearest affections! I was completely overwhelmed by the awful judgments

of heaven, in the fearful consequences of my sins; my reason gave way, and a brain-fever, which had nearly proved fatal, kept me in a state of raving delirium during several months. At length I recovered, and found myself in the power of my brother, who, as soon as I could bear the journey, sent me here, to expiate my crimes by a life of misery and self-reproach."

"And now, Rosa, dear Rosa, that you know all my guilt, do not, pray do not shrink from me with the abhorrence I deserve;—but have compassion on me, comfort me, counsel me, and tell me how I shall get rid of the dreadful load of condemnation that weighs me down to the dust."

"Dearest sister," replied the youthful novice, whose tears of sympathy had not yet done flowing, "I am quite incompetent to advise you. The father confessor, to whom you have no doubt told all this dreadful tale, will direct you in the mode of expiating your offences, and put you in the way of recovering your peace of mind, and being reconciled to God. He has, no doubt, enjoined you suitable penances, and will, in proper time give you absolution."

"Has he the power or authority to do *that*, Rosa? If I could feel *satisfied* that he *had*, I should dismiss all anxiety; but my mind is full of doubt and confusion on that very subject."

"Sister!" exclaimed Rosa, starting back in-

voluntarily a few paces, "Sister! what can you mean? What! doubt the authority of the Church and her ministers! Oh, you have indeed fallen into the snares of heretics!—But you must confess this also, and Father Giacomo will easily solve all your doubts. But, pray, do let us retire to rest; for the moon has sunk behind the mountains, and it must be very late. I fear we shall be but little disposed to attend matins, and I think the superior considers you quite recovered enough not to be any longer excused."

"She has told me so, and my duty is passive obedience. But, oh! do promise to meet me here occasionally at night, that we may have a little unrestained conversation. I have still much to say to you, therefore promise me this enjoyment."

Rosa promised, though she felt as if she were doing wrong; and the two friends, having affectionately embraced each other, retired to their respective cells; but the sleep of the one was disturbed by mental agony, and that of the other troubled with dreams and visions of terror, occasioned by the tragical events which had just been related to her.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPANISH NOVICE.

We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.

We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men.

We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves; we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.—ISAIAH lix. 9, 10, 11.

IT was some weeks after the conversation related in the preceding chapter, the convent-clock had tolled the hour of eleven, and silence reigned along the deserted corridors, for the inmates of the establishment had some time before retired to their cells, to enjoy the few hours of rest allowed them, till the three o'clock bell should summon them to their early task of useless and wearisome repetitions. A feeble ray of light, however, still streamed from the casement of one small chamber; and its faint reflection just revealed within the usual contents of a nun's cell:—a bedstead without curtains, one chair, and a deal table, on which stood a crucifix, a black rosary, a breviary, a skull, and an hour-glass. On that bed lay, in seeming repose, the form of the Spanish novice,

and beside it sat the youthful Rosa, in an attitude of quiet watchfulness, her eyes bent on her rosary, and her lips inaudibly repeating the Latin prayers attached to each separate bead. A profound silence had, for some time, reigned in the little room, when it was interrupted by an impatient motion on the part of the invalid, and a meek, but agitated, voice feebly exclaimed,

"Rosa, dearest Rosa! do speak to me, I beseech you! Let me hear your sweet and cheering voice, dispelling the horror of my thoughts!"

"Hush! hush, dear sister!" said her affectionate attendant, gently laying her hand on the mouth of her charge; "you know you must not talk, but try to sleep, or you will bring on again the fever and all its dangerous symptoms."

"I *cannot* sleep, Rosa; I assure you I cannot; I have been trying for the last half hour, but I cannot accomplish it. I have long ardently wished for an opportunity of conversing with you alone, and without interruption, and the present is one which may not again occur for weeks, perhaps for months. My mind is in a state of insupportable torture, and, as I really find it impossible to sleep, I must unburthen my misery to you."

"I sincerely wish you would not, dear sis-

ter," observed Rosa, with a countenance and manner expressive of the most unfeigned reluctance to listen to a subject from which her feelings instinctively shrank, though she could scarcely, even to herself, have assigned a reason for the dread it inspired. "You know," she continued, "that I am a most unfit person to be your confidant, and I earnestly entreat you to choose a more suitable one, or rather to repose unlimited confidence in your spiritual director."

"The thing is impossible, and so you will acknowledge, when you know the nature of my distress. O Rosa! *Rosina carissima!*" she continued, throwing her arms round the neck of the softened girl, and laying her burning forehead against her cheek, "you cannot, you must not, deny me the relief of your sympathy!"

Rosa gently replaced her head on the pillow, (a luxury only allowed in sickness,) which she carefully adjusted; and, thinking that further refusal would, perhaps, only produce irritation and dangerous excitement, she resolved to submit for a little while, in order to calm her, and soothingly said, as she kissed her patient,

"Well, then, I will listen to you for a few minutes, and when you have silenced your mind, you will perhaps be able to sleep. In

the mean time, lie down quietly, and I will lay my head on the pillow, beside yours."

"Thank you, *carina*, thank you. You are the only kind creature in the house. And now, I will tell you why I cannot impart my distress to Father Giacomo. It is because he is himself, in a great measure, the cause of it."

"What, has he not given you absolution? I thought you had performed all the penances he had enjoined you."

"He *has* given me absolution, Rosa,—full and entire absolution. But I am not satisfied with it."

"Not satisfied with it, sister! you astonish me! What more can you require?"

"I want the absolution of God, Rosa; the full and entire pardon of my offended Creator —of my insulted Redeemer."

"Well, and have you not had it, by the mouth of His ambassador—His accredited and authorized agent?"

"I am not sure of *that;* I do not feel as if God had forgiven me; my mind is in a dreadful state of doubt, anxiety, and terror."

"That must arise from the weakness of your faith, sister. You know that God has empowered His ministers to forgive sins in His name, and it is a sin to doubt it."

"Dearest Rosa, allow me to say that I do

doubt it, most seriously doubt it, and this it is which makes me miserable."

"Sister!" exclaimed Rosa, starting from her recumbent position, and attempting to withdraw her hand from the fevered clasp of the invalid, "sister, you terrify me! I must beg that you will not again give utterance to such fearful sentiments, or I cannot listen you."

"Listen for one moment!" cried sister Isabel, with vehemence, forcibly retaining her hand, while her eyes flashed with intense and almost wild earnestness, "Rosa, you are not more attached to the church than I am. It is because I *wish* to think her right, that I am so anxious to be satisfied on this subject. Surely truth must be able to bear investigation, and the church *must* have proof to give, in support of her pretensions. You cannot but wish to know those proofs; do not, therefore, refuse to hear what I have to say. Remember, it is a question of the utmost consequence, for on it depends the eternal welfare of our immortal souls. I do not say the church speaks without authority; but I wish to be *satisfied* on that point."

"But what satisfaction, what proofs can you require?" asked Rosa, awed by the solemnity of the subject, and the earnestness with which it was pressed upon her.

"When I was at Gibraltar, I was one Sun-

day going to walk on the Alameda with . . . oh! I dare not say with *whom*, for my brain begins to whirl at the thought! . . . but, *we* were going to hear the military music played by the English band; and on our way, we passed a place in which there were a great number of people, both Spanish and English, assembled to hear a heretic *padre* preach. My curiosity induced me to enter, and my beloved companion gladly accompanied me. My attention was soon riveted by the simple, but forcible eloquence of the speaker. He attacked most unsparingly the doctrines of our church, and especially that by which she claims the right of forgiving sins. I do not remember one of his arguments; indeed, how could I, after the oceans of blood and misery which have since rolled over my mind? but I *do* remember that, at that time, they greatly startled me. He had in his hand a small book, which he said was the Bible,—the word of God himself,—and what he read out of it seemed very clear and convincing. I resolved to satisfy myself on the subject, by inquiring into it seriously, for I felt that it must be of infinite importance; but alas! my attention was soon forced from the subject, and the time that has since elapsed seems but one long, long protracted dream of horror, anguish, and despair."

"Sister," said Rosa, mildly, but seriously,

"you then committed the same sin as our mother Eve; you listened to the voice of the tempter, offering you the forbidden fruit of unhallowed knowledge; and you should be thankful to God, who snatched you from the peril you were rashly drawing upon yourself."

"But *why*, is it forbidden knowledge, Rosa? that is what I cannot comprehend. If God has really communicated his will to man, as our church admits that he has, why should we, why should any one, be debarred from reading that blessed book? Surely, it must be delightful to read what God himself has inspired, and much more satisfactory to us to learn our duty thus at the fountain head, than to take it on the word of others, who, perhaps, are as liable to mistake its meaning as ourselves."

"The priests *cannot* misunderstand it, dear sister, because they are instructed by the church, which God has commissioned to be the infallible interpreter of His word; and they only withhold it from the people, to prevent those numerous and dreadful errors which always result from the exercise of private judgment in matters so mysterious."

"But are we sure that God has so appointed it? Has He said that the greater number of His rational creatures should not read His own words? Has He *really* revealed His will only to the priests? If I could be *quite* convinced

that it was indeed so, my mind would be perfectly satisfied."

"What proof could convince you, since you cannot believe the testimony of your spiritual superiors?"

"The word of God itself, Rosa! Give me but *that*, and let me see there the confirmation of what they tell me, and I will cheerfully and humbly bow to their authority."

"You could not understand it, sister, even if it were put into your hands."

"I cannot believe that, for every thing that I heard the English *padre* read was extremely plain and simple, and I could, without the slightest mental effort, perfectly understand every word."

"But, remember, he was, according to your own account, a heretic, and his Bible, therefore, must have been a false one. There is no doubt that the devil has furnished those unhappy people with a wrong and injurious translation of the Bible; and this accounts for their errors, and your mistake."

There was a pause of a few minutes, and then the invalid resumed.

"You may be right, dear Rosa; there is great weight in what you say, and I assure you, that I earnestly wish to believe it. It would take an insufferable load off my heart, to be satisfied that the church was right, and

that I might safely depend on her as a guide to heaven. But, still, there is one doubt, one dreadful doubt, which distracts my mind. Since the church has the *true* word of God in her possession, why does she not impart it to her people? Why not openly and honestly produce it, and thus, at once, establish her own doctrines, her own authority, beyond the possibility of their being controverted, and crush forever the pretensions of heretics?"

"Really, dear sister, I am not sufficiently skilled in the question, to answer all your inquiries; I have always heard that it was highly presumptuous and dangerous for unlearned persons to attempt the study of what is so completely beyond their powers of comprehension, and that it infallibly leads them into scepticism, infidelity, or heresy. I have been taught to bow an implicit submission to the authority and infallible wisdom of the church, and I should shrink with horror from the idea of arraigning either."

The invalid turned uneasily on her pillow, and was silent for a few minutes. "Rosa," she said at length, "I could almost say I envy your tranquillity. I would give the world, if I had it, to enjoy the same undoubting, unhesitating confidence; yet I could not bend my mind to such a system of mental slavery, which must surely be unworthy of a rational

being. Your innocence of all crime is the cause of your blessed serenity; but to a soul like mine, tortured with the misery of unpardoned guilt, the fearful uncertainty of my position is a source of incessant anxiety, and almost hopeless despair. Oh! that I had a Bible! Oh! that I could look on the word of God Himself, and satisfy the agonizing doubts that continually distract my mind!"

She clasped her hands wildly together, and sobbed in the bitterness of her feelings.

A step, soft and stealthy, but still audible, now startled the anxious Rosa, and turning very pale, she leaned over the bed, earnestly whispering,

"Dear sister, for the love of heaven, calm yourself! Here is sister Giovanna! What will she say to find you thus?"

The invalid smothered her sobs, covered her head, and composed herself to the semblance of sleep; while her youthful nurse resumed her breviary, and was apparently deeply absorbed by its contents, when the aged nun entered to relieve her watch.

"Well, *carina*, how is your charge? Has she been very quiet? Has she slept well?"

"She is, as you see, quite composed, mother, and I have done all in my power to keep her so."

Rosa's cheek was slightly tinged, notwith-

standing the habitual duplicity inseparable from a conventual life; the nun, however, did not suspect her prevarication, but dismissed her to rest with the usual blessing.

The invalid slowly recovered; but her mind was not at ease. It brooded over her doubts and fears, and daily became more and more perplexed. The consciousness of unpardoned guilt, the terrors of an awakened conscience, the ardent longing of the soul for peace, and the utter ignorance of the only way in which it might be obtained, preyed upon her health, and secretly, but surely, undermined her constitution.

It would be too much to say that the mind of her young friend, Rosalia, was quite tranquil. Her eyes had been opened to see much that she had never dreamed of before; her fears had been, in some degree, awakened by the suggestions of the Spanish novice; but her disposition was naturally cheerful, unsuspicious, and confiding; and her spiritual perceptions were not sufficiently clear, or her fears sufficiently excited, to compel her to relinquish that implicit trust in her self-appointed guides, which had been implanted in her mind from her earliest infancy. Her deadly lethargy, indeed, had been somewhat disturbed, and her confidence slightly shaken; but she was willing to banish these unpleasant feelings,—to

persuade herself that sister Isabel was, to say the least, extremely unreasonable, visionary, and, perhaps, bewildered,—and to close her eyes to every gleam of unwelcome light, as the sluggard implores to be left to "a little more sleep, a little more slumber."

The new comer, in the meantime, was any thing but a favorite in the convent. Her reserved and gloomy manners, her determined shunning of all familiar intercourse with the other inmates, the contemptuous glances with which she noticed their childish enjoyments and silly gossip, the sullen resignation with which she entered into their wearisome employments, the morose and melancholy expression which continually sat on her countenance, and the haughty silence in which she received the directions of the superiors, made her equally an object of curiosity and dislike. As every thing new, however trifling, is an event in a convent, these peculiarities were eagerly seized upon, as interesting subjects, to enliven the dreary monotony of their stagnant existence. Every look, gesture, and action, was closely watched, every opportunity greedily seized of prying into her secret sentiments, and imagination very readily supplied what the most anxious observation left undiscovered. Various surmises were formed, and marvellous tales told, of the mysterious novice. She was

looked upon with an eye of suspicion, wonder, and even dread. The young beheld her with distrust, and avoided her; the old scowled upon her, crossed themselves, and muttered a prayer to some saint, when they met her. To Rosalia alone she was an object of compassion, kindness, and growing affection; but the young girl soon found that she must be cautious in the manifestation of these sentiments, or she would have to share in the unpopularity of her unfortunate friend.

"*Gesu* Maria! Sister Rosa," said one of the younger nuns to her, one morning, as they met in the corridor, "what *can* make you so intimate with that gloomy-looking Spanish stranger? One would think her aspect was sufficient to scare away a girl like you; and I really think you are not like the same creature, since you have been so much with her. Pray, do tell me, what attraction can you find in her, that you are so fond of her company?"

"She is a stranger, sister Marcella; and that, of itself, is a claim on our kindness and attention; but she is unhappy, and that is a still greater one to every feeling mind."

"What can she be so unhappy about?—Of course she could not help regretting the world, and her friends, when she left them, especially as she does not appear to have done so willingly; but she has now been here quite long

enough to be comforted, and to have made acquaintances in the house who would have supplied the place of those she has lost. But she keeps aloof from all of us, and treats us with haughty scorn. This is not very amiable, and I cannot see any right that she has to consider herself above us."

"She does not think so, or feel so, sister; but her feelings have been greatly lacerated, and her mind is, I fear, sadly unhinged; we should, therefore, pity, and try to soothe her."

"You speak in this way, Rosa, because she has taken a fancy to you, and you are proud of being preferred to every-body else; but, for my part, I see no reason to court the favor of this haughty Spaniard, about whom, indeed, very strange tales are told."

"Strange, indeed," said sister Geronima, an elderly nun who now joined them. "It is the opinion of many persons, that she must have committed some very dreadful sin; for Father Giacomo would not give her absolution for a long time,—not until she had performed a great many long and severe penances; and she looks so miserable, that I am sure she must have a conscience burdened with very heavy sins. The great enemy often takes advantage of such a state of mind; and it is said that she is not free from his assaults. I hope she does not yield to his temptations; but there is about

her something very unhallowed and mysterious. She repeats the prayers as if she did not know what she was doing; she is evidently wrapped up in some contemplations of her own; and, when any thing arouses her from her *rêverie,* she starts as if she had been asleep, or in a trance. There is a fearful wildness in her eyes, which makes one tremble and cross one's self; and she is, altogether, so strange and unaccountable a being, that the greater part of our elder sisters strongly doubt the wisdom of the superior, in introducing her among us."

"Santa Maria preserve us!" exclaimed sister Marcella, "you do not mean to insinuate, sister Geronima, that she is under the power of the devil?"

"I do not exactly say so," replied the other, "but there is certainly something very strange about her; and how do we know but that it may arise from Satanic influence, or even from heresy?—It cannot but be highly dangerous to introduce such a person into the house; and we must all pray to the blessed Virgin, that she will avert from us the awful consequences that may result from it."

"But, sister," remonstrated Rosalie, "you have no reason to suspect the poor stranger of such crimes. Why should you judge her so severely, when you have no proofs of her guilt?"

"No reason! no proofs!" retorted the nun angrily, "do not, sister Rosalie, set yourself up as a judge of your superiors in age and knowledge. I tell you, that I have *good* reasons for speaking as I do; and, if you must know some of them, I can inform you that she has been heard in her cell, muttering strangely, groaning, sobbing, and walking distractedly about, as if under some dreadful conflict; she has also been known to roam about the corridors, like a demented person, at midnight; and mysterious noises are said to be heard about the house, ever since she has been here. Let me tell you, sister Rosalie, that you are very rash and foolish, thus to put yourself in the way of danger, by associating with her as you do. How do you know but that she may be guilty of witchcraft or heresy, or possessed with an evil spirit, and that she may infect you with the same crimes, and so drag you, with her, down to perdition?"

Rosa made no reply, but Marcella devoutly crossed herself, and invoking the aid of "Maria Santissima," went to make further inquiries respecting the new wonder of Santa Rosalia, and to enjoy this fresh topic of convent gossip. The youthful novice was glad to escape from the lecture of sister Geronima, and immediately took refuge in her own room.

Rosa was not naturally superstitious; and

though she had been nursed from infancy in convent-lore, and her mind filled with all the absurd legends which formed so large a part of the instruction peculiar to such establishments, the utmost effect it had produced was an undefined feeling of awe, but little tinctured with fear. She did not, therefore, bestow much attention on the marvellous tales so gravely circulated respecting the mysterious stranger, in whose conversation she felt an increasing interest. They frequently met in one another's cells, after the rest of the family had retired to rest, and spent many an hour in intimate communion; but Rosa now perceived that these nocturnal visits must be discontinued, as suspicion had been excited, and the prospect of detection was any thing but pleasing. They had, also, once or twice, enjoyed a still greater luxury, a quiet ramble in the garden by moonlight; but this had been obtained by means which, if discovered, would have subjected them to severe punishment.

Some months previous to this period, and before the new superior came to Santa Rosalia, the portress had been afflicted with a dangerous illness which confined her for some weeks to her bed. Rosa, to whom she had been very kind in her childhood, entreated and obtained permission to be her nurse. A temporary substitute had been appointed in her place, to

whom the keys were delivered; but Rosa afterwards found a small one in her pocket, of which she took possession, intending to give it to the new portress at the first opportunity. Her patient, however, was in so alarming a state, and she became so completely absorbed by the care and constant attention she required, that the circumstance entirely escaped her memory. The key was that of a small door which led into the garden, but which was never used. It was, therefore, not inquired after; and, when the portress resumed her station, she fancied it lost, and did not mention it, lest she should be thought guilty of negligence. The key remained in a small box of Rosa's, unperceived by her, till some time after the installation of the new superior; and, on discovering it, she felt a dread that, from the greater strictness and severity of the present rule, she would be censured, and, perhaps, punished, on the suspicion of having used it. She, therefore, kept it, till she could find a favorable opportunity of restoring it. In the meantime, sister Isabel's entreaties for a private interview induced her to do the very thing of which she dreaded being accused; and, so great was the enjoyment of those stolen midnight-walks, that the key was used again and again, till the remarks of the nuns, in the foregoing conversation, made her trem-

ble lest they should be discovered, and resolve either to discontinue them entirely, or, at least, to adopt the greatest caution in the use of this indulgence.

It never occurred to the mind of this young girl that she was doing wrong, nor did one feeling of compunction disturb her conscience, respecting the system of deception she was practising upon those who were "placed in authority over her." She had been educated in the principles of that false religion which teaches that the *end* sanctifies the *means*, and that it is lawful and praiseworthy to "do evil, that good may come." Her moral perceptions had thus been dimmed, and her conscience taught to "call evil good, and good evil;" and, as she felt quite persuaded in her own judgment, that the enjoyments she thus stealthily obtained were, in themselves, perfectly innocent, and tended to soothe and comfort the mind of her unhappy friend, she considered herself fully justified in the use of what appeared a harmless artifice, and not one doubt arose as to the course she was pursuing. Alas! she knew not that the God she pretended to worship is "a God of truth;" and that, as all falsehood is an abomination to Him, He has denounced the most awful punishment, not only on "all *liars*," but on "whosoever *loveth* and MAKETH a lie." Poor Rosa knew not *this*, for her church had

shut up the word of life from her eyes, and was leading her blindfold to the brink of that gulf into which she herself shall be cast, when the whole host of heaven shall triumphantly exclaim, "Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GARDEN.

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.—ISAIAH xli. 17, 18.

IT was another moonlight-night—bright, and soft, and balmy; the acacia, the myrtle, and a thousand other odoriferous plants, were flinging their delicious perfume over the convent-garden; while the verdant alleys, and beautiful bowers that composed it, checkering the flood of silver light with the flickering shadows of their luxuriant foliage, seemed to invite to contemplation and quiet enjoyment. The two novices had again availed themselves of the missing key, and were taking advantage of the delightful evening for a walk, and a long, unrestrained conversation. It was not late, but the convent had been some time hushed to rest; and the deep silence of the scene was only interrupted by an occasional swell of plaintive melody, from a nightingale in a neighboring grove, and the low, cautious tones of the two friends, as they earnestly conversed.

"I cannot, *cannot* believe it!" said Isabel, stopping in her walk, and turning suddenly around to her companion; "I cannot exercise faith as you do; I have tried, struggled, prayed fervently, sincerely, passionately,—prayed to have my mind set at rest; to be enabled to *trust* my spiritual guides, implicitly, nay, *blindly*, as you trust them; that I might enjoy the peace and sincerity which I envy you. But no, it *will* not be; I am still restless, anxious, miserable; and every time I strive to draw some comfort from the recollection of Father Giacomo's full and repeated absolution, I seem to hear a voice, deep, distinct, and clear, as if it were from heaven, harrowing my soul with the fearful question, Has he the *right* to forgive? What if his authority should be false, and the whole system founded upon a delusion? I start, and recoil with terror from the thought: but it haunts me, Rosa, night and day, and I cannot, I cannot escape from it."

"Dear sister, it is indeed a dreadful trial; but you must persevere in resisting this temptation. It is doubtless an assault of Satan, and you know many of the blessed saints have been buffeted in a similar manner. You must redouble your devotions to our Holy Mother, and to St. Rosalia. You must say more prayers, perform more penances, inflict more self-denial on yourself."

"I *have* done all that, Rosa, and more than that, I have prayed to every saint in the calendar; I have sat up whole nights, repeated *aves* and rosaries without number; I have fasted till nature was completely exhausted; look at me, and see if my appearance does not corroborate my assertion; but it is all, *all* in vain. I cannot bring my mind under subjection; I cannot obtain the peace for which I pant." The eyes of Rosa, as they were turned on the poor novice, did, indeed, most painfully convince her of the veracity of her statement, and the reality and depth of her misery. The wasted form, the hollow cheek, the wild expression of the swollen eyes, the pale, languid, and haggard countenance, bore sad and incontestable witness to the mental conflict and utter wretchedness within.

"Have you confided your state of mind to the confessor, sister? Father Giacomo is a holy man, he might give you useful advice, and assist you in overcoming these doubts and temptations."

"I dare not, dearest; how could I be explicit with him on such a subject? How could I tell him that I doubted his authority, questioned his power, distrusted his teaching? One thing I did venture; I entreated permission to read the Holy Scriptures; but he was so angry, that I shall never be able to mention the subject again."

"What did he say, sister?" inquired Rosa, with some eagerness.

"He said that the Bible was a most dangerous book, in the hands of unlearned people, especially to females; that it was only intended for the clergy; and that it was a very great sin to wish for the perusal of it, as I did. He questioned me very closely, to ascertain the cause and motive of my request; but I did not tell him that I had heard the heretic *padrè*. As it was, however, he prescribed me a long penance for my curiosity, as he called it, and a great many prayers to repeat, that I might be delivered from it."

"Have you complied with his orders?"

"I have, but I cannot see the use it. Prayers, I should suppose, have no effect, unless we really *wish* what we pray for. Now, I do not, and cannot believe that my desire to see, from God's own word, what he requires of his creatures, is either sinful or dangerous, and, therefore, I neither repent of it, nor wish to be free from it. My prayers and penances are, consequently, a mockery of devotion."

"Sister, how can you act and speak thus?" "Listen to me, *carissima*, do you think that God, who is infinite in goodness, can have revealed His will to mankind in such a manner that by far the greater part of them must remain ignorant of its meaning? or, that they

are required to receive implicitly whatever their fellow-creatures choose to tell them concerning it? Is it not slandering His love, and denying His mercy, to believe it? Oh, that I had but the means of obtaining a Bible! I think I could die in peace twenty-four hours after!"

She stopped, with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to heaven, in mute, but imploring supplication; while Rosa, distressed at her anguish, unable to oppose her arguments any further, and half-alarmed at the rising doubts in her own mind, walked musingly on, till a turn in the walk hid her from the sight of her companion.

She had gained the boundary-wall of the garden, and was still absorbed in this new subject of thought, when she was startled by a sudden rustling above, and a sprig of orange blossom fell at her feet, evidently flung down by some one over the wall. Transfixed with amazement and terror, she durst not look up; her first impulse was to fly, but her trembling limbs seemed chained to the spot. She had not time to deliberate, and scarcely to think, for the rustling increased, and in an instant, a young man leaped on the ground, and stood before her. She attempted to scream, but the power of utterance had deserted her; and she would have fallen, had not an arm encircled her, while a clear, musical voice exclaimed,

"*Cara Rosina*, do not be frightened! look in my face, and recognize your own Francisco!"

"My brother!" gasped the trembling girl, "why do you come thus?—What brought you here?"

"At that moment, sister Isabel, astonished at the sound of voices, approached hurriedly, to inquire the cause. She was surprised, but not alarmed, at the sight of the stranger; a few words of explanation sufficed to clear up the mystery; and Rosa reiterated her question to her brother.

"What brought me here, carissima? Affection for you, and a longing desire to see you again before my departure."

"Are you, then, going abroad, Francisco?"

"Yes, my sweet sister, I am ordered on a long cruise, and it may be many months before I see you again. The one monthly visit your friends are allowed to pay you is yet more than a week distant, and I have vainly applied to your Signora Abbessa for permission to bid you farewell. My heart swelled very high with indignation and grief, at being compelled to submit to such unreasonable and unnatural tyranny; but you see my good fortune has wonderfully befriended me."

"But, dear brother, what could induce you to come hither in this unlawful manner, and at

this strange hour? You could not expect to find me waiting for you?"

"I did not, indeed, expect any such thing, *sorella mia;* but I will tell you how it happened. I have just returned from a country excursion, with a young friend of mine, an English gentleman, who is a prisoner on parole here. Our road home lay not far from these walls, and I could not resist the temptation of showing him your prison. We have often spoken of you, and I must tell you he pities you very much; for he is a Protestant, —a heretic you would call him; and, he says, that you are the victim of superstition and delusion."

"Dear Francesco! how can you associate with such dangerous companions?"

Oh! are you alarmed for my Catholicity, my darling *sorellina?* Pray set your mind at rest, for I am too good a Christian to be shaken in my faith. You know what a true son of the church I am, and how very devout I have always been! Nay, don't put your pretty little hand on my mouth, Rosina! Can you deny what I say?"

"For shame, Francesco! How can you talk so foolishly? I wish, indeed, you *were* more devout. But tell me what led you to scale the wall, naughty brother."

"So I would have done already, my 'pen-

sive nun, devout and pure,'—I quote this from one of my friend's English poets,—if you had not been all this time preventing me by your lectures. You must know, that I was desirous to show Henry Willoughby your prison, and when we came near it, an irresistible impulse urged me to mount the wall, and take a peep at the garden. An obstacle twelve or fifteen feet high is not likely to deter a sailor, especially when there are so many convenient interstices between the old stones, where he may plant his feet pretty securely, and friendly little bushes growing here and there, by whose help he may climb up with perfect safety. While I was examining the wall, with the view of ascertaining where the ascent would be easiest, I heard a soft murmur of voices inside, and, on listening attentively, distinctly recognized yours, my darling sister. This determined me at once to mount, that I might, at least, obtain a sight of you; and, when I saw you alone, I could not resist the desire of speaking to, and embracing you once more."

Sister Isabel, though listening to all this conversation, felt as if she had heard but one sentence, one expression uttered by the handsome young man, whose face, beaming with animation and kind feeling, was fondly pressed against his sister's cheek, as her head rested on his shoulder, where it had fallen in the moment of

surprise and agitation. "They were a lovely pair," and a great and striking resemblance existed between them; but the Spanish novice scarcely noticed the interesting picture presented by the brother and sister, for her mind dwelt on one absorbing idea, and it burst forth in a wild and eager inquiry.

"You said, signor, that your friend was an Englishman,—a Protestant. Oh! tell me, does he know the Holy Scriptures? Has he ever read them?"

"Know them, signora! Oh! yes, and reads them too, I believe, every day of his life. He almost forced a Testament on me, though I care little about such things; I took it to please him, but I have not read much of it, except where he has particularly drawn my attention to some parts of it. I am, I trust, a good Catholic, though I cannot say a very *devout* one, and I do not wish to have my faith in the church shaken by the arguments he brings forward, and which are, certainly, greatly corroborated by the sacred Scriptures. We, laymen, have nothing to do with Scripture, or theology, you know, and ought to be content with our ignorance. So, at least, say the holy fathers, and I suppose we must believe them."

"Oh, that I had a Bible!" exclaimed sister Isabel, with enthusiastic fervor. "Signor, do you think your friend could procure me one?"

"That I cannot say, lady, for Bibles are very scarce in Sicily. I know not if my friend has any besides the one he uses; but, signora, should you like to ask him? He is waiting for me, just outside the wall, and, I am sure, would be most happy to answer your questions himself. Shall I make him a signal, or call him? He will soon be here, for he, too, is a sailor."

"Oh! no, no!" exclaimed Rosa, starting from his arms with terror. "Francesco, you must not do any such thing. You ought never to have come hither yourself, and, indeed, you must go away directly. Only think, if this visit were discovered, what misery and peril it would bring, both upon you and us. Go, go away, dearest brother, I entreat you, do not stay here one minute longer!"

"I will go, my sweet sister, because I know that by remaining I should compromise your safety. But you must allow me to come again, for I wish to set the signora's mind at rest respecting the Bible; and I know that, if I cannot get her one, I can bring her a New Testament, for, if Henry has not one to spare, she is heartily welcome to mine."

"Oh! bless you for that word!" exclaimed sister Isabel, clasping, in her rapturous gratitude, the hand of the youth between her own. "You will, indeed, give me more than life!—

May the God of mercy reward you, and make your whole life peaceful and happy!"

"But, Francesco," remonstrated the affrighted Rosa, "you cannot, must not come hither again! Think of the danger! You would infallibly be thrown into a dungeon, for violating the sanctity of a convent,—and I know not what dreadful punishment might be inflicted on you. Perhaps even your life might be the forfeit!—Oh! pray, pray, do not come any more! —I fancy every moment I hear steps and voices! Go, dearest brother, go!"

"Your imagination is fertile, Rosa, in conjuring up dangers for me; but you say nothing of the consequences that would result to yourself. I have not, however, forgotten the horrible tales of convent barbarity which have often made me tremble for you. I will not expose you to such cruelties, *sorellina mia*, but for your sake be prudent. Listen to my plan, ladies;—to-morrow, at this hour, I shall be outside the garden, exactly opposite this spot. Do you come also, and let me just hear your voices, conversing in a low tone. I shall climb the wall, and, from its summit, I can easily drop the book to you. This method will be perfectly safe, and, I promise you, I shall not attempt to descend, but shall be satisfied with a look, and a kind farewell."

Rosa's pale cheeks, and trembling agitation

still bespoke her unabated fears; but Isabel's mploring countenance was turned upon her with a look which she could not resist; she, herefore, gave a reluctant consent, but entreated her brother to conclude his visit.

"I will, my darling sister;—may the saints bless and keep you!—*Addio, carissima!* I must embrace you once more; for I have not done so, till this evening, ever since we were both very little children, and, perhaps, I may never have another opportunity. Can that be a *good* system, Rosa, which thus tears asunder the sweetest links of domestic affection, and places an eternal barrier between a brother and sister?"

She answered not, but, half-blushing, hid her face on his shoulder. He raised her, fixed a long and earnest gaze on her beautiful countenance,—then, clasping her in a close and fond embrace, tore himself away. He was soon on the top of the wall, and with another affectionate adieu, disappeared.

The two young women listened anxiously, till they heard him greet his friend in a cheerful voice, then, hardly daring to exchange a word, cautiously retraced their steps to the convent. Sleep scarcely visited their eyes that night, for the excitement of their nocturnal adventure was more than sufficient to banish all repose.

Nothing could exceed the agitation of both, during the whole of the next day. They durst scarcely look at each other, lest their countenance should, in some inexplicable manner, betray them. They were absent, nervous, and almost incapable of attending to their usual employments. It was well for them that they were placed in different departments, and under the direction of different nuns, or the similarity in their conduct might have awakened the suspicion of convent-vigilance. In Isabel, indeed, it was not so remarkable, for she was ever wayward, fitful, and morose; but the tranquil mind and cheerful manner of Rosa had never before been so altered. A few sharp rebukes, however, from the presiding sister, quickly recalled her from her occasional *rêveries;* and gladly did she hail the approaching shades of evening, which promised to relieve her from observation, and brought her nearer to the hour which she longed for, though an irrepressible feeling of terror made her shudder as she thought of it. At length the evening closed in, and the usual services and chantings were concluded. Never had they appeared so long, so insufferably wearisome to either; but they ceased, and, after an abstemious supper, the different inhabitants of the convent retired to their respective cells. An hour of anxious and agitated suspense succeeded, and then Isa-

bel softly opened Rosa's door. The young girl was on her knees, hurriedly repeating the Latin prayers of her rosary, while her mind was evidently as absent from her occupation as it well could be. She rose, on the entrance of her friend, but trembled so violently that she could scarcely stand.

"Rosa, *carissima*, you would not like to forego seeing your brother, or I should beg of you to let me have the key, and go alone. I have not the least fear, I assure you; and it is quite needless that you should run a risk which appears to you so terrible."

"Nay, dear sister," said Rosa, ashamed of the timidity she had betrayed, "I could never consent to that; but my prayer to you is, that you will not accompany me. Why should you expose yourself to danger, when there is not the least necessity for it? I shall return in a very few minutes, for Francesco is too reasonable and too kind to detain me;—and I feel now quite courageous, and free from all alarm."

Rosa's conscience slightly tinged her pale cheek, for she felt that she was uttering a falsehood; but she answered its reproof with the usual sophistry,—that she did it with *a good intention.*

"What!" exclaimed Isabel, with generous warmth, "can you, for one moment, imagine that I would let you undergo alone the peril I

am drawing on your head?—Never, Rosa, never!—I know not that there is any cause for fear; but, whatever may betide, the adventure is of my own seeking, the benefit to be derived from it will be mine, and, if you will not allow me to accomplish the object in view without you, I shall, at least, share the danger with you."

Each of the friends saw, that it would be an idle waste of time to debate the question any further; they, therefore, stealthily crept to the small postern-door, opened it as quietly as possible, and passed into the garden without another word. The moon was high in the heavens, but her resplendent beams were occasionally interrupted by dense masses of snow-white clouds, and this dubious and fitful light seemed favorable to the clandestine project they were pursuing. They stole cautiously along the most secluded walks, instinctively holding each other's hands. Rosa trembled with agitation, but she was sustained by a feeling of generous self-sacrifice, and somewhat reassured by the prayers she almost involuntarily breathed to the Virgin and St. Rosalia. As for sister Isabel, her mind was wrought up to a high pitch of fervent enthusiasm, her heart throbbed almost audibly with feelings of rapturous expectation: but she uttered no prayer, for she was conscious that her

present object was incompatible with the laws of convent-obedience, and did not feel quite sure that she was acting under the Divine sanction. Devotion, therefore, at that moment, appeared to her like mockery.

They were soon at the appointed spot, and both unconsciously turned round, to cast a hurried glance of searching inquiry. All was silent and tranquil; every object seemed sleeping in the dreamy repose of moonlight beauty. A deep-breathed sigh relieved the hearts of the novices, and Rosalia, recovering some degree of courage, softly, but distinctly, uttered the name of Francesco.

The heart of each seemed to pause with intense anxiety; but they were not long in suspense, for the beaming countenance of the young man was soon looking over the wall, and his gay, clear voice, was heard, though in a suppressed tone, addressing his sister.

"*Cara Rosina*, I have brought the book for the signora. My friend gave it me for her, and requests me to say, that he hopes the Holy Virgin will give her grace to understand it,—no, not that—what a giddy fellow I am!—I believe it was the Holy Spirit, not the Virgin, he said. Well, I suppose it is much the same thing. But, Rosa, dearest, I hope the book will not make you heretics!"

As he spoke, he dropped it at their feet, and

Isabel, snatching it up with almost frenzied eagerness, pressed it to her lips in uncontrollable emotion. The youth laughed, in the happy buoyancy of his spirits, at the ardor she displayed, and then checking himself, resumed his address to Rosa.

"You do not ask how our parents and sister are; but I will tell you that my mother, though well in health, is dreadfully out of temper with me, and Leonora not much less so; for I could not refrain, this morning, from telling them frankly, what I have long thought and felt, that it is cruel, unjust, and shameful, thus to immure you in a convent, when you are so well fitted to shine in society, and have as much right to liberty and happiness as any of us. I told them that you were not a free agent, or a party to the sacrifice; but a victim, immolated to some imaginary duty, or visionary fancy, which I can neither understand nor approve, and that you must be miserable, in being thus doomed to a life of gloomy seclusion, although they both insist that you are and must be happy."

"And so I am, dearest Francesco, and would not change my peaceful lot for any other, however gay or brilliant."

This was a set speech, which Rosa, in common with other inmates of the convent, was in the habit of uttering to visitors; but its utter

falsehood had never struck her till now. Her heart swelled, the tears rushed to her eyes, and her lip trembled, as she forced her tongue to articulate the words.

"You are not speaking the truth, sister, I am quite sure of that," bluntly observed Francesco, "and I do not believe one word of it. However, I have not relinquished all hope of restoring you to life and liberty; for, though my mother is deeply offended with me, and Leonora seems to have an envious wish to keep you out of her own way, I place great reliance on the justice, humanity, and affection of my father, and will certainly use my utmost influence with him to release you from this living tomb."

"Hush, hush, dearest brother! do not talk so,—and pray do not cause any strife, or make me the object of any discord in my family. I assure you you are mistaken . . . . . " she attempted to add, "I am quite contented;" but the effort was too great, and her tongue refused the office.

"I may not be able to put my design in execution just now," pursued the youth, without noticing her abortive attempt, "for I am to sail to-morrow evening; but rest assured that it shall never be absent from my thoughts, and that, if the saints preserve me, you shall, one day, my darling sister, be really free and happy."

"Dearest Francesco, are you going on any dangerous service?" inquired Rosa, feeling that her heart was "bound up" in this beloved brother, the only relative, besides her father, who had ever inspired her with the sweet affections of domestic life. She now felt anxious for his safety, for his last observation seemed to point to some anticipated danger.

"I am ordered on a cruise, Rosa, which is considered to be of a rather daring nature, and the result of it will be as the saints please, or 'as Providence may order it,' as my friend Willoughby says. But fear not, *carissima*, I dare say I shall return, and eventually set you free. In the meantime, promise me that you will not set the seal to your destiny, by pronouncing the irrevocable vow, and assuming the black veil. Promise me, Rosa, that you will not."

"I do," said she, in a tone of hurried agitation, "but do not waste your thoughts upon me. Think only of yourself, and your own safety. And now, dearest brother, go away, I beseech you! Peril hangs on every moment of your stay. Go, and may the blessed Virgin, and every saint in heaven, watch over and protect you! I will say an additional rosary every day for your preservation."

"Thanks, dearest Rosa, and now farewell. I see that your friend is too intently gazing on

her book to attend to what I say. Tell her that my conscience was reconciled to giving her the Testament, by the circumstance of its being an orthodox translation, by one of our holy archbishops, and, therefore, incapable of doing any injury. *Addio, Rosina carissima!* let the sweet voice of Hope cheer your dreary seclusion!"

Rosa's faltering voice could scarcely murmur a responsive farewell, when he slipped down the wall, and disappeared from her view. She clasped her hands, in fervent prayer for him, and then, after listening with breathless anxiety to the last faint sound of his retreating footsteps, she rejoined Isabel, who was still rapt in the deep *rêverie* inspired by the acquisition of her much-coveted treasure. They spoke not a word, the hearts of both were too full of utterance; but Rosa grasped her arm, and Isabel obeying the impulse, glided swiftly with her towards the house. As they approached the door, both started at the sight of a retreating shadow, which instantaneously disappeared; but whether it had entered the building, or concealed itself in the garden, they could not determine. A trance of terror almost paralyzed poor Rosa's faculties; her heart seemed to cease its pulsations, a cold perspiration started from every pore, and she would have fallen to the ground, if the stronger-

minded Isabel had not supported her. It was no time, however, for delay; and her courage, rising with the occasion, she almost dragged the fainting girl inside the small door, locked it, secured the key, and then, half led, half carried her to her cell, though she expected every moment to encounter some one along the dark corridors. She laid her on her couch, and remained with her till the morning. The terrors of that dreadful night to both may be more easily imagined than described; and it was not without great effort that either of them could meet the eyes of the convent-family at the usual service of matins.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAWN OF LIGHT.

The entrance of Thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.—PSALM cxix. 130.

How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth.—PSALM cxix. 103.

IT would be utterly impossible for those who have not been similarly circumstanced, to form any adequate idea of the agitation, the tremor of conscious guilt, with which our two young friends met the eyes of their superiors, and even their companions, the following morning. They expected to see suspicion in every glance, and to be called upon to render an account of their nocturnal rambles. They felt that it would be impossible to deny the fact, and had resolved to confess the truth, and endeavor to palliate their offence by alleging the temptation presented to them by the stray key. They trusted, however, that nothing more than their moonlight-walk was known, and did not for one moment dwell on the possibility of their interviews with Francesco having been discovered.

But all their apprehensions seemed utterly groundless, and their terrors superfluous; noth-

ing but kindness and good-will appeared in the looks of the superior and her assistants. They had not yet learned that the true spirit of the Inquisition, which pervades the convent-system, often adopts the tiger-like policy of the cat, and allows its victims apparent liberty, only to sport with their torments, and render them eventually an easier prey. This deceitful calm restored some degree of confidence to the two self-convicted culprits; but Rosa determined not to tempt further danger, by retaining possession of the key. She cautiously watched an opportunity, and going into the portress's cell, deposited it in a small crevice, between the wall and the floor, where, if found, it might be supposed to have lain unnoticed, ever since the illness of that important functionary.

This act necessarily precluded all future enjoyment of their delightful garden-walks; but even Isabel did not object to it, for all her thoughts and feeling were now diverted into another channel. Her precious Testament was the object of unceasing solicitude, and constant study, during every moment she could secure from the wearisome round of monastic observances. Afraid of trusting it out of her own hands, she concealed it in her bosom, and preferred the risk of carrying it about with her everywhere. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks," so did her soul pant for the full

knowledge of that sacred book, and the ardor with which she devoured its contents was commensurate with the misery she had endured, while debarred from the enjoyment of that privilege.

Had she known where to look for the solution of her most perplexing doubt,—that which related to priestly authority,—she would, in all probability, have commenced her studies there; but having no human guide to direct, she began at the commencement, and read on with unwearying and increasing interest. Well and mercifully was it so ordered, by Him who hath said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." She was thus compelled to drink at the fountain-head those "living waters," which must ever lose something of their Divine purity by being transmitted through earthly channels, how hallowed soever they may be; and having no other teacher than that Almighty Spirit, whose peculiar office it is to "guide unto all truth," and to testify of Christ to the sin-burdened soul, it was evident that her faith would not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Poor Rosa, although she, too, had become

anxious to know what the Scripture said, on many points to which her attention had been directed by her companion, was unable, for some time, to derive any information from Isabel's studies; for the fear of detection made them both sensible of the necessity of extreme caution in their intercourse. They scarcely dared even to look at each other, lest that glance should convey a meaning which might be observed, and awaken that suspicion which they feared already existed. But all remained calm and serene in the convent; there was nothing but kindness and complacency on the countenances of the superior nuns; and their fears were at length lulled to rest, and their confidence restored. True it was, they could in no way account for the circumstance which had so greatly alarmed them, on their re-entrance into the house on that eventful night; but, as time passed on, they almost persuaded themselves, at last, that it must have been nothing more than an optical delusion, produced by the over-excitement of their nervous system.

They now gradually ventured to resume their evening-conferences, after the rest of the inmates had sunk to repose; and long and interesting were their conversations on the all-absorbing topic. Isabel would read, in a low and cautious voice, to the attentive Rosalia, some of the parts that had struck her most, in

the course of her own study of the Gospels. There was much in them which neither could thoroughly understand, referring its meaning, as they did, to the doctrines and practices of their own church. A growing sense of its utter discrepancy with these was insensibly gaining ground in their minds, though they neither acknowledged nor even clearly saw it as yet.

"There is one thing," observed Isabel one evening, "which I cannot account for; I have not hitherto met with any direct allusion to those duties which our church most particularly enforces, such as confession, saying masses, or praying for the dead. In the third chapter of St. Matthew, it is said that St. John the Baptist exhorted the people who came to him, to 'do penance,' no doubt in order that they might expiate their sins; but it is not said what kind of penance he exacted; and, as far as I have read, I do not see that our Saviour Himself said any thing about it."

"You will, no doubt, find it by and by," said Rosa; "but, sister, are we sure that Francesco was right, when he said that your Testament was translated by an archbishop of our church? What if he had been deceived, and this book were one of the pestilential heretical translations?"

"Your brother was quite right, Rosa; here

is the fact, announced on the title-page,—look! '*Tradotto in Italiano, da Monsignore Antonio Martini, Arcivescovo di Firenze.*' You see, there can be no doubt of the correctness or orthodoxy of the translation; we can, therefore, read it with perfect confidence, and without any fear of being misled."

Rosa's apprehensions were now completely set at rest, and she listened, with real interest, to the inspired records of the life, doctrine, and death, of the Divine Redeemer, often participating in the wonder expressed by her friend, that there was so much in the Gospels of which they had never even heard. And sweetly and powerfully did many of those sacred passages speak to their hearts, especially to the lacerated and anxious one of Isabel. With what emotion did she read the gracious assurances of pardon that issued from the lips of Him, "who spake as never man spake," when, on many occasions, he healed the diseases of the soul, simultaneously with those of the body. "Thy sins are forgiven thee,"—"Oh," she would exclaim, "that such a blessing were mine! Oh! that I could hear that Divine voice, proclaiming *my* forgiveness! But, now that the Saviour is no longer upon earth, I must obtain that blessing through his ministers; and I long to find in His word the commission by which they are empowered to impart it."

Day after day, or rather night after night, glided on in this new and most interesting employment. They advanced but slowly, as every portion they read was the subject of much earnest conversation between them. They often found great difficulty in reconciling the plain declarations of Scripture with their preconceived notions, and the anti-scriptural practices in which they were daily engaged; but their attempts to do so were sincere and persevering; and, if they did not quite succeed in satisfying their own minds, they, at least, struggled hard to believe that all was right.

One evening, when Rosa entered her friend's cell, she found her expecting her arrival, with sparkling eyes, and a look of joy which she had seldom seen on her countenance. "I have found it, Rosa," she exclaimed, "I have found the treasure I longed for! the blessed proof that our church is right, when she declares, that her ministers have the power to forgive sin. Look here," she continued, pointing to the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, eighteenth and nineteenth verses, "see what our Saviour said to the blessed apostle St. Peter: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven;

and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.' You see, dearest, it is just as the church says, and I shall now feel quite happy in this delightful assurance. Oh! what a load, what a mountain of anxiety and anguish, it has removed from my mind! I shall now prepare with alacrity and pleasure, for the duty of confession, to which Father Giacomo calls me tomorrow morning, and against which my rebellious heart was struggling in determined opposition. I can now disclose all my sins to the holy father, for,—Oh, blessed, blessed thought, he has the power and authority to 'loose,'—to absolve me from them all!"

Poor Isabel! it was thus that the great enemy of souls, by means of his masterpiece of deception and falsehood,—Popery, was striving to lull her awakened mind into fatal security, by perverting Scripture from its true and simple meaning. It was not the first time that he thus attempted to "transform himself into an angel of light;" and if a greater than he had not condescended to foil his purpose, the mind of the poor novice would soon have been as dark as ever.

"There is one idea," she said after a pause, "which still haunts me, and prevents me from enjoying all the comfort of this welcome as-

surance. What can be the reason that our spiritual guides shut up this precious book from us, since it so clearly proves that what they assert is true? Could it be possible, Rosa, that this is not the *real* meaning of the words, and that they are afraid we should discover it at last?"

"Oh! no, no! surely not," exclaimed Rosa, shuddering at so horrible an idea, "that *cannot* be, dear sister;—but, you know, the holy church considers the Bible a dangerous book; and, though we have not yet found it so, we may soon discover that there is good and sufficient cause for her prohibiting its indiscriminate reading."

Isabel shook her head, fully resolved not to assent to this supposition of her young friend, and went on with her reading.

"Did our blessed Saviour hear the confessions of his disciples?" Rosa inquired, when Isabel had finished the chapter.

"I suppose he did," replied her friend, "but, as yet, I have seen no mention of it. Of course, he would not neglect so important a part of the priestly office. Look here, dear Rosa, at the eleventh chapter, and twenty-eighth verse, of St. Matthew, what sweet words He spoke to such poor burdened sinners as myself, 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Oh! Rosa, you

know not, you cannot know, how precious those words are to my soul."

Rosa, indeed, did *not* know it, for light had not yet dawned on her soul; the Holy Spirit had not yet convinced her of sin, and her mind lay still in the dreamy slumber of early morning, before the "day-star" has fully dispersed the murky gloom of midnight, and ushered in that glorious dawn, which, like "the path of the just, shineth more and more, unto the perfect day." She was not yet awakened to the reality of her position; but her deep, midnight repose had been somewhat disturbed; and, as she listened with interest, if not anxiety, to the words of eternal life, a faint ray of light would occasionally break upon her darkness, prophetic of the time when, before the glorious beams of the "sun of righteousness," the shadows would all "flee away."

Isabel went to the confessional the next morning, with a mind considerably lightened of its load, and the priest had reason to be better satisfied with her disclosures of sin than he had ever been before. But the poor penitent did not derive from this unauthorized ordinance of the Romish Church the comfort or benefit she had anticipated. On the contrary, her conscience, which was now under the enlightening influence of Divine grace, severely rebuked her duplicity, and she re-

turned to her cell almost as miserable as ever.

Her feelings were, as usual, communicated to her friend in the evening; for her burdened heart loved to repose on the bosom of affection, and, though Rosa could not altogether comprehend her troubles, she could sympathize with her grief, counsel her, and sometimes even soothe.

"All the cheerfulness," she said, "with which I had approached the confessional, forsook me before I had finished repeating the form of confession; for I had no sooner begun to mention the names of apostles and saints, to whom it is addressed, than the question suggested itself, 'Does the Scripture authorize us to confess our sins to *them?*' This thought disturbed me, and for a few moments I could scarcely proceed; and when I went on to enumerate particular sins, my conscience overwhelmed me with the conviction that I was dealing deceitfully with the holy father, and thus committing a very great crime. I could not speak *candidly* to him,—I could not disclose my thoughts and feelings as they really were; I was obliged to conceal many heart-sins, many doubts and temptations, which I ought to have laid open to him, but which would immediately have excited his suspicions. I trembled at every question he asked

me, lest it should compel me, either to reveal the truth, or to utter a falsehood. I received no comfort from the absolution he gave me, for I felt that, if he could have looked into my heart, he would have launched the terrors of the church's vengeance at my guilty head, rather than the words of peace and pardon he pronounced. Oh! Rosa, what shall I do? I am, indeed, very, *very* miserable!"

Rosa would fain have spoken comfort, by telling her that she was too scrupulous, but she durst not; for, although the Romish system makes light of the sin of deception, and dares to call falsehood, under certain circumstances, a venial fault, it fails not to denounce it in the strongest terms, when exercised towards a priest; and she had heard so much of the criminality of the slightest reserve, or want of full sincerity, in the matter of confession, that she shrank from countenancing it in any degree.

The mind of Isabel was soon involved in greater perplexity than ever, by reading the thirteenth verse of the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye *shut up* the kingdom of heaven against men, ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." She immediately perceived, on comparing this passage with that in the

sixteenth chapter, which had caused her so much joy, that she had altogether mistaken the true meaning of the latter.

"It is evident," said she to Rosa, "that the 'keys of the kingdom of heaven,' cannot signify the power which our Lord gave to St. Peter, to admit into heaven, or exclude from it; for that power the wicked scribes and Pharisees could not have had, and yet He accuses them of 'shutting it up against men.' *What*, then, could it mean?"

"It seems to me," observed Rosa, after a moment's pause, "that the question rests on the precise meaning of the expression, 'the kingdom of heaven.' It is very often used in the chapters we have read before, and, I think, not always in the same sense."

This remark was like a ray of light to Isabel. She turned over the leaves of her Testament, and referred to the preceding chapters. There she found, indeed, the term frequently used, but seldom in the sense she had attached to it. She could not always clearly define its exact signification, but she could ascertain, by the context, when it did not mean the state of eternal blessedness; and there was one sense in which she found it most generally applied, and which was so simple that she could fully comprehend it. "I see it means the Gospel, in the greater number of places!" she ex-

claimed with astonishment. "Look, Rosa, in the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew, the 'kingdom of heaven' is, in three parables, compared to seed, and, in the nineteenth verse, it is explained to mean 'the word of the kingdom.' I can now recollect other similar passages; but these are quite sufficient to prove the fact. I am, therefore, convinced that it was the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, which the scribes and Pharisees had 'shut up;' and, if so, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, promised to St. Peter, must merely have signified the *knowledge* of the Gospel, which he should receive, and the 'binding' and 'loosing,' the power of explaining it. Do you not think, Rosa, that seems to be the plain meaning of these passages?"

Rosa could not deny that such was her own conviction, but she received it reluctantly; for she could not but see how much it militated against both the doctrines and the pretensions of her church. The ardent mind of the Spanish novice, however, instantly took up the clue, and, without hesitation, followed it up to its inevitable termination.

"What, then, becomes," she inquired, "of the lofty assumptions of our church, that she has power to forgive or retain sins,—to open or shut the gates of heaven? Oh! Rosa, I fear they are not supported by Scripture;

and, in that case, she has, indeed, sufficient inducement to conceal the Word of God from the people she deceives."

"Hush! hush! dearest sister! how can you fancy such shocking things? You are uttering blasphemy against the church! Believe me, you are too hasty,—too impetuous. Only wait a little, and, I doubt not, you will find the proofs of the church's authority before long. Remember, you have yet read but a very small portion of the New Testament."

"You are right, *carina*, I am too impatient; I will wait quietly, and study the blessed book with more diligence. But one thing is as clear as the day, and to *that* I cannot shut my eyes, —our church is certainly guilty of the same crime for which Jesus Christ denounced condemnation on the scribes and Pharisees,—that of shutting up the Scriptures from the knowledge of men."

Rosa felt the full force of this inference, but, unwilling to acknowledge its truth, she merely said, as she rose to return to her own cell,

"Sister, you are engaged in a forbidden employment; you are pursuing a course which the church declares to be fraught with great and awful peril; I hope you will be incessant in your prayers to our Lady and the blessed saints, that they will intercede for your par-

don, and preserve you from the danger which you are so rashly tempting."

"Thank you, dear Rosa, for your friendly counsel; I shall not be negligent in my duty; and I hope you will also pray for me, that I may be directed aright, and enabled to understand and receive the truth, whatever it may be."

Faithfully and earnestly did each endeavor to propitiate heaven, by an increased number of those petitions, litanies, and invocations, to the multitude of intercessors whom the Church of Rome has set up, to the dishonor of the "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." But fruitless were all these "vain repetitions," in a language they did not understand, and addressed to beings who could neither hear, answer, nor help them. It might, indeed, be said of them, as of too many others, that "they worshipped they knew not what;" but He who was to them an "unknown God," looked with pity on their ignorance, and was gradually leading them by His Spirit to the knowledge of His will.

Isabel, indeed, had already begun, in some measure, to doubt the efficacy of prayers to the Virgin and the saints; for she had read, at the end of the twelfth chapter of St. Matthew, how little regard the Saviour had paid to the interference of "His mother and his brethren,"

when they sought to interrupt His public ministry; and she could not find any instance of His sanctioning an application to any of his apostles or friends, for their intercession in behalf of any suppliant for his mercy or compassion. This reflection greatly lessened her confidence in the mediation of saints; but she did not mention it to her friend, nor, indeed, did she dwell much upon it herself; for her mind was, just then, absorbed in the contemplation of another subject,—the attempt to discover, in the Word of God, a warrant for the assumptions of that church which has long "cast that word behind its back."

CHAPTER V.

FEARFUL ANTICIPATIONS.

My soul is among lions.—PSALM lvii. 4.
They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down they have digged a pit before me.—PSALM lvii. 6.

THE tranquillity and comfort with which the two friends had hitherto carried on their noctural intercourse, were now disturbed by an incident which, however trifling in itself, caused them no little alarm. Isabel discovered accidentally that a small orifice existed in the wall of her cell, and that the opening extended even to that of her nearest neighbor, an elderly nun, whose appearance and manners she had always disliked. This hole might have been there prior to her occupation of the apartment, but she had never observed it before; and a thrill of horror shot through her frame, as the probability of its having been recently made, for the purpose of watching their proceedings, and listening to their conversation, presented itself to her mind. The opening, indeed, was very small, and could scarcely be available for conveying the sound of words with any distinctness; but it was a terrible idea, that some suspicion existed respecting her, and, perhaps,

Rosa also. It was in a dark corner, almost concealed by her pallet bed; this seemed to corroborate her fears; and, if it was the effect of contrivance, it would, of course, be enlarged, though, no doubt, cautiously and gradually. She felt very uneasy, and, after a little reflection, and a few stolen words of consolation with Rosalia, it was agreed that their meetings should be discontinued for the present, and that she should carefully examine the hole every day, in order to ascertain if it made any progress.

It occurred to her that she must no longer indulge in the pleasure of studying her precious Testament, after retiring to her cell in the evening, as the circumstance of keeping her lamp burning so much longer than the usual time, was, of itself, sufficient to confirm suspicion, if any existed; yet, though she had no leisure during the day, and, if she had possessed any, would not have dared to employ it in so hazardous an occupation, she felt, nevertheless, that she could not resign a privilege which had become to her, not only all-important, but inexpressibly delightful. The hour for retiring to rest in the convent was nine o'clock; the nuns were compelled to rise at midnight, to attend a service in the chapel, and, after its termination, were permitted to sleep till three, when they were again aroused

for matins. An hour's meditation and reading in the refectory, followed, after which, early mass was performed, and their daily round of wearisome and heartless duties commenced. Rosa and Isabel had lately devoted to the Scriptures, and conversation, a great part of the interval before midnight; but, as they durst no longer do that, Isabel resolved to sit up in her bed, as soon as it was light, and continue her study of the sacred volume, till the matin-bell summoned her to the chapel. This she accordingly did; but though, from the situation of the suspicious hole, she could not be seen in this employment by any one looking through it, her nervous agitation and terror were so great, that her eyes involuntarily turned to it almoste very moment, and then to the door, which had no fastening but a latch. In such a state of mind, it was almost impossible to keep her attention fixed on her reading, and, after many unsuccessful efforts to do so, she felt so discouraged, as to be tempted to abandon the attempt in despair. A strong feeling, however, of her ignorance and spiritual necessities, urged her to persevere in the struggle; and, as she remembered that the advancing season, by shortening the days, would soon deprive her of this resource, she resolved to pray for more calmness and firmness of mind,

to overcome the difficulties that impeded her progress.

This good resolution, however, was more easily formed than reduced to practice. Her church had provided no form of prayer for such an occasion, and she had never thought of praying without one. She had been taught in the convent, that the Paternoster and Ave Maria would answer all purposes, and secure any favor for the obtaining of which, their repetition was intended; for that God would look to the intention and wishes of the petitioner, how inappropriate or inapplicable soever the words might be. On the same principle, it was asserted, but with a directly contrary argument, that prayers, in an unknown tongue, were as efficacious as if they had been understood by the suppliant, for that God would regard with acceptance the words of the petition, though they could not be the utterance of the heart, being merely repeated as a kind of mysterious charm. But these miserable subterfuges of a system, which altogether denies the great fact, that, as "God is a spirit," "they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," could not now entirely satisfy the awakened conscience of Isabel. She knew not yet the blessed declaration, that "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities," and "maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be

uttered;" but that gracious Spirit, whose office it is to "testify" of Christ, brought to her remembrance, the Saviour's own sweet and encouraging words, which she had recently read, —"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For *every one* that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." She turned to several instances, related in the Gospel, of His readiness to grant the unstudied and earnest petitions which on every side assailed Him; and, hope springing up in her depressed soul, she at length ventured to breathe a few fervent ejaculations to the throne of grace; and, in the holy calmness and elevation of mind she subsequently experienced, was exhibited the promised benefit to be derived from such an application, the finding "grace to help in time of need."

One morning, when the two friends met in the garden, and were able to speak to each other without being observed, Rosa, who looked extremely pale, informed Isabel that she was convinced they were suspected and watched.

"I was sitting at my window last night," said she, "about half-past ten, for my thoughts were so busy, that I was unable to sleep; and I saw Father Giacomo issue from the cloisters, accompanied by a nun, who, I suppose, was the

Madre Superiore, though I could not see her face. They walked up the inner court, conversing in a low tone, and stopped over against your window; they paused a few moments, earnestly regarding it, then advanced to where they could have a full view of mine. I watched them unobserved, till, being satisfied that there was no light in either room, they re-entered the house, in close consultation. Fearful of a visit from them, I hastily took refuge in bed, and had not been many minutes there, when my latch was softly lifted, and some one apparently peeped in, but quietly retreated, on finding nothing to notice."

"Oh! Rosa, it is very miserable to live like this, subject to continual apprehensions; and we can now scarcely speak to each other, while there are so many important texts of Scripture that I wish to show you, and to consult you about."

"Hush, hush, dearest! here are two or three of the nuns, and I must now be asking your advice about this stupid piece of work. 'What say you, sister,' she continued, holding out a magnificent scarf, which she was embroidering for the image of the Virgin in the chapel, 'shall I make the border of lilies of the valley, or white rosebuds?'"

Isabel's mind was too much confused and bewildered, to second the artifice with a ready

answer; but, fortunately, her hesitation was referred to a due sense of the importance of the question, and one of the nuns exclaimed,

"Oh! rosebuds, sister, rosebuds by all means! They are so beautiful,—and then, you know, our blessed Lady is called, in the Holy Scriptures, 'the Mystical Rose.'"

"But she is also called 'the Lily of the Valley,'" remarked a second, "and I think a lily is so delicate, and so beautiful in its chaste purity, that it best represents the spotless holiness of the immaculate Mary."

"The rose, however, is the 'queen of flowers,'" eagerly resumed the first; and a very animated dispute as to the merits of the respective emblems was about to commence, when Isabel turned the current of the conversation, by suddenly inquiring in what part of Scripture those names were given to the blessed Virgin?

"I really do not know," replied sister Francesca, "do you, sister Clara?"

"I have quite forgotten," the other answered; "I saw them a long time ago in some of our books; but it is of little consequence, for everybody knows they are correct."

"Will you, dear sister, try to find that book, and kindly show it me? Are you sure it was Scripture?"

"Gesu Maria!" exclaimed the nun, crossing

herself, "you do not, surely, mean to doubt the truth of any of our holy books? I do not think I could find it now; but what concern is that of yours or mine?"

"No concern of ours, sister Clara! Why, does not our eternal salvation depend on the faith we hold?"

"Certainly it does,—but that faith consists in a humble reception of the truths which we are taught by our spiritual instructors. We have no right to inquire any further!"

"If we are satisfied with their authority,—" began Isabel; but Rosa forcibly dragged her away, exclaiming, with assumed playfulness, "Come now, you tiresome creature, you shall not enjoy your darling pleasure, of arguing for the sake of amusement; you know I want you to teach me that Spanish stitch, and you shall not escape me again."

"Isabel!" she exclaimed, when they were out of hearing, "you must surely have lost your senses, to talk in this manner publicly. Do you not know that every word you have uttered will be repeated, and, then, what will become of us both? Oh, how could you be so imprudent!"

The poor girl sank, half-fainting, on a garden seat; she trembled violently, and tears came to her relief. Isabel was scarcely conscious of what she had said; but sincerely

sorry that she had alarmed her friend; she attempted to persuade her that her fears alone had attached any importance to the words, and that no one else would think them worthy of notice.

"Oh! you are greatly mistaken! You have not lived all your life in a convent, as I have. Depend upon this, that *nothing*, however trifling, passes unnoticed here! You would shudder, as I do, if you knew all that I know."

The bell, at that moment, summoned them away; the trembling girl dashed the tears from her eyes, and they separated, but not till she had exacted a hasty promise from her friend, that she would be more cautious in future.

Isabel's mind was full of anxious and perplexing thoughts, as she sat down to her appointed tasks, in company with several others. The conversation of that morning had recalled all her former doubts as to the worship paid to the Virgin, and she resolved to search her Testament for the expressions quoted by sister Clara, and for other similar titles, which she saw plentifully scattered over the books of devotion authorized by her church. She did so, earnestly, diligently, sincerely; she no longer read slowly and regularly, the chapters as they came, but hurried on, with feverish excitement, impatient to find something which would set her mind at rest on the subjects that troubled

her. But all in vain; she could find nothing that sanctioned the errors which she wished to believe, while her partially-enlightened mind revolted from them. The more she read, the deeper and stronger grew the conviction, that the practices, and many of the doctrines of Romanism, were perfectly irreconcilable with Scripture. She found nothing to countenance the worship of the Virgin, the invocation of saints, the bowing down to images, or purgatory, but she did find what filled her heart with joy, and eased it of the painful load of suspense, with respect to the right and duty of reading the word of God. She dwelt with rapture on the command,—the positive injunction of the Saviour, in the 5th chapter of St. John's Gospel, 39th verse,—"SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, for they are they which testify of me."

The feast of Santa Rosalia, the patroness of the convent, and of all Sicily, afforded the poor nuns an agreeable holiday; for, after the idolatrous mummery of the morning services, they were allowed, during the rest of the day, to choose their own employments and recreations. Our two young friends contrived to spend the greater part of the afternoon together, and seated themselves in a small bower at the bottom of the garden. They chose this seat, because it was placed against the boundary-wall, and considerably elevated above the adjacent

walks,—no intruder could approach them unperceived, and they could, therefore, converse in safety. A desire to assist each other in a large piece of embroidery was their ostensible object; but greatly did they enjoy this short interval of comparative liberty, though their conversation was many times interrupted by the visits of evidently curious members of the sisterhood. Isabel had, the evening before, intrusted her precious Testament to Rosalia, requesting her to read attentively several passages which she had marked for that purpose, as she wished to converse with her about them, during the long-anticipated opportunity which the next day would afford them.

Rosa had done so, though with fear and trembling; and the book was now stealthily returned to Isabel. Long and earnest was their conversation on these subjects, and deeper and deeper the impressions produced on their minds by the inspired Word of God.

"You see, dearest Rosa," said Isabel, her expressive eyes beaming with indescribable joy and satisfaction, "you see I was quite right in thinking that we ought to read the Scriptures for ourselves, in order that we may know what is really the will of God. Our blessed Saviour commanded *all* those who heard Him to 'search the Scriptures.' He rebuked the Pharisees constantly, by referring them to what

was written in the Old Testament, and told the Sadducees that they erred, because they did not 'know the Scriptures.' And the holy apostles did the same afterwards, for they were always reading and explaining them to the people; and the inhabitants of Berea are praised, because they 'searched the Scriptures daily, to see if these things were so.' Nay, even our blessed Lord Himself, when tempted by Satan, always answered him by a text, and, surely, we could not do better than follow His example."

"It is quite true," said Rosa, with a deep sigh; "but then, sister, what a dreadful conclusion must we draw from all this, as regards our spiritual instructors?"

"That they are deceivers," exclaimed Isabel, with an impetuous burst of indignation, "cruel, heartless, unprincipled deceivers, who would lead us blindfold to destruction, in order to compass their own wicked purposes."

"Hush, sister, you are too severe; *why* should they do it? What interest have they in deceiving us?"

"Do you not see that they conceal the Bible from us, to prevent our eyes from being opened to the falsehoods they teach us? Do we not detect those falsehoods, as soon as we begin to read the Word of God? I am no judge of the motives which first led them to adopt such a

system of imposture, but it is evident that they scruple at nothing to support it."

"But, is it not possible that they may be as ignorant as the poor creatures who look up to them?"

"I can scarcely conceive that," replied Isabel, after a pause, "for they surely must have it in their power to read the Bible, if they choose. And, even if we give them the benefit of such a supposition, what are we to think of such blind teachers, who presumptuously undertake to guide others as blind as themselves? Oh! what an awful responsibility do they incur!"

"My heart sickens when I think of it," said Rosa, the tears dropping through the fingers of her clasped hands, as she held them tightly pressed over her eyes. "Oh! that I had never heard these things! Why, sister, did you tell me of them? Why did you break the peaceful slumber of ignorance in which my life had hitherto been passed? Who can ever restore that confidence in my spiritual guides which I once possessed, and of which these unhappy disclosures have robbed me? Not a doubt had, till then, disturbed the serenity of my thoughts; but I shall never know that blessed peace again!"

"Rosalia," replied Isabel in a mournful and solemn voice, "do you reproach me for arous-

ing you from the sleep of death? Could you wish still to slumber on the brink of the precipice? Do not suppose that your ignorance would have saved you; for I have read, in the word of everlasting truth, from the lips of the Redeemer Himself, that, 'if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the pit.' And can you blame me for calling your attention to the awful reality of your danger?"

"No, dear sister, no,—forgive my foolish words! I know you are right, quite right,—and that your affection for me prompts this anxiety for my salvation; but I cannot help feeling bitterly the hopelessness of our position. Of what use can our scriptural knowledge be to us, but to make us miserable? We know that we are deceived,—shamefully, cruelly, fatally deceived,—but we cannot, in any way, extricate ourselves from the toils in which we are inclosed. We cannot, we dare not betray, even by the slightest word, our consciousness of the truth, or disavow the errors and evil practices we must abhor, without incurring the most dreadful consequences! Oh! sister, what will become of us? Must we thus drag on a miserable existence, and, perhaps, after all, be dragged down ourselves into everlasting destruction, not blindfolded, but with our eyes open?"

"You draw a frightful picture, *mia cara;*

but it may not be quite so hopeless as you imagine. We are not, surely, compelled to assume the fatal black veil; and, if we do not, we cannot be detained here against our will."

"Alas! you deceive yourself, if you think it so easy to leave a convent. We cannot, indeed, be *forced* to take the black veil, for *that* must be done in the chapel, and requires us to pronounce our assent before witnesses. But what would be the consequence of our *refusing* to do so? We should immediately become the objects of the most cruel, harassing, and dreadful persecutions, which would only cease when we yielded or died."

"But, Rosa, the law would surely protect us, if we complained; for, since this island has been in the possession of France, we are under a French king, and French laws, which, I have been told, do not allow any one to be imprisoned in a convent against her will."

"That may be true, though, of course, we have heard nothing of it here. But, my dear friend, how are we to claim the protection of the law? We have no friend to undertake our cause,—no one to whom we can even communicate our desire for liberty. We cannot write a letter, or receive one, without its being read by the superior. How, then, can we possibly escape the fate to which we are doomed?"

"But, you have friends and relations, Rosa, who come to see you sometimes. You have a father and mother, a brother and sister, to whom you can speak, and who will surely assist you. You are not, like me, alone in the world."

"I have, but, alas! I cannot hope that they would remove me from this place. Did I not tell you that I was devoted to the convent even before my birth, in expiation of my parents' marriage? My mother would not, for any consideration, retract her vow, nor would my father *dare*. Indeed, I would rather suffer any thing, than let him discover that it has ever cost me one sigh or regret. He is so kind, so affectionate to me, so fearful of having made me unhappy, that it would forever destroy his own peace. And, I think, my mother does not seem to like his coming too often to the convent, for it is now very long since I have seen him."

"Your sister, however, who cannot be influenced by the same feelings,—she *must* be capable of sympathizing with you; and, if she did not actively take your part, she could mention your case to some one, who, from mere humanity, if not from any other motive, must surely interfere in your behalf."

Rosa shook her head mournfully. "My sister has never manifested any affection for

me, and I fear that she would be quite as averse to my leaving the convent as my mother could be; for my resignation of the world greatly increases her fortune, and, through it, she looks forward to a splendid marriage."

"Your brother, then,—your noble, disinterested, affectionate brother! He will not suffer you to perish, or wither away in a prison. He entreated you not to take the black veil."

"My darling Francesco!" exclaimed Rosa, the tears of tenderness and love glittering on her cheeks, as they were touched by a bright, but momentary gleam of hope, "Oh! he would peril his own life, I am quite sure, to save me. But, shall I ever see him again? My heart bleeds, when I think of the dangers to which he is exposed, and I shudder as my fancy pictures him wounded, dying, or dead."

A cold trembling seized her, and she turned sick and faint.

"Your fears exaggerate the danger, *carina;* your brother shall be restored to you; I feel a confidence in the goodness and mercy of God, which tells me that you will not be forsaken. *I* may perish in this gloomy abode, but brighter days are reserved for you. In the meantime, let us return to our former subject of conversation; for there are many things I wish to say to you, and such an opportunity as this does not often occur."

"Have you found the texts you expected to find respecting the authority of the church to forgive sins?"

"I have found nothing satisfactory,—nothing, at least, that satisfies me. The only other passage I have seen, relating to the subject, is in the twentieth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where it is said that 'Jesus breathed on the apostles, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.' When I first saw these words, I thought they were exactly what I wanted, and felt greatly delighted; but, in reading the Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles they have written, I cannot find that they exercised the power which I supposed was thus given them,—no, not in a single instance. They wrought miracles of healing, indeed, constantly and willingly; but never are we told that they forgave sins, heard private confessions, or gave absolution in any way. Saint James says, that we are to confess our sins, but it is '*one to another*,' and that cannot mean private confession to a priest. Then, there is nothing said of any worship, or even homage, paid to the Virgin, or of prayers to the saints; and not a word about relics. In short, Rosa, the more I read of the blessed Word of God, the more I am convinced

that many, if not all, of the practices of our church, are incompatible with the commands of our Saviour, and the example of the apostolic church. It is true, I have not yet read all through the Testament; but I have read enough, and more than enough, to make me dissatisfied with the religion I have been so often told was infallible."

"You make me tremble, dear sister; but, if we sincerely serve God, as we have been taught by the church, surely we shall be safe at last!"

"*I* cannot do so now, Rosa, for my eyes are opened, and I see too many errors in it, to receive its doctrines, or obey its precepts, with the confidence of faith. All those constant and wearisome observances, which occupy our time, are they not condemned by our Saviour's words, when he said, 'Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.' Do *we* not multiply our repetitions, under the idea that we shall be 'heard for our much speaking?'"

"True, indeed, sister; but did our Saviour really say those words?"

"He did, indeed, Rosa; they are in the Gospel of St. Matthew, though our priests have taken care to conceal them from us. And then, dearest, I begin to suspect that the *doctrines* of our church are not less contrary to Scripture

than its practices. I read nothing of expiating our sins by penances, by mortifications, or self-inflictions; nothing of the meritoriousness of good works, or of accumulating merits, either for ourselves or others; nothing of indulgences, masses, or prayers for the dead; nothing of ——"

"Oh! stop, stop, dearest sister, I pray—I beseech you! Do not *quite* demolish the whole fabric of religion! What, then, remains to us? How, in the name of heaven, are we to be saved?"

"I am so ignorant, Rosa, that I dare not undertake to be your teacher; but, surely, we cannot be wrong, when we keep close to God's own word. There is much of it, indeed, that I do not thoroughly understand; but the greatest part is so plain and simple, that it is not possible to mistake it. Now, it does appear to me, that the Testament teaches us a way of salvation quite different from that of our church. It speaks of 'being justified by faith alone,' and says, that 'by the deeds of the law shall no man be justified.' But I wish, dearest, you would take my precious book, and read for yourself those epistles of which I am speaking. You would understand them much better than I can explain them to you, especially if you prayed for grace to do so; for our Lord Jesus Christ has promised the Holy Spirit to

all who ask it. Do, *carissima*, take the book; I can spare it you for a few days."

"Oh! no, *carina*, I am much obliged to you; but I am so fearful of discovery, that I could not read it in comfort; the very idea makes me tremble, and I am sure I could not derive any benefit from it. I would much rather hear these things from you, and you can make me understand them much better."

"But we can so seldom have any conversation together."

"I will come to you sometimes, very early in the morning, and then we can talk in safety."

"Well, do, then, for I am most anxious to tell you all I think and feel; and, when I have quite finished my Testament, I shall be better able to do so."

A bell now summoned all the *religieuses* back to the house, and the two friends reluctantly separated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT-WATCH.

His anger endureth but a moment; in His favor is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.—PSALM xxx. 5.

That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.—I PETER ii. 9.

A PERIOD of delightful quiet had been vouchsafed to our poor novices, by Him who saw and pitied their weakness and ignorance. They needed such a calm, to enable them to acquire that knowledge which alone could make them "wise unto salvation;" their feeble, and, as yet, wavering faith, might, otherwise, have been extinguished by the rude blasts of persecution; and that merciful Saviour who does not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax," kindly "stayed the rough wind," and tenderly guarded them from trial, till their convictions had attained sufficient depth and strength to resist the tempest. Isabel had a kind of presentiment that evil was impending over her, and that feeling led her to study more and more diligently, and to pray with increasing earnestness for that wisdom, courage, and fortitude, which she might so soon require. And she did not pray in

vain. "As thy day, so thy strength shall be," is a promise which has ever been faithfully fulfilled to all those who have pleaded for its accomplishment; and, though our poor Spaniard had never read it, she, too, experienced its benefit, in answer to her trembling and imperfect prayers, or rather to the all-prevailing intercession of her compassionate Redeemer. Days of sorrow, and scenes of trial, were at hand; but she was gradually prepared for them, by those peaceful hours of quiet communion with God, and girded for the conflict with the two-edged "sword of the Spirit."

She had, as may be supposed, frequently examined the hole in the wall of her cell, which had excited so much alarm, and found that it had been gradually and cautiously enlarged, till it was about the size of a Spanish dollar. This, of course, confirmed all her suspicions, and made it utterly unadvisable that Rosa should pay her any more visits; their intercourse, consequently, became more and more restricted, and, indeed, almost ceased, for they could not but perceive that they were closely watched, whenever they met, and wherever they went!

It has been observed, that the nun who inhabited the adjoining cell was one whose appearance and manners Isabel had always disliked. She was an elderly person, remarkable,

not only for her strict and devout performance of every conventual requirement, but for numerous acts of self-imposed penance and mortification. This constant exercise of unauthorized and unscriptural "will-worship" had not tended to improve her naturally harsh disposition, or to soften the asperity of her manners; on the contrary, her increasing austerity had made her an object of fear, and even aversion, to many of her less punctilious companions. She was, however, a great favorite with the superior and the priests, who frequently proposed her to the others, as a bright example of piety, zeal, and eminent sanctity. The effect of these commendations, as might be expected, was to increase the general feeling of envy and dislike, while it puffed up the poor devotee herself with pride and arrogance, and urged her on to still greater, and more life-destroying efforts, for the attainment of the honor of saintship, which had long been the object of her ambition. She scarcely allowed herself any rest, but would spend the greater part of the night in the chapel, on her knees, before a crucifix, or the image of the Virgin, with her arms extended in the form of a cross, till the strained and agonized muscles could not, without great difficulty, be brought back to their natural position. She seldom wore shoes, and frequently mangled herself with the

scourge, till exhausted nature could scarcely enable her to crawl back to her cell. She ate no meat, except on festival days, and allowed herself so little food of any kind, that she had reduced herself to a mere skeleton. She wore on her chest an iron cross, garnished with small pointed spikes, which she often drove into her flesh, by pressing her clasped hands upon it, or striking her bosom violently, as a sign of penitence, or a penance for any sin of which she was conscious, till the place was covered with scars thus inflicted, and never attempted to be healed, or the pain they caused in any degree mitigated.

All this was perfectly in accordance with the doctrines of that church, which teaches her deluded children that self-inflicted tortures are agreeable to a God of infinite mercy, and that the more the laws of nature are violated, and the requirements of Divine goodness outraged, the greater is the amount of merit accumulated, for the purchase of that eternal life which is so distinctly declared to be "the GIFT of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

But this unnatural and unscriptural system could not but lead to its natural results. Life, health, and strength, how vigorous soever they might have been, could not always hold out against such murderous warfare. Sister Giovanna's constitution had been slowly, but

surely, destroyed by this long course of infatuation, and her little remaining strength now sank under her still unrelaxed austerities. She was several times found senseless in the chapel, and great loss of blood, from repeated ruptures of vessels in the lungs, reduced her already emaciated frame to the last degree of exhaustion. She could no longer drag herself to the chapel or the confessional, nor even rise from her hard pallet, but lay there in utter helplessness, the miserable victim of a superstition as senseless and blood-thirsty as that of Juggernaut,—a sad and awful comment on the Divine question to the self-willed Jews, "Who hath required this at your hand?"

The fame of sister Giovanna for sanctity was, indeed, great throughout the convent; but, if she was reverenced as a saint, she was certainly not loved; she might have many admirers, and a few imitators, but she had not one friend. She had, at first, been removed into the infirmary; but, her case being evidently hopeless, she was, at her own request, carried back to her cell, and there literally left to die. It would seem that the deluded creature acted thus from a desire to increase her stock of self-acquired merit, and shorten her purgatorial expiation, by depriving herself of the few comforts and privileges conceded to the sick and dying, and by voluntarily endur-

ing all the miseries of lonely suffering, and unrelieved agony. The strict discipline, and constant, burdensome services, which absorbed the whole day, and almost the night, did not admit of individual attention to the sick out of the infirmary, except in a few peculiar cases, to conciliate novices; the poor creature, therefore, was only visited for a few minutes twice a day, by a nun who brought her food, and attended to what she absolutely required; but no kind hand sustained her aching head, or wiped the cold dew from her throbbing temples; no pitying voice strove to soothe her anguish, or spoke words of comfort and hope to her desponding soul.

So little sympathy, or familiar intercourse, existed in the convent, that it was not till her absence of some weeks from the usual services had excited considerable curiosity, that an anxious and half-fearful inquiry from Rosa, elicited the information that sister Giovanna was confined to her cell by illness. Unaccountable absences, of longer or shorter duration, were not at all rare among the recluses, and their effect was always to inspire the others with dread, perhaps the more so from their never being explained; and conjecture could only ascribe them to punishment, or extraordinary penance required. Questions were seldom asked, and, if asked, scarcely ever answered;

and, as it was well known that some absentees had never returned, or been heard of again, it is not surprising that a feeling of irrepressible terror hovered over the subject, or that Rosa's voice trembled, as she ventured on so bold an inquiry. Having ascertained the truth, however, the kind-hearted girl at once resolved to visit the invalid, and to see if she could not be of some use to her. She obtained permission to do so during the time of recreation; but, finding her in so exhausted and distressing a state, her benevolent feelings prompted her to return in the evening, after bed-time, and to bestow on the poor suffering creature many little acts of sympathy and attention which were really necessary for her, but which she never would have received otherwise. The invalid herself was unwilling to accept them; but Rosa would not be driven away; and her persevering kindness at length won upon the heart which had long been closed to human affection, till the drooping head resigned itself to her supporting arm, and the long-tortured frame lay in her tender embrace, with a feeling of newly-awakened bliss, which she feared it was sinful to indulge, but was too weak, and too much overcome to resist.

Rosa soon found means to inform her friend Isabel of her new occupation, and the latter, from a sense of humanity, resolved to assist

her in waiting on the invalid. Sister Giovanna however, did not seem disposed to accept her attentions with complacency. She received her with cold, averted looks, and would evidently, if she could, have declined her services altogether. Isabel's quick and sensitive feelings were much hurt by this evident dislike, and she almost resolved not to obtrude her kind offices where they were so little appreciated; but the word of God had reached her heart, and that word, applied by the Divine Spirit, taught her to imitate the example of Him, who "is kind to the unthankful and to the evil." She recollected her own former aversion to the poor nun, and resolved to make some amends for it, by persevering assiduity in the promotion of her comfort.

The two friends agreed to devote alternately half the time allotted for their rest, to the invalid, so that she might not be left alone during the night. Her increasing weakness made this really necessary; but it would not have been allowed by the heads of the establishment, and, therefore, must be carefully concealed from them. It was unquestionably a breach of their conventual vow of obedience, and Rosa felt it to be such; but her feelings of compassion prevailed over every other consideration; while Isabel's more enlightened conscience saw the futility of such unhallowed engagements, and

the duty of "obeying God rather than man." But, in the mind of the invalid herself, there was a fearful struggle between the innocent infirmities of nature, and the merciless spirit of bondage under which she had groaned for so many years; a struggle which often shook her feeble frame, and threatened suddenly to extinguish her flickering flame of existence.

Restless and feverish, she lay tossing on her hard bed, unable to sleep, while Isabel, with ceaseless and untiring assiduity, tried every ingenious contrivance that the most anxious solicitude could suggest, to procure her some little ease; she raised her tenderly, changed her position repeatedly, smoothed the hard unpillowed couch, wiped the cold dew from her face, and gave her water to drink. It was all of no use; the sufferer could get no relief, and her groans pierced the heart of her nurse. Nearly two hours of wearing agony passed away, and, when exhausted nature at length sank into a death-like torpor, Isabel was compelled to leave her, and hasten to her daily task of heartless drudgery.

The next night she seemed in less pain, but still more unwilling to receive her services, and there was an expression of wild resolution in her eyes, which Isabel was at a loss to account for. Anxious to learn the cause of this unyielding spirit of opposition, and evident dislike to

herself, she resolved to attempt something like conversation, and accordingly began by inquiring why she was so unwilling to be conveyed into the infirmary?

Sister Giovanna hesitated for some minutes, as if doubtful of the propriety of replying to the question; at length she said, "That would be an indulgence, sister, and I need punishment and penance, not indulgence."

"Have your sins, then, been so very great?" inquired Isabel, whose enlightened mind revolted from this unscriptural sentiment, although she could scarcely have given a clear account of her aversion to it.

"Not greater than those of many others,—not so great as those of some whom I could name;" replied the nun, accompanying this pharisaical declaration with a peculiar emphasis, and a look at Isabel, which startled her. She, however, mastered this feeling of sudden alarm, and rejoined, without appearing to perceive or understand the innuendo.

"Your life, sister, has been one of continued penance and self-infliction; and, surely, a merciful God does not require that you should now aggravate your own sufferings, by refusing the alleviations which are provided in the infirmary. You will hasten your death by such a proceeding, and I do not think it can be right to do that.

May you not then be committing sin, instead of acquiring additional merit?"

The brow of the poor devotee became contracted with displeasure at this suggestion, which seemed like an attempt to rob her of a hoarded treasure; and her indignation was about to burst forth on the audacious speaker. A distressing fit of coughing, however, which threatened to shatter her feeble frame, gave her time for reflection, and an involuntary misgiving softened the tone of her reply.

"You cannot require to be reminded, sister, that the greater the pain we voluntarily endure, the more merit we acquire; we offer it to God, in expiation of our own sins; and if it should be more than is necessary for that purpose, the surplus remains in the hand of the church, to be applied in indulgences to those whose deficiencies require it."

"Such, I know, is the doctrine we are taught," said Isabel, thoughtfully, "but, . . . " and she was about to express her doubts of its Divine authority, when the recollection of the nun's suspicious look, and implied censure, checked her tongue, and she attempted, though not without considerable embarrassment, to introduce another subject.

It was the middle of the night, and silence had long reigned in the convent; but a stealthy step was now faintly heard, and the door of

the cell, which, according to monastic rules, had no fastening, was quietly opened a little, then hastily reclosed, before the alarmed Isabel could perceive who the intruder was. She, however, started up, sprang to the door, and, taking the light, endeavored to obtain a view of the retreating figure, but all to no purpose. The corridor was deserted, and the stillness so great, that her hasty opening of the door re-echoed through it with almost frightful distinctness.

"Can you account for this interruption, sister?" inquired she of the nun. "Who can be wandering about the house at this hour, and with what motive could they come hither?"

But sister Giovanna was not disposed to answer; she only shook her head, and intimated by signs that she did not wish to be spoken to. Isabel felt annoyed at her obstinacy; but, as it was invincible, she sat in silence by her bedside, deeply absorbed in conjecture, till Rosa arrived to relieve her watch. The cheek of the young novice became pale as marble, when she heard of the night's occurrence; and she expressed her conviction that they were exposed to a secret *surveillance* which threatened them with impending peril.

"Leave these night-watchings to me, *carina*," said Isabel; "you know I have no fear whatever; I am not naturally timid, and I care little

for penance, or punishment of any kind. You are too gentle, my Rosa, too delicate and feeble to withstand the storm, and why should you expose yourself unnecessarily?"

"You must, indeed, think me weak, Isabel," exclaimed Rosa, reproachfully, "to fancy for one moment, that I could desert you in the hour of danger, or shrink from the performance of a duty, through fear or cowardice. No! I will neither leave you nor sister Giovanna; but may the holy Virgin and Santa Rosalia watch over and protect us!"

The invalid gave Rosa sufficient employment, the rest of the night, to prevent her from dwelling long on the danger of her position. She was distressingly restless and uneasy; her respiration seemed obstructed by violent palpitations of the heart, and the cold perspiration which bathed her face, neck, and hands, bore witness to some inward and agonizing struggle. She groaned dreadfully, but spoke not a word, although she several times grasped the hand of her patient nurse with a convulsive force, which almost extorted a cry: and when the early matin-bell summoned Rosa away, she left her in a state of exhaustion which seemed little short of dissolution.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that Isabel and Rosa watched, with intense anxiety, the countenances of all the nuns, but especially

those of the superiors, with the view of discovering indications of that anger or suspicion which they had reason to believe existed with regard to themselves. But their penetration was completely baffled; not the slightest shade of displeasure, or coldness, could be discerned on the smooth, well-practised brow, in the subdued, downcast eye, or on the perfectly disciplined lip. Nothing but kindness, affection, and confidence, was expressed by look, word, or action; and the anxious hearts of the novices almost felt re-assured, and ashamed of their fears. Rosa, who was better read in the annals of convent-duplicity than her friend, had less confidence in these appearances; but even she, though brought up from infancy in its noxious atmosphere, had been sedulously kept in ignorance of those mysteries of falsehood, treachery, and refined wickedness, which were never disclosed to novices, and into which, indeed, only a few even of the elder nuns were fully initiated.

When the sisterhood were assembled that day at dinner, the superior, with much apparent feeling, spoke of sister Giovanna; and, while announcing her approaching dissolution, eulogized, in the highest terms, her patience, self-denial, and extraordinary devotion. "Her humility is so great," continued the abbess, "that she refuses any thing that could alleviate

her sufferings, because she thinks that her sins require the utmost degree of agony to expiate them; but our holy father confessor assures me that she is thus laying up a store of supererogatory merit, which will be of infinite value to this our blessed community. Let us all pray for her, my children, and assist her by repeating two extra rosaries on her behalf this evening."

One of the younger nuns here ventured to inquire, "if they might hope to see sister Giovanna again?"

"Certainly, my daughter," replied the superior, "although she is now indulged in her wish for extraordinary mortification, by being allowed to remain in her cell, the community must not be deprived of so edifying an example as her death is likely to be. When her final hour arrives, and it becomes necessary to administer the last sacraments, she will be brought into the infirmary, and the whole sisterhood, as usual, summoned to the spectacle."

Rosa knew, from long experience, that this practice was customary; yet the cold-hearted selfishness of the whole proceeding now struck on her heart like ice. She thought of the lonely sufferer, wearing out her last hours in unrelieved, unsoothed, unpitied anguish, and the tears rushed to her eyes. She raised them to the countenance of Isabel, and the glance of

indignation which she saw, flashing from her magnificent Spanish orbs on the hypocritical face of the superior, thrilled her with terror. She could not, however, ascertain whether that look had been seen or read; all was calm, composed, and benignant in the features she was scrutinizing,—as calm as the volcano just before an eruption,—as still as the awful hush that precedes an earthquake. Rosa felt uneasy, restless, and apprehensive; for she could not believe that Isabel's look had been altogether unobserved; and she trembled for the consequences of her friend's imprudence.

The whole of the day was passed by her in a state of indescribable anxiety; and, during her two hours' watch by sister Giovanna, a nervous terror made her start at every sigh of the breeze that moaned around the ivied walls. The invalid was excessively feeble, and not disposed to speak; but she seemed to suffer much, and occasionally uttered a deep groan. Rosa felt something like relief when Isabel came to take her place, although she was unwilling to leave her in what she could not but consider a dangerous occupation. Isabel, however, smiled at her fears, and assured her that she herself entertained no apprehension.

Rosa had scarcely departed, when the invalid made a sign that she wished to be raised to a recumbent posture, and Isabel hastened to

assist her. There were no pillows with which to prop her up; the Spanish novice, therefore, sat on the pallet, and supported the emaciated frame. This she had never before allowed her to do, and it seemed a mark of new-born friendliness which gratified Isabel. The panting nun remained some moments silent; then, after a struggle to recover her breath, she, with some difficulty, articulated,

"Sister, I am in great pain of body, and distress of mind,—can you not say something to comfort me?"

"You have, hitherto, rejected every thing from me, sister," replied Isabel, with some surprise, "but heaven is my witness, that I would gladly do any thing in my power for you, if you would only direct my endeavors."

"I know that I have been rude and ungrateful to you, sister Isabel. I entertained a prejudice against you, which nothing but your unwearied and persevering kindness could have overcome; but your patient goodness, and your generous devotedness in exposing yourself to danger and punishment, in order to relieve my sufferings, have completely triumphed over me, and I now beg your forgiveness and friendship."

This speech was uttered at intervals, and with great apparent difficulty. Isabel's heart was touched by the confession, and her warm

affections, which had been, as it were, frozen up by the nun's former coldness and dislike, now flowed towards her with all their natural freedom and fulness. She assured her of her entire forgiveness for the past, and begged to know in what way she could contribute most to her comfort.

"I feel, sister," replied the invalid, "that my time in this world is rapidly drawing to a close, and that I must very soon enter upon that eternity which I have always dreaded. The church, you know, engages to secure our salvation, if we are obedient and faithful, yet she forbids us ever to feel sure of it. This uncertainty is very dreadful, when we are standing, as I now am, on the brink of the grave; and, besides, if I may hope for ultimate rest in heaven, I know there must be first a period of awful purgatorial suffering,—how long, how severe, I cannot even guess. Oh! sister, these thoughts make me very miserable, they haunt me day and night; and I shrink with horror from the approach of death, lest it should plunge me into greater torments than I now endure."

The unhappy creature's groans bore witness to her misery, and pierced the heart of the sympathizing Isabel. She could, indeed, feel for her distress, for her own soul had often been steeped in the same "deep waters" of anguish and terror; and she longed to impart the

soothing comfort she had herself experienced from the study of her precious New Testament. But prudence restrained her tongue, and she merely attempted to administer the feeble opiates prescribed by her church; yet her voice faltered, as she uttered words which her own convictions told her were false and delusive.

"Have you not, sister, done all, and more than all, that our church requires? Are not all your penances, fastings, mortifications, and acts of piety, sufficient to quiet your apprehensions, satisfy your conscience, and insure you a peaceful end? Will not this extraordinary self-denial of yours, in refusing your poor suffering body every comfort to which a dying person is entitled, even in a convent, will not all this avail to . . . . ."—"*expiate your sins?*" she was going to say, but the inspired declaration, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified," flashed on her mind with such force that she could not finish the sentence.

"Alas! sister, I thought so formerly; but the near approach of death seems to have set every thing in a stronger light, and I feel afraid to trust to what *might* be an unsafe dependence. Besides, I do not really suffer all the inconveniences I intended, for you and sister Rosa frustrate my penance by your kindness; and yet, strange as it is, I cannot resolve to forego the comfort of your attentions, and

drive you away from me. I fear our holy mother, the blessed Virgin, will treat me as a reprobate, for not performing my vows to their utmost."

"Can you suppose her so very severe and unfeeling?" exclaimed Isabel. "She would not, then, be like her Divine Son; for he was more kind and tender-hearted than any other man. Remember how He seized every occasion of healing pain and sickness, of alleviating sorrow, and showing indulgence to the wants and weaknesses of his followers; how kindly he felt for the famishing crowds in the wilderness, and supplied them with food by a miracle, expressing His fears lest they should faint by the way. And, when His disciples were hungry, and plucked the ears of corn to eat, He sternly rebuked the Pharisees for finding fault with them, and reminded them that God had said, 'He would have mercy rather than sacrifice.' Indeed, sister, I think we wrong God, by looking upon Him as severe in exacting from us more than our feeble bodies are able to bear."

"Your words are very agreeable, sister, but I am afraid to dwell upon them; for they might lead to self-indulgence and slothfulness. You know we are to 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;' therefore we ought not to be too confident, nor ever to think

that we have done, or can do, enough to secure it."

This Romish perversion of a much abused text grated upon the heart of Isabel; yet she knew not what to reply, and, had her ideas on the subject been even clearer than they were, she would not have dared to give them utterance. She, therefore, exerted herself to soothe the sufferer's fears, by promising to repeat many extra prayers for her benefit, and urging her to keep her own mind as much employed in prayer as her state of weakness and pain would permit. But when Rosa's arrival released her, she felt so much depressed, disturbed and uneasy, that, instead of seeking the short rest which her frame required, she threw herself on her knees beside her pallet, and wept unrestrainedly.

The feeling which thus overpowered her was a deep and distressing sense of her spiritual ignorance. Notwithstanding her anxious study of the New Testament, she had not yet clearly perceived the way of salvation by Christ. Her reading had, indeed, enlightened her on the errors of her former system; it had demolished, one by one, almost all the refuges of lies," to which the Romish church directs her children; she could no longer trust to its doctrines, nor repose her hopes on its sandy foundations, nor yield her soul to the

treacherous fanning of its vampire-wings. But, though she had renounced all false dependence, she had not yet found that stay for her soul which consists in being firmly fixed on the everlasting rock. The Holy Spirit had not yet led her to that full reliance on the Saviour which alone can produce joy and peace in believing. Her mind was painfully tossed on the waves of doubt and uncertainty, and her inability to offer substantial comfort to a soul shuddering on the brink of eternity, forcibly reminded her of her own helpless condition, and the awful perplexity that would distract her under similar circumstances. She felt that she could not, without equal misery and danger, continue in this state; hope whispered that there *must* be in the word of God, a solution to all her doubts; and the cry of her soul burst forth in deep, earnest, impassionate supplication to the Father of mercies, for pardon, light, and peace.

Such a petition is never left unanswered by the Hearer of prayer. A feeling of confidence arose in her mind, that she would find her answer in His own word, and, as the first streaks of early dawn began to dissipate the total darkness which had hitherto surrounded her, she arose from her knees, placed herself at the casement, and opening her treasured book,

strove to decipher the first epistle of St. John, which she had not yet read.

It may, perhaps, be said, that she had already perused more than enough of the New Testament to give her a clear and satisfactory view of the plan of salvation; but when the former darkness of her mind, the circumstances of her case, and the natural blindness of the human heart to spiritual things, are considered, it cannot appear strange that she should be, as yet, but as the partially-enlightened man who "saw men as trees walking." She had, indeed, read, and deeply pondered, the Divine declaration, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," with many others equally important and unequivocal; but she did not clearly understand the nature of the faith required; and, as one great object of her Scripture-reading had been the hope of finding the Romish dogmas authorized, or, at least, sanctioned in the Word of God, its effects had been the demolition of her former belief, rather than the establishment of her mind in the truth.

Now, however, she was thoroughly humbled and stripped of all dependence on aught save the mercy of a compassionate God; and the Holy Spirit, having thus brought her to a deep and heartfelt sense of her utter helplessness, was now about to reveal to her soul those blessed, saving truths, which can only be "spir-

itually discerned." It would be impossible to describe the joy, the transport, with which she read those precious words: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from ALL SIN." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." A ray of heavenly light seemed to rest on these words, and she felt that she understood and could believe them. So great was the effect they produced, that she laid down the book, took it up again, ascertained, by a second and a third perusal, that it was no illusion, then clasped her hands, sank on her knees, and, utterly unable to express her feelings, even by prayer or thanksgiving, remained for some minutes in a silent ecstasy of joy and gratitude. A few incoherent words of praise then issued from her lips, and again she returned to the study of the blessed words.

A flood of light had burst upon her soul, and she now recollected how many similar passages she had read before, which she had never distinctly understood. She felt that the great truth they contained had now been divinely applied to her heart; that she could trust to the blood of atonement for the pardon of *all* her sins; and that that precious word,

ALL, had forever swept away every doubt and misgiving, as well as every false dependence.

She rose at the sound of the matin-bell, "a new creature," in the Scripture sense of the word. The burden of misery which had so long weighed her down was gone, and her emancipated spirit seemed to tread the courts, and breathe the air of heaven. She was scarcely conscious of the soul-blighting atmosphere that surrounded her; and, while mechanically performing her usual routine of employments, enjoyed the ineffable sweetness of heartfelt communion with God. Her only wish now was to communicate her happiness to Rosa: and this she resolved to do the following night, by accompanying her to her cell, and conversing with her for half-an-hour, before she supplied her place, by sister Giovanna's bedside. This recalled the invalid to her thoughts, and her heart rose in gratitude to God, that she could now tell that forlorn and desponding one of a free and full salvation,—of a "hope which would not make her ashamed." That heart now overflowed with love to her Saviour, and the beneficent stream, with its natural tendency, sought to impart its cheering and fertilizing influence to all around. No thought of prudence, no sus-

picion of danger, laid its chilling touch on the new-born ardor of Christian charity; she could only feel, with the beloved St. John, that "if God *so* loved us, we ought also to love one another."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DYING NUN.

Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul.
I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.—PSALM lxix 1, 2.

IT was Rosa's turn to watch by the invalid the first part of the ensuing night; and, when Isabel joined them, instead of taking her place, she followed her young friend back to her cell, and, in the fulness of her overflowing heart, communicated to her the "glad tidings of great joy," with which she had herself become acquainted. Rosa listened, and wondered, and scarcely knew whether she ought to believe what she heard; but she could not question the authority of Scripture, warranted as its authority was, by the translation of an archbishop of her own church. Her convictions being less deep than those of her friend, and her perceptions of personal sinfulness and danger less acute, the message of free and unconditional pardon, of sovereign grace, and all-atoning blood, did not affect her to the same rapturous degree; but it was sweet and pleasant to exchange the "spirit of bondage" for even a foretaste of the "glorious liberty of the

children of God," and to feel that she might draw near to God in "the spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father."

Perhaps, however, the feeling which, at that moment, most occupied her mind, was that of unbounded surprise at the deceptions which she now saw were practised by her church and its ministers, on the unhappy creatures, whose blind confidence intrusted their eternal concerns to such unfaithful hands. She had hitherto persisted in evading the force of Isabel's animadversions on that subject; she had striven hard to maintain her trust in her spiritual guides; she had, as it were, clung to delusion, and, with desperate resolution, refused to be undeceived. But she could now do this no longer; her eyes were forcibly opened, and the spell that had hitherto sealed them destroyed forever. Her indignation burst forth in vehement exclamations; and she now requested from her friend the temporary loan of the Testament, that she might, by means of its perusal, retrace her steps from the maze of error in which she felt herself almost inextricably involved. Isabel was loth to part with her treasure, which had now become more than ever precious; but she conquered this motion of selfishness, and, resigning it to the hands of Rosa, departed to resume her watch. She found her patient in a state

of extraordinary excitement, and apparently much distressed by her absence. She started up with an exertion of strength of which Isabel had not thought her capable, and stretching out her emaciated arms towards her, exclaimed, with wild vehemence,

"Sister! dearest sister! come to me! Oh! why have you left me alone so long? I have had such frightful visions! They were not dreams, sister, for I have not slept, but I saw Costanza!—the murdered Costanza! You start sister, but I did not murder her! Why, then, did she come to reproach me?—to torture my dying moments? She looked so pale! Oh! so frightfully wan and emaciated! and she said I could have saved her! But how could I expose myself to the same fate? Surely, it would have been madness! and then, it would not have saved her effectually, while I should have been involved in her ruin. But her looks of reproach were dreadful! and she stretched out her wasted arms to clasp me; and I saw the image of Santa Rosalia in that corner, and I ran to her, and embraced her knees, imploring her protection. But she took no notice of me, and looked so utterly powerless! Then I raised my eyes to heaven, and saw the blessed Madonna sitting on a cloud. I shrieked to her for help: but she turned her eyes away, and the ghastly spectre seized me, and I sank in its icy

embrace. Oh! sister, I know not what would have become of me, if your coming had not dispersed the horrid illusion!"

She clasped the hand of Isabel with convulsive force; every nerve in her frame shook with irrepressible terror, and the cold dew of agony bathed her pallid face. Nature seemed completely exhausted by the struggle it had endured, and she sank back on her comfortless pallet, looking so much like a corpse, that Isabel for some moments thought her spirit had departed. The horror of a death under such circumstances terrified her beyond description, and she strove by every effort to recall the departing soul, and, at last, by bathing her face and hands plentifully with water, (the only restorative at her disposal,) succeeded in reviving her to consciousness. The terror of her immediate dissolution being thus removed, Isabel reflected that the recent occurrence had laid on her conscience a heavy responsibility. If she had before thought it her duty to direct this poor benighted creature to the only way of salvation for perishing sinners, how greatly was that obligation increased by what she had just witnessed! It was evident that the wretched nun had been, either directly or indirectly, concerned in some fearful deed, some crime, or perhaps series of crimes, of the darkest and most awful dye; and that, notwith-

standing all the moral opiates which had no doubt been administered, to lull and stupefy her conscience, it would still occasionally assert its Divine commission, and "shake its scorpion whips," before her guilty eyes. Isabel, therefore, resolved in obedience to what seemed an intimation from above, to probe this rankling wound, and, with the blessing of God, to apply to it the only balm that could heal it, even that blood of atonement which she had so recently learned "cleanseth from all sin." The miserable creature, however, was now too weak for conversation; she was lying in a state of apparent torpor, but she held with both her hands that of her watchful nurse, and every attempt to remove it produced a convulsive shudder. It was, therefore, necessary to defer every attempt till the next night, and it was not without considerable difficulty that she was induced to acquiesce in the propriety of Isabel's departure in the morning.

A solemn sense of the important duty she had to perform rested on Isabel's mind that day, and led her to much earnest prayer for the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit in her proposed undertaking. These petitions, indeed, were entirely mental, for she durst not utter them; but they ascended to heaven in fervent aspirations, while her lips were mechanically repeating the Latin invocations

which constituted a very considerable part of her daily routine. She had quite discontinued the *private* repetitions which were regularly enjoined, but the *public* ones she knew not how to refuse, although she felt them to be mere mockery when addressed to God, and blasphemous in their application to any created object.

She had not, indeed, seen or heard the second commandment, which so plainly denounces all image-worship; for the Church of Rome, with the true wisdom of the serpent, has unceremoniously blotted out that commandment from the decalogue which she puts into the hands of her young and ignorant members, dividing the tenth into two, in order to complete the required number. By this audacious presumption, indeed, she has subjected herself to the curse, divinely pronounced against those who dare to "take away from the words" of the sacred book; but, alas! the apostate church cares little for that, as long as she can retain her usurped dominion over the minds and consciences of her victims.

Of this, however, Isabel was ignorant; but she had learned that there is but "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" and having, in consequence, discontinued all prayers to saints and angels, she could not descend so low as to pay any homage to the senseless images which she had felt were

only calculated to etnangle the senses, and interpose a veil of obscurity between the grovelling soul and the only real object of spiritual worship. She, therefore, turned with loathing from the convent-idols, while she was compelled to bend the knee before them, and occasionally to assist in decorating them for some superstitious solemnity.

One of those festivals was now approaching; it was the day on which the Church of Rome celebrates the Assumption, or fabulous ascension of the blessed Virgin into heaven: and the whole convent was busy in the preparation of artificial flowers, for *bouquets*, garlands, and other fanciful devices, to adorn the chapel, the altars, and the image of the Madonna, on the important day, which was always one of great *éclat* at Santa Rosalia, as all the nobility, the gentry, the authorities of the island, and a large concourse of the people, after having heard high mass in the morning, at the principal church in Palermo, invariably attended vespers in the chapel, where a gorgeous exhibition, and an exquisite musical entertainment, presented attractions not to be resisted.

Isabel had diligently sought in her Testament for some account of an event which she had always heard mentioned as a Scripture-fact, and had never thought of doubting. But, to her inexpressible astonishment, she found not a

syllable on the subject, nor, with all her searching, could she discover even the most distant allusion to any such occurrence. It was strange, she thought,—most inexplicably strange, that it should have been omitted! There were accounts of the deaths of John the Baptist, of Stephen, and of James; of the imprisonment and miraculous escape of Peter, and the persecutions and sufferings of the other apostles; but, though many of these circumstances occurred and were related at a time which must have been subsequent to this alleged event, not one of the sacred writers seemed to be acquainted with it. Even John, the beloved disciple, to whom the care of His mother had been especially committed by the dying Saviour, who was spared to outlive all his fellow apostles, and wrote his last solemn admonitions, and glorious prophetic visions, for the benefit of the church, long after all his brethren had been called to their rest,—even he had not recorded a single line respecting his precious charge; her removal, whenever and however effected, had not been thought of sufficient importance to occupy the smallest nook in the pages of inspiration. Isabel felt convinced that such a miracle could not have been abandoned to tradition or profane history, while others, of much less general interest and consequence, were minutely related; she was for some time

bewildered by the difficulty which thus presented itself; but at last came to the natural and inevitable conclusion, that the whole story was an invention, for what purpose she could not at the moment divine. She soon, however, recollected the additional dignity it seemed to confer on the Virgin; the sanction it gave to the worship which was paid her, and the intercession she was supposed to exercise in heaven, and the scope it presented for the fabrication of miracles said to have been wrought by her in former times, and even then occasionally repeated. This at once cleared up the mystery; and the heart of the enlightened novice turned with sickening abhorrence from the falsehood and duplicity of the system in which she was entangled.

It was under the influence of these feelings that she took her usual place by the pallet of her suffering charge, whose restless agony, both of mind and body, excited her tenderest compassion. She was now reduced to a state of weakness which was truly distressing, yet Isabel discovered that she had, in the course of the preceding day, adopted an additional means of self-torture, by fastening around her waist a broad, rough, prickly band of horsehair, the irritating effects of which were further aggravated by the small iron cross, with sharp edges, which, tightly bound on her chest, must

have caused excruciating pain. Isabel's first impulse of indignant horror was to remove it, but the infatuated creature, though writhing under the infliction, only pressed it closer to her bosom, with a desperate energy, which made the blood gush from her mouth, as well as from the lacerated part. The alarmed novice desisted, and with tears endeavored to soothe her; then, seeing her too weak to converse, and feeling that her time must be very short, she resolved, in spite of every risk, to lay before her the truths and consolations of the Gospel. Having lent her New Testament to Rosa, she could not read from it, as she otherwise would have done; but having, under the impression that it might one day be taken from her, committed a great deal of its precious contents to memory, she was now able to repeat the first and third chapters of St. John's Gospel. This she did in a low voice, and with much feeling; and her exhausted auditor seemed to listen with deep and rapt attention. Some parts of it she had read and heard before, and, therefore, recognized as Scripture; but the rest she was, of course, utterly unacquainted with; and, as soon as she was able to speak, she eagerly inquired what it was. Isabel replied that it was the Word of God, and, as such, entitled to the most implicit credit.

"But where did you find it, sister? It is not

all in our holy books: are you sure it is Scripture?"

"Quite sure, sister Giovanna; but you must excuse my telling you where I found it, as that is not at all necessary."

"Then, how am I to know that it is true, since you refuse to acquaint me with your sources of information? I have heard that the devil may transform himself into an angel of light, and this may be a device of his to ensnare me, and, perhaps, you also. Sister Isabel, there have been strange rumors about you in the house, and I was at one time greatly influenced by dislike and dread of you. What am I now to think of this strange proceeding? You repeat to me something which you say is the Word of God, and yet you refuse to tell me how it came to your knowledge, although I am sure you can only have acquired it by supernatural means. Avaunt, Satan!" she exclaimed, suddenly crossing herself, and then holding out a crucifix towards the startled Isabel.

"Alas! poor sister," replied the latter, smiling with compassion at this pitiable exhibition of ignorance and superstition, "are these the fables you have been taught? Are these silly legends the ground of dependence on which a dying creature can rely? Oh! sister, cast away

all those vain confidences, and come to the Lord Jesus alone for pardon and salvation!"

"What do you call fables and legends, sister Isabel? I trust to nothing but what my church teaches me, and, surely, I cannot be wrong in so doing. Explain yourself, for the love of God, and do not thus distress a dying creature."

"I will, dear sister," exclaimed Isabel, yielding to her deeply-excited enthusiasm, "I will speak to you without reserve, and open your eyes, if I can, to the awful delusions which have so long surrounded you. May the God of Mercy enable you to see the truth, before it be too late! The church, to which you trust for salvation, has fearfully departed from the Word of God, both in her doctrines and practices; and, in order to avoid all confutation, she has dared to conceal and prohibit that blessed word. A copy of the New Testament has, however, through Divine interposition. fallen into my hands; I cannot tell you how, nor is it necessary; but of this I solemnly assure you, that it has not been through any supernatural agency, and, therefore, you may dismiss your superstitious fears. In perusing it, I have discovered how shamefully we have been deceived; and the blessed truths it contains have set me free from spiritual bondage, and may also be the means of making you 'wise unto

salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.' Oh, sister! you will very soon be called to appear before God; refuse not the opportunity of learning what His will really is, for our blessed Saviour Himself declared, that 'the word which He has spoken shall judge us at the last day.' Is it not, then, of the utmost importance that we should know what that word is?"

"But how are we to know it, sister," inquired the invalid, whose attention seemed thoroughly roused, "if, as you say, it is purposely hidden from us? The blessed Virgin and saints have pity upon us! What are we to do? And what will become of me, if, now that I am at the point of death, I have to begin the work of my salvation all over again, and must lose the benefit of all I have done and suffered to secure it?" The unhappy creature groaned aloud, in real distress of mind, at this fearful idea.

"Dear sister, I have not told you this to make you miserable, or to deprive you of hope in your dying moments; but to destroy your false confidence, and set your trust on the only true foundation,—the only Scriptural one,—and that you may enjoy that peace and assurance which will never fail or deceive you. All you have done and suffered is utterly insufficient to secure your salvation, for nothing that we can do will ever justify us before God,—you

start, sister, but the Scripture says so,—but you may be saved by a humble faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a simple dependence upon Him; for 'His blood cleanseth from all sin,' and 'by Him all that believe are justified from all things.' 'In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.' 'To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.'"

"But, sister, you say nothing of penances, mortifications, or acts of self-chastisement; you forget that we must acquire some merit to enter heaven, and that the merits of the blessed saints are necessary, to make up for the deficiency of our own."

"There is no such doctrine in the New Testament, I assure you, nor even any mention of the merits or intercession of any saint whatsoever. No! not even of the blessed Virgin herself, nor of any worship paid to her; but we are told, that, as there is but one God, so also there is but one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. There is not one word, either about the use of pictures, crucifixes, or images, or of any respect or reverence to be paid to them."

"Gesu, Maria! Sister Isabel, how can we, poor sinners as we are, approach God in that

way? He is too great, and too holy, even to listen to our prayers, unless they are recommended to His notice by some one who, feeling for our weaknesses, and sympathizing in our miseries, will interpose a claim of merit between Him and our sinfulness. Oh! do not rob me of the hope that the holy mother of God and Santa Rosalia are interceding for me! Do not drive me to despair!"

"I only wish to fix your attention on a far greater and far better Intercessor, even the blessed Saviour Himself, who, the Scripture tells me, is much more merciful and compassionate, as well as more powerful, than any other could be. He is not one who 'cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but was tempted like us in all things, except sin.' Let me repeat to you some of His own gracious words, and you will see that He is most willing to receive all poor sinners who come to Him by prayer and faith. 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.' 'Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.' These are His own words, and you see there is nothing in them about saints or angels, or any other created being."

"They are sweet words," murmured the poor invalid, "most consoling words, if I could but believe them. But are they true? Oh! sister Isabel, are they really the words of God? You spoke of free and unconditional forgiveness,—of blood which cleanses from all sin,—Oh! might it avail for me! You do not know what my sins have been! nor what reason I have to dread the horrors of purgatory! Oh! that I could, by any sufferings here, escape that dreadful place!"

"I am very ignorant myself, dear sister, I cannot presume to teach you further than the New Testament teaches me, and I do not understand it all; but, as far as I can judge, there is no mention in its pages of any such place as purgatory. I have found but two states described as being the portion of the dead,—they are, heaven and hell; but there is no allusion whatever to a third, nor to any possibility of change after death. The only instance mentioned, of a petition being presented to a glorified saint, is in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; and that was unsuccessful, even for the poor alleviation of a drop of water; and Abraham then announced the utter impossibility of any interference or change in the lost soul's condition."

"No purgatory! no expiatory state after death!" exclaimed the poor nun, starting up

wildly on her couch, "Oh! sister, do you know what you are saying? Dreadful as the idea of that awful place is, it is still more frightful to think of there being none! What, then, is to become of our remaining sins and corruptions? How can we ever enter heaven, without their being removed?"

"I have told you, that the Redeemer's blood purifies from *all* sin; do you think *that* is not sufficient? The sacred writers all represent the death of a believer as being *immediately* followed by eternal blessedness. St. Paul says that, to be 'separated from the body' is to be 'present with the Lord.' Christians are everywhere represented as longing for, and desiring, their departure, which, surely, could not be the case, if they expected an indefinite period of purgatorial suffering; and the blessed spirits in heaven are described as having 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;' and, '*therefore*, being before the throne of God.' Their songs of praise are to Him 'who redeemed them to God by his blood;' and there is not one word about merits, intercession of saints, or purgatory."

"And is it enough, then, to trust in the Saviour for pardon? May I hope that his blood alone will wash away all my sins, and procure me an entrance into heaven? Oh! sister, do

not deceive a dying sinner! Is it really so in the Word of God, and may I believe it?"

"I will show it you in the blessed book itself, and then you can judge if I am right," replied Isabel, endeavoring to calm the agitation of the poor creature; but the violence of her conflicting feelings had been too great for her worn-out frame; she clasped her arms wildly about Isabel's neck; then, falling back suddenly, the fresh rupture of a blood-vessel almost suffocated her. The opportune arrival of Rosa was a great relief to the terrified novice; but it was not till the night was nearly past that she could leave their almost expiring charge, who, however, seemed composed, and remarkably tranquil; and, though unable to speak, pressed her hand at parting, with a look of unutterable gratitude and affection.

Isabel hurried to her own cell, and, instead of seeking rest, threw herself on her knees, and spent the rest of the time in alternate thanksgiving and supplication. She blessed God that she had been enabled to speak frankly and faithfully to her dying charge, and that her eyes seemed to be, in some measure, opening to the truth; while a deep-felt conviction of her own ignorance led her, with almost agonized earnestness, to implore pardon for every mistake she might have made in instructing her, and Divine direction in her future pro-

ceedings, in order that she might not deceive, or in any way mislead, a fellow sinner in so awful a situation. Tremblingly alive to the responsibility she incurred, both in a spiritual and temporal point of view, she clung, with trusting faith, to the promises of Divine support, and felt that she durst not advance one step without Divine guidance.

Desirous of performing her promise to sister Giovanna, she went to Rosa's cell, before the matin-bell rang, and obtained from her the Testament, but without informing her of the use she intended to make of it, for she neither wished to encounter her fears and remonstrances on the hazardous step she was about to take, nor to involve her in the danger that might attend it. She then softly entered the invalid's cell, with the intention of putting it into her hands; but, as she appeared to be in a state of profound repose, she felt unwilling either to disturb her, or expose her precious book by leaving it in the apartment, and, therefore, turned towards her own cell, in order again to secure it about her person.

She watched the whole morning, for an opportunity of returning to accomplish her object, but could find none, till just before the dinner-hour, when, being sent on a message to the chapel, she hastily turned aside into sister Giovanna's cell. She was so struck, however,

on her entrance, with the changed countenance, and ghastly look, of her charge, that she stood by her bed, unable to utter a word. The hand of death was evidently upon her; but no sooner did the glazing eyes rest upon Isabel, than a sudden gleam of reviving energy illumined them, a flush of emotion re-animated the livid complexion, and she seized the hand of her visitor with a trembling, but almost convulsive, grasp.

"Sister! dearest sister!" exclaimed she, in a hollow and agitated voice, "I know why you come, and what your object is. But, say not one word about the book, and let me not see it, as you value your life! Listen! come near to me, and let me whisper important truths into your ear, before death stop my tongue. I love you with inexpressible affection; my heart is bursting with overwhelming gratitude to you,—for you have taught me what, in all the course of my long and wearisome life, I never heard of before, and should never have known but for you,—the true way of salvation. I know, I feel, that it *is* the right way, for the words you have repeated to me have come home to my heart with an efficacy which nothing but Divine power could give them. I can rest my soul upon them, even though I do not see them. . . . . ."

"But let me show them to you, dear sister!"

"No, no, not for the world! Listen, and you shall know why. I need scarcely tell you that I was once greatly prejudiced against you, I almost hated you; for I thought it my duty to do so. You and Rosa were suspected of unlawful practices, and had been long watched, to discover the purpose of your nightly meetings. A hole in the wall between this cell and yours was carefully made during the day, through which I was directed to overhear, if possible, your conversation. I entered willingly into what I considered a meritorious scheme, but was only able to ascertain that you read in some book, which you cautiously concealed. The afflicting hand of God stopped my proceedings, and I was not a little vexed and irritated, that you should unconsciously insist on returning good for evil, by nursing and comforting me, who had always been acting as your worst enemy. My mind was imbittered, not softened, by all your kindness; I considered you as little better than a heretic, and was determined to keep my heart closed against you. The superior saw you here a few nights ago, and questioned me closely respecting your visits. I expected that she would punish you for such a breach of discipline; but, on the contrary, she and Father Giacomo commanded me to encourage your attendance, and so to deceive you, by appearing to feel an

interest in your conversation, that you might be induced to impart your real sentiments to me, and thus disclose the secret they have hitherto been unable to penetrate. They laid it on my conscience, as a sacred duty required by my vows of obedience, and promised me a considerable remission of purgatorial suffering, if I succeeded.

"You see, then, dearest sister, that I have been acting the part of a deceiver and a hypocrite towards you; but, believe me, when I solemnly assure you, that the interest I only feigned at first, I soon began really to feel. Your untiring patience and kindness melted my heart in spite of me, and the deep, earnest fervor of your exhortations aroused my conscience to a feeling of distress and alarm for my eternal state. I cast from me with loathing the perfidious task I had undertaken, and received from you with thankfulness the blessed truths of the Gospel. They have dispersed the dark clouds of fear and horror from the prospect of eternity, and are now gilding the portals of the grave with the sweet light of hope and glory. You have taught me that the blood of the Saviour cleanseth from ALL sin, and that blessed assurance has taken away the sting from death.

"But let me, if I can, explain to you the present state of affairs. The superior and the

father have questioned me every day, respecting our nocturnal conversations, and I have not dared to utter any falsehoods; but I have told them as little as possible about your sentiments. They have been very anxious to see, or know where you kept your book, their utmost researches in your cell have failed to discover it, and, in answer to a pointed question this morning, I have been compelled to acknowledge that you had promised to intrust me with your treasure. They were delighted, and gave me strict orders to retain it, under any pretext whatever, till to-morrow morning, when I was to put it into their hands. I felt greatly distressed at this, and prayed that God would avert this great danger from you. He has granted my petition, for I feel that I am dying, and have only sufficient strength left to put you on your guard. Let me warn you, therefore, to secure your precious book, if you have the means of doing so; if not, as you value your life, bury or burn it, and trust to your memory for remembering its contents. You know not the peril you incur by keeping it.

"And now farewell, my best and dearest friend and benefactress. Hasten back to your occupations, that no one may know of this visit; then, as I have not seen the book, I cannot betray you any further. They must soon transport me into the infirmary, for I shall not

see another day. But go, go, *carissima*, and hide or burn your precious book! Adieu, do not stay to answer me! we shall meet in heaven."

It was in vain that Isabel attempted to reply, or to prolong the conversation by a single sentence; an impatient wave of the hand, or a gesture imploring her to be gone, was all she could obtain; and, observing that the dew of death was fast gathering on the sufferer's pallid brow, she at length yielded to her mute entreaties, and, with a last long look of affectionate interest, and a warm pressure of her clammy hand, she reluctantly took her departure.

Conscious that she had exceeded the time necessary for the performance of her allotted task, and was, consequently, liable to suspicion, she flew to the chapel, and hastily set about accomplishing her work. This consisted in dusting and re-arranging the altar and its ornaments, removing the faded flowers, taking off the veil and scarf from the figure of the Virgin, and carefully wiping her face and neck. This was all she was allowed to do, for the dressing and undressing were intrusted only to the elder nuns. On the approaching festival, the image was to be splendidly attired, and hints had been given, that it was expected to work some miracle, for a *novena*, or nine days' extraordinary act of devotion, was being per-

formed in the convent, with the view of obtaining that favor.

While engaged in cleansing the neck from the dust which had settled on it, she found it necessary to unfasten a costly necklace of oriental pearls, the gift of a late Queen of Naples, which was clasped with a magnificent sapphire, of uncommon size and beauty. In so doing, she was startled by the silver thread, on which it was strung, suddenly breaking, and the pearls falling around her in various directions. She hastily gathered up all those she could find, and replaced them; but they did not nearly fill up the vacant space, and it was evident that several of them were still missing. Greatly dismayed at the accident, she sought anxiously for them, but without success; and, as if to increase her distress, the unwelcome sound of the refectory-bell summoned her away. What was she to do? The ceremony of dressing the image was to take place the next evening, and she dreaded the discovery of the mischance. After a moment's hesitation, however, she contrived so to tie up the necklace as to conceal the deficiency from mere casual observation, resolving to return in the night, and search for the stray pearls till she found them, if by any possibility they were to be found.

She took her usual place, but had some dif-

ficulty in concealing the agitation that still shook her frame. The attention of the whole sisterhood, however, was soon attracted by the superior, who announced, in set phrase, that sister Giovanna, being at the point of death, had just been removed to the infirmary, where the last rites of the church were to be administered to her; and all the community were invited to witness her truly Christian and edifying departure, and to aid her with their prayers in the moment of extremity. The information was received in solemn silence; and the meal was scarcely finished, when the lugubrious tolling of the passing-bell induced every one to repair to the infirmary.

Isabel took her place among the others, but contrived to get as near the bed as possible, that she might have a view of the dying nun's countenance; and deep was her anxiety to ascertain its expression, and fervent the mental prayers she offered up to the God of all grace, that He would vouchsafe the trembling pilgrim light and comfort in the dark valley she was now entering. One glance, however, showed her that sister Giovanna was insensible, and that the priest's mummeries were all wasted on an unconscious object. Nevertheless, the consecrated wafer was put into her mouth, and apparently swallowed, though mechanically, and with great difficulty; and the usual anoint-

ing was performed, interrupted only by a few convulsive gasps.

The lugubrious chanting of the *Miserere*, however, which was performed alternately by the priest and the nuns, seemed at length to arouse the departing soul for a moment. Sister Giovanna opened her eyes with a start, but, after fixing her gaze an instant on the mournful array that surrounded her, she was about to close them again, when they met the anxious and tearful glance of Isabel. She slightly raised her hand, with a beckoning motion, and, regardless of every other consideration, the Spanish novice was instantly bending over her. The dying eyes beamed on her with inexpressible affection, and, while her lips were finally pressed to the cold forehead, she caught the feebly-murmured accents, which dropped on her heart like balm, "Jesus!—Jesus alone!—His blood! . . . ." but the tongue was unable to utter more; the tight clasp of the hand, however, as it seemed to expend its last energies in pressing that of Isabel, spoke with unmistakable eloquence; a few deep breathings succeeded, and the long-wearied spirit was at rest forever.

Isabel's heart rose to heaven, in one rapturous mental ejaculation of thankfulness; then, extricating her hand, with some difficulty, from the death-pressure, she mechanically joined in

the doleful "De Profundis," and *requiem*, chanted by the whole sisterhood, while her mind was tracking the joyful flight of the emancipated spirit to the throne of Him who had redeemed it, and whose Spirit had introduced it into "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The whole community at length dispersed, leaving the body to the care of the lay-sisters, who were to array it for lying in state before the high altar, preparatory to its being interred the next day. Isabel returned to her cell, and, after offering up her grateful acknowledgments to the God of all grace, who had thus abundantly crowned her feeble efforts for the poor nun's benefit, she sat down to reflect on two subjects, which, at that moment, imperatively demanded her attention. The first was, how she could secure her precious Testament, for she had no doubt, from sister Giovanna's warning, that active steps would soon be taken to deprive her of it, and she felt that its usual concealment about her person would no longer be safe. The other question, which seemed even of more immediate moment, was, how she could secure an opportunity of visiting the chapel unobserved, in order to repair the unfortunate accident which had befallen the pearl necklace, and which, she feared, if discovered, would draw upon her some heavy penance.

She knew that the chapel would not be untenanted till after the funeral, as it was a rule of the convent that some of the sisters should always be kneeling at the side of the coffin, sprinkling the corpse with holy water, and repeating prayers for the repose of the departed spirit.

As it was considered a meritorious act to spend some part of the night alone, in these mournful offices, some of the nuns always requested it as a favor; and a thought occurred to Isabel, that she might thus contrive to accomplish her purpose. But there was something in the idea, from which her newly-acquired feelings of truth and conscientiousness recoiled. She must assign, as a reason for the request, a motive of devotion which did not actuate her; and the hypocrisy of such a pretence at once deterred her from the attempt. Yet, how was she to attain her object? and, if she did not succeed before the obsequies were performed, she knew that the dressing of the image would disclose the mischance immediately after, for it would then be the eve of the Assumption, and every thing must be in readiness for the important festival. She felt greatly perplexed, and the summons of the supper-bell did not lessen her distress. She was inexpressibly relieved, however, after the repast, by hearing her friend Rosa request, and

obtain from the superior, the privilege of watching by the body, during two hours, in the dead of night; and, though she had not an opportunity of speaking to her, this providential interposition in her favor filled her heart with thankfulness and joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIRACLE.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming;

Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.—2 THESS. ii. 8, 9.

ISABEL was at a loss to determine, in her own mind, what might be Rosalia's motives for the request she had preferred, of being allowed to watch beside the corpse of their departed charge. Was her understanding still so dark, that she imagined any benefit could possibly arise from the vigil, either to herself or the deceased? Or was it merely that natural feeling of affection which she could not but experience, for a creature so long the object of her unceasing care, which made her desirous to linger still near the relics of one for whom she had risked a great deal? The Spanish novice pondered those questions on her sleepless couch, till she heard the hour strike, at which her friend's watch was to begin. She waited a few minutes, in feverish impatience, then rising, took her way, in the dark, to the chapel, and, having ascertained that all was

quiet, and the preceding watcher retired to her cell, she gently opened the small door of communication, and entered the chapel with a noiseless step.

The blaze of light from the chancel, contrasted with the total darkness of the surrounding edifice, struck her with a kind of involuntary awe, and she paused a moment, to recover her dazzled sight, and contemplate the scene before her. The high altar was covered with a gold-embroidered veil, and the splendor of its magnificently-chased silver candlesticks, filled with burning wax tapers four feet in height, beamed on the gilded crucifix that surmounted it, and threw a softened lustre on the masterly paintings around it. Two similar tapers were placed before the Madonna; and in front of this array stood the coffin, open, and displaying the corpse, dressed in the robes of a nun, the face lightly covered with a curiously and delicately cut lace-paper, and the head encircled with a long-faded and withered wreath of everlasting, which, having been first assumed on the day of monastic profession, was called the bridal crown, and carefully preserved to adorn the lifeless remains in the grave. On the bosom was laid a small silver crucifix, of exquisite workmanship, which the thin, emaciated hands had been made to clasp; the sweetest flowers, and most fragrant herbs,

were profusely strewn over and around the body, and the fumes of incense, burning without intermission, were so powerful as to be felt quite oppressive. In front of the bier, with her head resting on its side, knelt the youthful form of Rosalia; and, as she looked up, with a sudden start, when Isabel's approaching footstep fell upon her ear, perhaps a more interesting face and figure had seldom met the admiring gaze of a spectator. Her complexion, of almost English fairness, was pale as marble, and the brilliancy of her speaking eyes was softened, and almost dimmed, by the tears that glistened on her long, drooping lashes. "She is, indeed, a lovely victim," thought Isabel, as she fondly stooped to kiss her cold forehead; and an involuntary flush of pleasure irradiated the poor girl's countenance, at the unexpected, but most welcome appearance of her friend.

"You here, dearest sister!" exclaimed she, "what can induce you to come at this hour? I know it is not any purpose of devotion,—and you are aware that you run no slight risk, in disturbing the funeral vigils."

"Rather let me ask, dear Rosa, what brings *you* here? You cannot, with your present knowledge of Scripture, believe that any of these things can *now*, if ever they could, benefit the departed spirit?—Nor does it need such mockery!" she continued, with enthusiasm,

lifting the thin covering from the pallid face on the bier, and gazing with mournful pleasure on the shrunk but placid features; "I have just read, in the Word of God, that 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, *from henceforth*;' and our once-suffering sister is now resting from all her sorrows, in the presence of that Saviour 'who loved her, and gave Himself for her."

Isabel's eloquent countenance was lightened up with the feelings of holy triumph, which seemed, for the moment, to raise her above all sublunary considerations.

"Dearest sister," said Rosa, in a tone of deep dejection, "my mind is sadly bewildered, and I neither know what to think, nor how to act. My former belief is thoroughly shaken, yet I cannot see the way of salvation clearly, as you do. I requested the privilege of this vigil, that I might spend it in prayer, and hoped by it to regain some degree of peace and tranquillity; but I cannot compose my mind to devotion, or still the tumult of my thoughts. But tell me, Isabel, why do you express so much confidence in sister Giovanna's present happiness, when you have so often condemned the system on which her hopes were built?"

"That system she relinquished,—fully and finally relinquished,—and died trusting to the blood of Jesus Christ alone. You did not hear her dying whisper, Rosa, but it will never pass

from my memory. I cannot now give you any particulars, but you shall know all at the first opportunity. I must now attend to the immediate object of my visit."

She then informed her young friend of the accident she had met with, in dropping the pearls, and Rosa, notwithstanding her professed intention of spending the time in devotion, rose to assist her in disrobing the figure of the Madonna, though she did not do so without a feeling of superstitious awe. On removing the different articles of the dress, they found, to Isabel's great relief, several of the precious beads, which had lain concealed amidst the folds; they were carefully gathered up, and the necklace was nearly completed. But what was their astonishment, however, on finding, as they stripped the figure, that it was a piece of machinery, exhibiting a number of springs, the intention of which they could not possibly conjecture. Curious, however, to solve the mystery, they touched first one, and then another, and discovered that their effect was to produce various movements of the figure, such as opening and shutting the eyes, bending the head, extending or raising the hand, and contracting the face into what might be taken for a smile! On tracing these springs to their termination, Isabel discovered that they were conducted from the pedestal on which the statue stood,

through the whole depth of the high altar, till they met in a small recess on the other side, which was concealed by a square piece of marble, which being pressed with the finger in a particular spot, slipped backwards and forwards in a groove provided for the purpose. By means of this contrivance, the priest, while kneeling at the altar, could, with the greatest ease, manage the lifeless puppet in such a manner as to produce, at will, the different movements which excited the awe and wonder of the deluded spectators.

It would be difficult to describe the astonishment and indignation of the two novices, when they had fully investigated this shameful deception.

"This, then, exclaimed Isabel, "accounts for all the miracles and false wonders which we have so often heard related, and a repetition of which all this mockery of a *novena* was instituted to invoke! The day after to-morrow, no doubt, the cheat will again be practised, on the poor deceived votaries of a senseless superstition. Come to my cell as soon as you can, Rosa, and I will show you several passages in the holy book of God, in which such proceedings as these are described as 'lying wonders,' and declared to be the work of some 'evil one,' whose character is most awfully portrayed, and who is denounced as the object of fearfully

appalling judgments. I should not dare to venture on too rash an interpretation of the mysterious truths; but there are descriptions in that blessed word, which cannot apply more closely or exactly to any thing, than they do to the whole system of our church, her doctrines, her practices, and her pretensions. And, oh! Rosa, there is a terrible warning to God's people, to come out of her, that they be not partakers of her sins, nor receive of her plagues."

Poor Rosa, pale and dejected, was leaning against the coffin, scarcely able to support herself, while her fast-dropping tears fell profusely on her clasped hands.

"Isabel," she said at length, "I would to heaven I were stretched on this bier, beside her whose bodily sufferings and mental woes are all ended! Oh! what will become of us, my friend? How shall we, how *can* we, endure the long, long life of consuming misery that awaits us? How spend year after year, in the dull, monotonous, wearisome round of useless observances, in which we can no longer place any reliance, and hypocritical acts of devotion, from which our hearts recoil? How submit to the lingering agony of constant restraint, and concealment of our every feeling, and the daily death of such a living tomb as now incloses us? Formerly, if I had to suffer from inflicted penance, or prescribed mortifi-

cations, I had the sweet confidence that I was thus advancing my eternal salvation, and the comfort of reflecting that, if I had a life of discomfort here, I was thereby securing everlasting happiness hereafter; but now! Oh! Isabel, to be miserable here, to waste our whole life in slow consuming wretchedness, and yet to feel, at the same time, that we are only involved in the mazes of irretrievable error, and, perhaps, being irresistibly dragged down to hopeless and endless perdition!" And the poor girl wept in unrestrained anguish.

"You are too desponding, dear Rosa," said her more sanguine friend, tenderly embracing her, and drying her tears, "I cannot believe that the God who has so wonderfully opened our eyes, will abandon us to the evils that surround us. His word assures us that 'He will not suffer us to be tempted beyond our power,' and that if we 'ask any thing of the Father in the name of the Son, He will give it us.' Let us, therefore, commit our cause to Him, in earnest, simple prayer, and He will doubtless have pity upon us. But, now help me, *carina*, to dress up again this poor senseless idol, the unconscious tool of these wicked deceivers. I think I have all the pearls, and can put on the necklace again. In the meantime, Rosa, tell me, are these exhibitions of pretended miracles frequent in this chapel?"

"Oh! no; I have only witnessed a few, and I dare say, after that which is intended for Assumption-day, there will not be another for some years. I suppose they are afraid of making them too common, or, perhaps, even of exciting doubts and suspicion."

The pearl necklace was now complete, the image again arrayed in its usual robes, and Isabel, perceiving that the time allotted for Rosa's vigil was almost expired, returned to her own room, and endeavored to obtain a little repose, before the matin-bell again summoned her to the chapel. She could not sleep, however, for a plan had occurred to her, on which her mind dwelt with persevering tenacity. In examining the recess in which the springs connected with the statue met, she had observed that the space inside of it, being intended for the free admission of a man's hand, was quite large enough to receive and conceal her precious little Testament. It was a bold idea, to think of appropriating it for that purpose, but the more she pondered the scheme, the more feasible did it appear. Such exhibitions as that now preparing were but seldom resorted to; the springs, therefore, after this contemplated use of them, might remain untouched for years, and the recess, being as it was supposed, altogether unknown, except to a very few, who were necessarily initiated into its mysteries,

would, consequently, be entirely exempt from suspicion. She felt a conviction, that an attempt would soon be made to deprive her of her treasure; and it seemed to her as if a providential indication had thus been given her, of a method by which she could secure it from discovery. She would always, she thought, have free access to the chapel, and could, therefore, easily secrete it when necessary, and even then sometimes snatch an occasional peep at its contents. The more she ruminated on the idea, the more she was pleased with it, and there was something delightful in the thought of thus outwitting the deceivers, by making their own artifices the means of foiling themselves, and effectually thwarting their own deep-laid plans for the injury and destruction of their victims.

The next morning witnessed the celebration of sister Giovanna's obsequies, when, after the funeral ceremony, a discourse was delivered by Father Giacomo, to the whole community, in which her monastic virtues were highly extolled, and her former companions strongly exhorted to imitate her acts of voluntary mortification, self-denial, and self-infliction,—that they might, like her, acquire a large stock of merit, to purchase exemption from purgatorial suffering. A solemn mass was then performed, to promote the repose of her soul, and an injunc-

tion laid upon each *religiosa*, that she should repeat an additional "*De Profundis*" every morning and evening, to assist in the same charitable object.

This business being disposed of, the whole sisterhood were actively employed the rest of the day in gathering, arranging, and making up flowers into garlands, crowns, and every imaginable kind of fanciful device, to ornament the chapel for the next day's exhibition. The pillars were wreathed round with the most splendid floral gems, the statues crowned with roses and lilies, and a diadem of the rarest and most exquisite beauties prepared for the head of the Madonna. The whole was to be a display of consummate skill, ingenuity, and taste. An elegant robe, of the finest cambric, richly embroidered by several of the nuns, was prepared for the Virgin; Rosa's beautiful scarf, of violet-colored satin, spotted with small silver stars, and bordered with lilies of the valley, was to be thrown over her shoulders, and a magnificent lace veil, the produce of Isabel's industry, was to fall carelessly over the floral crown on her head, which was intermixed with rubies and sapphires, and intwined with strings of small pearls. A diamond cross, of great value, was attached to the royal pearl necklace, and was to rest on a *bouquet* of the most

exquisite rosebuds, which, glittering with morning dew, was to be placed in her bosom.

Father Giacomo, the superior, her assistant, and the two oldest nuns, who alone were permitted to take part in these last arrangements, spent a long time in the chapel, with closed doors, the evening of that day, and were there again, in the morning, before three o'clock, ascertaining, no doubt, that all their machinery was in proper order, and every preparation duly completed, for their profane scheme of fraud and hypocritical imposition.

The morning-festival was ushed in with the ringing of bells, and every demonstration of public joy and solemnity. The early mass was attended by multitudes of worshippers; but it was not till the ceremony of high-mass that the altar and its gorgeous furniture were displayed, and the protecting coverings removed from the principal objects of attraction. The chapel was crowded, almost to suffocation, by throngs of curious and eager spectators, among whom an indefinite expectation of something unusual had been excited. The magnificent *coup d'œil* which the chapel presented, and the elegance of the Virgin's attire, evidently produced an admiration which the solemnity of the service could scarcely control; and when the rch tones of the organ, blending with the melting sweetness of female voices,

swelled into one burst of almost unearthly melody, and then died away in lingering cadences of inexpressible softness, one simultaneous murmur of irrepressible rapture echoed through the fretted aisles, as the kneeling spectators relieved their oppressed bosoms with sighs of luxurious delight.

The music ceased, and the usual service proceeded. The long litany to the Virgin was chanted with great fervor, and, during a pause of thrilling effect, only varied by the low accents of supplication from the nuns surrounding the altar, and a few occasional notes of plaintive sweetness from the organ, the eyes of the whole multitude were fixed, with almost aching intensity, on the face of the Madonna. A suppressed cry of astonishment announced the realizing of their desires; for, lo! the beautiful head was gently inclined, and then raised again, while a gracious smile appeared on the countenance!

It would be utterly useless to attempt a description of the scene that followed. The tumultuous expressions of surprise, rapturous joy, and awe, not unmingled with terror, uttered with all the wild fervor of Italian feeling;—the rushing towards the image, and prostrating themselves at its feet, till they fell in confused heaps over each other;—the fainting of women, the emotion of the men, and

the confused cries of "*miracolo!*" that echoed through the chapel;—formed an indescribable *tout-ensemble*, which could only be understood by those who witnessed it.

At length, though with great difficulty, something like quiet was restored; and Father Giacomo, marshalling the sisterhood, with the superior at their head, conducted them in front of the statue, round which he had made them kneel, while a solemn hymn of praise to the Virgin was sung, and another burst of choral harmony breathed its entrancing spell over the deluded hearers. At the close of its ravishing strains, the whole monastic train withdrew, and the vast multitude gradually dispersed, to blazon abroad the wonders of the morning's performance;—all but a few, whose enthusiastic devotion induced them to remain, in the vain hope that some further favor would be vouchsafed by the Virgin; while, during the whole day, crowds of curious gazers continued to pour in, and numerous devotees brought offerings of money, trinkets, and other valuables, to propitiate the favor, and secure the good graces of the miraculous Virgin of Santa Rosalia.

But what, during all this exhibition, had been the feelings of our two *undeceived* novices? Horror and disgust, indignation and dismay, had filled their minds, at the audacity and dar-

ing wickedness, of the infamous performers in this blasphemous and profane farce. Isabel, more courageous than Rosa, had closely watched all the movements of the priest; and, instructed by what she already knew, had found no difficulty in following all his proceedings, how unintelligible soever to the uninitiated, and unlikely to excite any suspicion where it did not already exist. Her flashing eyes could scarcely conceal their indignant glances beneath her shrouding veil; and it required all the self-control she could exercise, to enable her to repress the vehement feelings that prompted her to start from her kneeling position, and at once unmask the shameless cheat. The whole affair, however, seemed to have succeeded, greatly to the satisfaction of the projectors; and, during the rest of the day, which was a holiday in the convent, little was heard, among the nuns, but expressions of joy and gratitude to the Madonna, for the signal favor she had that morning vouchsafed their house; mingled with anticipations of the numerous and rich presents which would be brought by multitudes, as acknowledgments and bribes, to bespeak particular favors for the donors. Isabel sought in vain to converse with Rosa, who seemed to avoid her; and, not being on terms of much friendliness with any one else, she amused herself with watching

very closely the countenances of the different speakers, to detect, if possible, any lurking signs of acquaintance with the imposition that had been practised. She could not, however, perceive any such indication ; all appeared to be in blissful ignorance on the subject, and to receive the whole monstrous farce with the most unwavering confidence, and unsuspicious delight. Their pride, also, was highly gratified by the distinction thus conferred on their house, and a general feeling of increased self-importance pervaded the whole community. It was evident that the secret was confined to a very few individuals, and that the rest were all dupes, in the most comprehensive sense of the word.

The shades of evening had begun to fall on the garden, and the greater number of the nuns had re-entered the convent ; but, Isabel, lost in thought, was still sitting in a small bower of acacias, waiting for the bell that was to summon them to the refectory, when a slight rustling in the branches behind her made her start; and, before she could even inquire the cause, the voice of Rosa, in a low and cautious, but distinct and earnest, whisper, fell on her ear.

"Isabel, dearest, if you value your precious book, hide it,—hide it instantly !—we are in

great danger; but hush! for heaven's sake, be silent and circumspect!"

Isabel started up, and, while the blood rushed, in a suffocating current, to her heart, attempted to ask for some explanation; but the youthful novice had disappeared, and so swiftly, that she could not even catch a glimpse of her form. The purport of her words still rang in her ears; and, after pausing but one moment, to collect her bewildered thoughts, she hurried, almost instinctively, to the chapel. Meeting several of the nuns, however, in her path, she was compelled to wait till the refectory-bell had had the effect of summoning them all away. She then cautiously glided through the door which opened upon the chancel, pressed back the spring in the small movable block, hastily deposited her treasure in the cavity behind, re-closed it, and, with an imploring aspiration for Divine assistance and protection, returned with all speed, to join the community.

Notwithstanding her haste, however, she knew that she had transgressed the strict law of punctuality observed in a convent, and, therefore, fully expected the punishment usually inflicted; nor was she disappointed. A frown from the superior arrested her progress, the moment she appeared, and a sign of her hand fixed her, on her knees, in the door-way.

There she remained, with arms folded on her bosom, till, the repast being over, she was required, by invariable custom, to come up to the superior, humbly confess her fault, and entreat for penance and forgiveness. She did so, and a short, but severe lecture, was followed by a prohibition of food till the next day, as the punishment due to her crime. She bowed her head, in meek acquiescence, and was then suffered to depart.

The whole of the evening was taken up with the usual routine of services; but it would be impossible to describe the tumultuous emotion, the instinctive terror, that made Isabel's heart palpitate with so much violence, every time the officiating priest approached that part of the altar where her secret treasure was deposited. She felt like the miser, who, while the spoiler is searching for his gold, beholds him treading on the very stone that conceals the vault in which his coffers lie hidden, and trembles at every step that may discover the opening. Her secret, however, was evidently safe, and she poured out her gratitude in mental thanksgiving, as she left the chapel with the others.

On retiring to her cell for the night, however, an irrepressible feeling of sadness and apprehension overwhelmed her. She had parted with her precious Testament; she

could no longer search its pages for those blessed words of encouragement which had always imparted comfort to her soul, in every moment of despondency; and, in the deep dejection that now oppressed her, she taxed her memory in vain for some of those stores which she had committed to its keeping. The soul's remembrancer seemed, at that moment, unfaithful to its trust; and, as the hurried warning of Rosa recurred to her mind, in all its alarming indistinctness, her faith and courage gave way, and she wept in utter helplessness and anguish. She was not, however, of a character to sink quietly into the depths of despair; her native energy rose under the weight of depression, and springing up with sudden resolution, she extinguished her lamp, and cautiously glided to the cell of Rosalia.

Her low and gentle tap at the door was not answered, and she softly entered the little apartment. She spoke, but there was no reply; she approached the pallet, passed her hand over it, and felt all round the wall, and in every corner; but her friend was evidently absent. Where could she be? Half-alarmed, she took her way hastily to the chapel, fancying that Rosa's agitated mind might again have led her to undertake some vow or vigil. She gained the door, and, looking in, saw a form kneeling before the altar; but it was a

black-veiled nun, whose hurriedly muttered *Paternosters* indicated that she was anxious to complete her task. Isabel turned away, in wondering disappointment, and, fearful of encountering the penitent, or some other devotee, in her retreat, took her way in another direction, which would conduct her back by a more circuitous path to her own cell. She was not, however, familiar with that part of the building, and groping her way in the darkness, with her mind bewildered by perplexing doubts respecting this unaccountable absence of her friend, she was not aware that she had strayed from the usual track, till a rush of cold, damp air made her start, and convinced her that she was near the entrance to the vaults, and that the gate, for some reason to her unknown, was ajar at that unusual hour. She paused, and was about to retrace her steps; but the distant sound of low, faint sobs, struck her ear, and she listened anxiously for their repetition. Again the mournful wailing met her ear, and she felt convinced that it was the voice of Rosalia, and that it proceeded from the vaults beneath the chapel. Without a moment's hesitation, the courageous novice prepared to descend; for, though her heart throbbed with foreboding fears, she was totally free from all superstitious terrors, and the voice of affection silenced every other feeling.

She pushed the heavy door open with some difficulty, and, as cautiously as her agitation would permit, began to thread her way down the dark, damp, and, to her, dangerous descent. As she proceeded, not without many a hazardous slip, she looked anxiously for some gleam of light to dispel the obscurity, but none met her view; the sobs, however, which became more audible, and which she now distinctly recognized, or fancied she recognized, as proceeding from her friend, every moment quickened her steps, and she thought she must now be near the bottom of the dreary descent.

At length, after feeling her way for some distance further, she ascended two steps, and pushing back a half-opened gate, perceived by the dank, earthy, sepulchral smell, that she had entered the receptacle of the dead. She listened for the voice whose sobs she had heard; but all was deathlike silence, and she began to suspect that she had been deceived by an excited imagination. Her feelings, however, were too highly wrought up, to admit of her returning, without satisfactorily ascertaining the fact; and, therefore, though prudence prevented her speaking, she listened in breathless expectation, while her heart beat with such violence, that she felt as if it must be audible. About a minute of indescribable suspense succeeded; and then a long, deep, heavy sigh

sounded through the gloomy vault, and the voice of Rosalia feebly exclaimed,

"Oh, God of mercy! have pity upon me! doom not Thy helpless creature to such protracted and hopeless misery! Forgive all my sins, and shorten my wretched existence!"

"Rosa! dearest Rosa!" said Isabel, in a low, but cheerful voice, "I am here, beloved one, to comfort and help you; tell me in what corner you are, that I may join you, without stumbling against all the coffins in the vault."

A smothered shriek burst from the lips of the startled girl; but, recovering herself, she gladly indicated to her friend the spot on which she was kneeling, which was at the side of sister Giovanna's newly-placed coffin. Guided by this direction, Isabel was soon near her, and clasping her to her bosom, almost started on finding her as cold as a corpse.

"Rosina, *carissima!* how came you here, at this hour, and in this state? You, surely cannot have made the senseless vow of passing the night in this horrid place?"

"No, Isabel, no; but I am condemned to it as a penance."

"A penance! is it possible? but what can you have done to draw down so barbarous an infliction?"

"According to my vows, Isabel, I ought not to tell you; but, alas! I am no longer a nun in

heart, and affection for you supersedes every other consideration. Sit down then, with me, on this coffin, and I will relate the occurrences of the last six or eight hours."

"I avoided joining you in the garden, because I felt sure some cloud was gathering over our heads; for I had seen the *Madre Superiore* and Father Giacomo in close conference, and detected some of their dark glances directed towards you. I was walking with sister Lucia, trying to converse on indifferent subjects, when the sub-superior, Madre Monica, joined us, and putting her arm into mine, drew me away from my companion. I felt alarmed, for I knew her to be a treacherous woman, and mentally prayed that I might be endued with wisdom and strength for the approaching trial. She drew me towards the superior's apartments, telling me that the holy mother had sent her for me; but being called away by the portress, she left me for two or three minutes, and, seeing you seated in a *bosquet*, I contrived to give you the warning about your Testament. I hope you attended to it?"

"I did, dearest, but go on, go on: let me hear what followed."

"I had scarcely stolen back to the place where Madre Monica had left me, when she joined me again, and conducted me to the superior, who was sitting with Father Giacomo.

They both received me with their blandest smiles, and sweetest manner; and, had I not lived all my life in the convent, I might have been deceived by their false professions of affection and interest; but I knew the serpent-treachery that lurked beneath, and resolved to be on my guard. Nothing could be more cautious than their approaches to the subject on which they intended to question me; nothing more tender, than the way in which they spoke of you and me. At length, they asked me what I knew of your book, where you kept it, and what use you made of it. I replied, with all the prudence I could command, by evading their questions as well as I could, affecting ignorance whenever it was possible, and, without direct falsehood, misleading them to the utmost of my power. They were not, however, to be so easily foiled; and, not being satisfied with my answers, and finding me firm in denying all knowledge of the place in which you kept your book, they accused me of duplicity and disobedience, and condemned me to spend the night in this horrible vault, repeating prayers over sister Giovanna's coffin, telling me that they hoped this penance would bring me to reflection, and incline me to be more sincere in the morning."

"Dearest Rosa! and you are here on my account! Oh! the cruel wretches, who could

thus torment you! But, to a rational mind, there are no terrors here but those of cold, damp, and unhealthy air. You cannot fear any thing else, Rosa?"

"I *know* there is nothing to dread," replied the trembling girl, "but, dearest Isabel, I have neither your faith nor your courage. I could not overcome the foolish terrors that haunted me, in this frightful place, and, as the sense of our miserable situation recurred to my mind, in all its real horror, I yielded to the agony of my feelings, and, I think, should scarcely have been alive to-morrow morning, if you had not come, like my guardian-angel, to dispel my fearful visions."

"I think we are safe here from all danger of being overheard, especially when I have closed this gate, as I am going to do; for I wish to have some conversation with you, and shall sit here till the matin-bell begins to sound, when a few gleams of the morning-light will penetrate through the upper gratings of these gloomy vaults, and you will feel less terrified, while I shall endeavor to regain my cell unobserved."

She felt her way back to the gate, which she closed; then, returning to Rosa, gave her, in a low tone, a succinct account of the last moments of sister Giovanna, and, in conclusion, inquired if she knew how it happened that she

should be buried in the vaults, when the usual place of interment for the nuns was a small cemetery, at the back of the chapel?"

"It was a mark of honor," replied Rosa, "which is seldom bestowed on any but the superiors and other heads of the establishment. Sister Giovanna, you know, was long renowned in this house for her peculiar sanctity, her extraordinary penances, and numberless acts of devotion and voluntary self-denial. She was so, I believe, before I came hither, and, from my earliest childhood, I was taught to regard her with reverence, as an eminent saint, and one whose example we all ought to follow."

"All these merits, however," observed Isabel, "were insufficient to give her peace of mind, or assurance of salvation, in the near prospect of death. Nothing but the blessed Gospel could do that! But, Rosa, I have often thought that sister Giovanna had some burden on her conscience, even greater than that which must belong to every sinful creature. I found her once in great terror, and raving about some crime which had been committed, and in which she seemed to have borne a share. She said she had had a vision, in which she had seen some one whom she called Costanza, and spoke incoherently about her, protesting that she did not murder her. Do you know any thing of this dark affair?"

"Oh! it is a dismal story!" said Rosalia, shuddering; "it happened before I was born; there are but few now in the convent who remember it, and all I know about it has been gathered from unconnected hints, and traditional allusions, communicated, however, with the greatest caution.

"Costanza, it seems, was an Italian lady, whose parents had attempted to force her into a marriage she disliked. Her affections were fixed on a cousin of hers, who, besides having no fortune, was within the degrees of relationship in which the church prohibits any matrimonial connection. The two cousins, however, disregarded all these considerations; and with the assistance of Costanza's nurse, contrived to be privately married. Her parents discovered it, and as she was only nineteen, and the marriage was clearly illegal, they succeeded in separating her from her husband, and shutting her up in this house, unknown to him. She, however, steadily refused to take the vows, though her union was annulled by the Pope; and, though her liberty was offered her, on the condition of yielding to the wishes of her family, she was inflexible in her resolution. This obstinacy so enraged her parents, that they gave her up entirely to the power of the convent, endowing it with a handsome remu-

neration, and transferring the rest of their property to a nephew.

"In the meantime, Costanza had formed many plans of escape, which she had hoped to be able to put in execution. It happened that sister Giovanna was the aunt of her chosen husband, and she had succeeded in inspiring her with some interest in her cause. She had, by tears and entreaties, prevailed on her to take charge of a small note, written in pencil, which was to be conveyed to her husband, through his sister, who occasionally visited her aunt in the parlor. Sister Giovanna bore so high a character for piety, and had always seemed so to identify herself with the interests of the house, that she was not distrusted; and she, therefore, found no difficulty in slipping the note to the young lady, through the grating, without being perceived.

"Poor Costanza was kept in close confinement, and compelled to endure penances, privations, and misery of all kinds, under which she must have sunk, but for the cheering hope that upheld her. Giovanna was one of the few privileged to see her, and she played her part with great skill, by pretending to exhort her continually to obedience, while, in reality, she encouraged her in her expectations of ultimate freedom, and, consequently, her resistance to what was required of her. Some

weeks passed away in torturing suspense, when Giovanna's niece again visited the convent, and contrived to squeeze through the grating, into her hand, a fig, in which was concealed a very small note for Costanza. In it she was told that her husband, on learning the place of her confinement, had hastened to Sicily, and lost not a moment in arranging a plan for her liberation. He had, after great difficulty, succeeded in bribing the portress, who was fond of indulging in private in many little luxuries and enjoyments denied by a convent life. This woman had promised, on a certain evening, to leave her keys on the table in her cell; sister Giovanna was to unlock Costanza's door, and the latter was then directed to make her way to the portress's room, and select a certain small key, which would open the side-door into the garden—(the key, Isabel, which you and I have several times used); her husband would, in the meantime, find a way of scaling the wall, and would be ready to carry her away immediately, without any danger of her being retaken, for he had secured a small vessel, which would be waiting at the landing-place, to convey them far away from the possibility of pursuit, and he intended to fix their future residence in France or England.

"You may suppose how delightful this in-

telligence was to the poor, suffering Costanza; but it required great persuasion and much entreaty, to induce sister Giovanna to perform her part of the scheme. She promised at last, however, and would, perhaps, have been faithful to her word, had not the Argus eyes of monastic vigilance detected her in the act of burning the torn fragments of the fatal note at the kitchen fire. It was too late to ascertain its contents by snatching it from the flames; she was, therefore, summoned before the superior and the confessor, and strictly questioned as to the circumstance. Terror overcame her, and she disclosed the whole arrangement; but, instead of the severe penances she expected, she was promised exemption from all punishment, on condition that she assisted in enticing the doomed victims into the snare. This heartless betrayal of her friends she had not courage to refuse, and, though she could not carry her baseness so far as to see Costanza again, the scheme was executed on the appointed evening. The perfidious nun unlocked the prisoner's door, according to agreement; the betrayed Costanza repaired to the portress's cell, found the keys, and, her heart no doubt bounding with delightful hope, entered the garden, and found her way to the appointed spot. There she was rudely seized, and from thence conveyed to a dungeon; while her un-

fortunate husband, apprehended in the act of scaling the wall, by a party of *sbirri*, who had been stationed in ambush for that purpose, was conveyed to the prisons of the Inquisition in Italy, and, I believe, was never heard of afterwards.

"This is sufficiently dreadful, Isabel; but something still more horrible remains to be told. The unhappy Costanza was delirious for a long time after, and it was thought that confirmed insanity would rescue her from all consciousness of future misery; but she at length recovered her reason, and was dragged from her dungeon, the shadow of her former self, to undergo the solemn mockery of a trial before the bishop, and the superiors of all the convents in the island, in one of the subterranean apartments of the house. Her mind had settled into a state of gloomy apathy, and, with utter indifference to her future fate, she refused to answer a single question, or say a word in her own defence; but one of her judges, more compassionate than the rest, pleaded in her favor that she had never taken the last decisive vows, and ought not, therefore, to be considered liable to the frightful sentence pronounced on perjured nuns. That merciful advocate for the unhappy victim was the kind-hearted Abbess Maddalena, who was subsequently superior of this convent; but, alas! her pitying efforts to

save Costanza were of no avail. Her opinion was overruled by all the others; and the wretched victim was condemned to be bricked up alive in a niche in this very vault, and thus given up to the most horrible death!

"The same sentence was passed on the offending portress; but her terror was so overwhelming that it brought on a fit of apoplexy, which terminated in her death, and thus released her from the worst part of the inhuman punishment, for they laid her a corpse in the niche prepared for her. As to Costanza, she exhibited to the last an appearance of most extraordinary and unnatural calmness. The whole sisterhood were assembled to witness her horrid execution; and while many wept and sobbed, and almost all covered their eyes with their hands, in shuddering abhorrence of the scene, her tearless eyes glanced but upon one countenance,—that of her perfidious friend, who, pale and cold as a marble statue, was compelled to witness the tragedy which her own treachery had caused. That eye-beam penetrated through the thick folds of her veil, and the clasped hands that covered her eyes,—it pierced to the inmost recesses of her heart; and the wretched Giovanna was carried back to her cell, shrieking and raving like a maniac. In the meantime, the hapless Costanza was placed, unresisting, in her living tomb; and

when the masons, hired for the purpose, under the most awful vows of secrecy, had bricked up the opening, and concealed the victim from the view of mortal sight, the spectators rushed from the fatal spot, with feelings which I neither can describe, nor wish to understand."

Rosa's tears had flowed freely during this dreadful recital, and she had pressed closer and closer to Isabel, whose arms were clasped around her, as if she could bestow protection, though the cold chill of horror that succeeded her burning indignation, but too painfully proved the utter helplessness of both.

"And what followed, after these murders had been perpetrated?" she at length inquired, breaking the deathlike pause that succeeded Rosa's horrid narrative.

"I only know that the superior died soon after, and was succeeded by the Abbess Maddalena, whose kind and gentle sway-made the house very comfortable. It was to her care that I was given by my parents, at the tender age of four years, and I do not think any mother could have loved or reared a child more tenderly than she did me. With her I was, indeed, happy, and her sudden death almost overwhelmed me with grief, which, I believe, was shared by every member of the community; for all sincerely loved her, and felt that, under her government, no cruelties could ever be

practised in the house. I fear, however, the same thing cannot be said of the present superior."

"But Giovanna, the unhappy betrayer of her friend,—tell me of her?"

"I feel sure that she was very wretched ever after;—indeed, for a long time, she was afflicted with partial insanity, which was far worse than if she had entirely lost her reason, for the horror of mind she endured was truly frightful, and she entirely destroyed her health by the penances, privations, and sufferings, of every kind, she inflicted upon herself, in order to expiate her perfidy. Father Giacomo, I believe, did all he could to convince her that her conduct on that occasion had been meritorious, and that she would be rewarded for it by a very considerable remission of purgatorial pains; but I do not think she could ever feel sure of it herself."

"Oh! no, dearest, she never could believe it, though she labored hard to obtain the assurance. Poor creature! her mental torments must indeed have been great, until she heard, and was enabled to feel, that 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' But how blessed was the change which *then* took place in her soul! and how sweet and peaceful it made her last hours!—Oh! Rosa; what a mercy it is to possess the Holy Scriptures! God him-

self tells us that 'they are able to instruct us unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'"*

"Isabel, *carissima*, are you *quite sure* that we are right in reading them, contrary to the most positive and express commands of the church?—I ask this question, because it is clearly evident that we shall have to suffer for it;—and we ought, therefore, to be fully persuaded that we are not exposing ourselves to unknown perils, without a cause of sufficient importance."

"Dearest Rosa! how can we be wrong in obeying the commands of God himself? Our blessed Saviour, you know, exhorted the Jews to investigate the Scriptures, because they bore testimony of Him; and the inhabitants of Berea were praised by the Holy Ghost, because they 'examined the Scriptures daily.' I showed you these passages in the Testament, and also that where St. Paul congratulates Timothy on his having 'learned the Holy Scriptures from his childhood.'"†

"I dare say you are quite right;—but, alas! I have not your faith or courage, and I greatly fear I shall never be able to endure persecution."

"Both faith and courage come from God, dearest, Rosa, and you should pray earnestly

* Martini's Translation. † Ibid.

for them. But I confess I am not so apprehensive as you are on this subject. I do not see what great dangers we can be exposed to, for merely reading the Word of God. Besides, it is I who am the offender, not you; and I am quite ready to take all the blame upon myself; and, whatever punishment they may inflict upon me, I know I shall soon be free from their power; for nothing shall ever induce me to pronounce the fatal vows, or assume the horrid black veil."

"Oh! you do not understand the convent-system!—If the superiors suspect you of unwillingness to take the vows, they will never bring you to the public test. You will either be compelled to do it *in private*, or remain a novice all your life, but with no more liberty than you have now. It is a fearful thing to disobey or offend the authorities of such a place as this!"

"All my life, Rosa!—nay, that cannot be!—you forget that they can have no more legal power over me than I choose to give them. My brother, indeed, has exercised a tyrannical control in placing me here; but, in less than a year, I shall be of full age, and, consequently, my own mistress, to go when and where I please."

"Alas! poor sister! how you deceive yourself! How can you assert your liberty in a prison? Who will listen to you, or heed your complaints? The superior is in possession of

absolute and irresponsible power. How can you resist her authority, or throw off her yoke?"

"I will appeal to the civil authorities," exclaimed Isabel, her whole frame strung up to a feeling of undaunted resolution, "I will expose the tyranny that would coerce me!—I will obtain redress, and my liberty; and so shall you, too, *Rosina mia*, if you do not wish to be buried alive."

"Alas, alas! your imagination misleads you! Even if you *could* apply to the civil authorities, it would be of no use; for they would not interfere with the power of the church; but you will never have an opportunity of making that appeal. Do you not know that all correspondence passes through the hands of the superior?—that not a single written syllable is either received in the house, or sent out of it, till she has first seen it? Oh! no, sister, it is not possible to do what you intend. We are effectually cut off from all communication with the world, and must submit to our fate, whatever it may be."

These words of Rosa, which she felt to be but too true, fell like a leaden weight on the buoyant spirit of Isabel. She might have known all this before; she did, in fact, know it; but never had it sunk with such a depressing power into her heart; and she felt too much saddened

to reply. A painful silence ensued, but it was broken by the faint echo of the matin-bell from above; and the two friends found that they must immediately part. Isabel clasped the trembling Rosa in a fond embrace, and whispering, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," reluctantly tore herself away, and glided back as swiftly as she could, through the dark and devious passages, to the upper part of the convent.—She had gained the corridor on the ground-floor, when she suddenly encountered the sub-superior, who instantly inquired, in a tone of harsh authority,

"Whence come you, sister Isabel?"

Isabel, however, did not choose either to tell the truth, or invent an excuse; she, therefore, remained silent, and the nun repeated her question.

"What brings you into this part of the house, sister? Whither have you been, and what was your business?"

Isabel was still silent.

"You will not answer? Well, then, it becomes my duty to order you to your cell, until such time as you have disclosed your secret to the Madre Superiore; or, at least, until her pleasure is known. I shall report your disobedience to her; in the meantime you will remain in your own room."

Isabel obeyed, without uttering a single word; and, returning to her cell, prostrated herself in prayer before the God who alone could protect her, for she now felt, indeed, that her hour of trial was at hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EXAMINATION.

Without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which, without cause, they have digged for my soul.—Psalm xxxv. 7.

Three days of solitary confinement,—during which she was visited only by an old nun, who brought her bread and water in the morning—three days of wearisome inactivity, in which her mind was left to prey upon itself—and, notwithstanding the resources of prayer, meditation, and reflection, felt the time creep with inexpressible slowness,—had already reduced the mental, as well as the bodily vigor of Isabel; and she experienced a feeling almost like relief, when, on the third evening, she was summoned to the presence of the superior. That lady was seated in her chair of state, and on each side of her were the sub-superior, and Father Giacomo. Their countenances were dark and threatening; and yet there was evidently an attempt to assume an air of kindness and compassion, which, however, was not likely to deceive an observant and anxious eye.

"Daughter," said the Abbess, after a pause, during which she had been intently scrutinizing

the pale but calm countenance of Isabel, "it grieves me much to see you brought before me under the charge of disobedience and obstinacy. Our sister, the sub-superior, reports that she found you wandering about the house, early in the morning, in a direction towards which no duty could have called you; and that, on being questioned by her, you refused to give her any information as to your proceedings."

"I acknowledge the truth of the charge, holy mother," replied Isabel, while the word *holy*, which she felt to be sadly misapplied, cost her no little effort to utter. It was, however, the usual and indispensable mode of address to all ecclesiastical superiors, and she durst not withhold it.

"You acknowledge your fault; that is, so far, well, and shows that your penance has not been in vain. You will now, of course, make due reparation, by soliciting the pardon of the sub-superior, and then frankly communicating the information you before withheld; after which, you will receive from Father Giacomo what further penance he may see fit to inflict, preparatory to final absolution."

"I cannot disclose now what I then refused to tell; the same reasons which actuated me still exist in all their force."

The Abbess's eyes flashed with suppressed anger, at the unwonted presumption which thus

dared to thwart her will. "What do you mean, daughter, by this extraordinary language? Dare you question our authority, and defy our power? What can the reasons be, of which you speak? There must have been something very reprehensible in your conduct, to render such mystery requisite."

"There was nothing wrong in what I did, reverend mother."

"Then why do you wish to conceal it? But this will not do, daughter. You must understand that, in a house like this, you can have no will of your own, and that no concealment whatever can be permitted. Your unwillingness to answer the questions put to you shows a spirit of insubordination which must be subdued, or severe punishment will be necessary. I command you, therefore, once more, without a moment's delay, to tell us instantly where you had been on the morning in question, what you had been doing, and, in short, the object of your secret excursion."

Isabel remained silent. She would have had no hesitation in avowing her visit to the vaults, and her motive for entering them, had there been nothing to dread but the punishment which that confession would draw upon herself; but she was resolved not to compromise Rosa, who would equally have been exposed

to the cruel severity of her unscrupulous tyrants.

The superior waited a few moments, though with evident impatience, for Isabel's compliance with her injunctions; but, receiving no answer, she repeated them in a still more imperious tone, while every feature of her face was convulsed with passion, which seemed greatly increased by the calm self-possession of the offending novice. Isabel stood before her with her arms meekly folded on her bosom, but her beautiful countenance, though pale and wan, wearing an expression of high and lofty resolution, which resulted from the simple, child-like confidence, and humble, prayerful faith, with which she had committed her cause into the hands of God. Her heart was raised to Him, in silent supplication, and she felt that He not only could and would protect her, but that He was even then enduing her with a strength superior to her own. During the pause which succeeded the Abbess's fruitless commands, she glanced for a moment at the countenances of her judges, and was struck by their different expressions. That of the sub-superior exhibited an air of triumphant malice, which strongly contrasted with the enraged violence of the Abbess, and the deep, mysterious, and impenetrable coolness of the priest's appearance.

The superior, having again waited in vain for an answer, began to lose all self-possession, and would probably have proceeded to some violent measure, had not Father Giacomo interposed, and laying his hand, respectfully but significantly, on her arm, mildly observed,

"This refractory conduct, my dear daughter, must deeply wound and grieve your feelings; but let it not too much disturb your mind, for I trust this unhappy child will, in time, be brought to a proper sense of her sin and disobedience. I presume not to interfere with whatever measures you may think fit to adopt, in order to vindicate your just authority; but you know we have another question, of still greater importance, to put to this our misguided daughter. Let me beg of you, therefore, to enter with me into a calm and patient investigation of the subject."

The lady, thus rebuked, endeavored to smooth her ruffled brow, and to resume her air of official dignity; while the priest, in a tone of gentle and friendly inquiry, addressed the silent Isabel.

"It has come to our knowledge, daughter, that you have lately been engaged in studies not enjoined by your vows, nor even sanctioned by the church. You have in your possession a book which was not given you by

your spiritual guides. Is it not so? Answer me truly."

"If you mean the New Testament, father, it is true that I have read it. But, surely it cannot be a crime to study the Word of God."

"That is not a question for your decision, daughter, neither is it the matter at present under discussion. You confess that you have been reading the New Testament; it now becomes your duty to inform us how and from whom you received it."

"I am truly sorry, father, that I cannot comply with either of your injunctions."

"Is this your *serious* determination, daughter? Reflect upon the probable, or, I should rather say, the *inevitable* consequences of your disobedience, before you give your final answer."

"I *have* reflected, father, and feel that I cannot act otherwise."

Father Giacomo's piercing eyes were fixed steadily on Isabel's countenance, as if he could penetrate into her very thoughts; but she shrunk not from his gaze, as he had expected; for, though her frame trembled with emotion, the native energy of her mind, supported by a feeling of confidence in God, which surpassed even her hopes, enabled her to stand firm and collected before her inquisitors.

After a few moments' further scrutiny of her

pale but resolved aspect, the priest repeated his question,

"Is this your fixed determination, daughter?"

"It is, reverend father," she replied, respectfully, but firmly.

He looked at the superior, whose countenance betrayed the rage she could scarcely suppress. A slight frown contracted his brow; then, turning again towards Isabel, with an air of mildness, which she could not but consider jesuitical, he addressed her in a tone of compassion.

"You do, indeed, grieve us, daughter, by your obstinacy and disobedience; but, as I cannot yet resign the hope, that you may be restored to a better state of mind, by the judicious measures which your spiritual mother will know how to employ for your recovery, I must now ask you one or two other questions, which, I trust, you will not refuse to answer. Did you not transgress the rules of the convent, by frequently visiting at night, and without permission, the departed sister, Giovanna?"

"I did, father; I freely confess it; and you will not find me backward in answering your questions, when they relate only to myself."

"What was your object in visiting her, and even spending hours by her bedside? Did you seek for edification, that you might imitate her

sanctity, her voluntary humiliation, and extraordinary self-denial?"

"I cannot lay claim to any such motive, father; I merely sought in the first instance, to alleviate, in some little measure, her distressing sufferings."

"And did she encourage or desire your attendance," inquired the superior, "after she had voluntarily chosen the merit of an unrelieved death-bed, in preference to the comforts of the infirmary?"

"No, reverend mother, she did not; on the contrary, she used every means in her power to drive me from her, and persisted in her system of self-inflicted tortures, till my perseverance, and her own overwhelming weakness, rendered any further resistance unavailing, and, indeed, impossible."

"And did she persist to the last in reprobating your interference, and refusing your perfidious soothings?"

"I cannot say that she did, for I had, at last, the pleasure of perceiving that her sufferings were somewhat mitigated by constant attention, and her mind very greatly relieved and comforted."

A glow of holy gratitude lighted up the pallid cheek of Isabel, as she thought of the Divine blessing which had so remarkably rested on her feeble endeavors to enlighten the be-

nighted mind of the poor nun. She saw the angry kindling of the superior's countenance, and the dark, portentious frown of the priest; but her heart remained undismayed, for she knew that Giovanna was beyond their power, and for herself she felt no fear.

"Daughter," asked Father Giacomo, "was it your consolations and encouragements which thus *relieved* and *comforted* the mind of sister Giovanna?"

"Not mine," she exclaimed, with fervent enthusiasm, "Oh! no, not mine, but those of a Divine Comforter! To God, and God alone be all the praise!"

"But how was it that you were the instrument of imparting all this consolation? you who were even transgressing your duty, and breaking your vows of monastic obedience, as well as placing obstacles in her path of meritorious self-infliction?"

This was an insidious question, and evidently intended to entangle her; she sought not, however, to evade it, but replied, without a moment's hesitation,

"I was but the humble instrument in conveying to her mind the precious truths and promises of the blessed Gospel. She found them sufficient for all her wants, and, the sting being thus taken from death, she entered the

dark valley without fear, and with perfect peace and confidence."

"You must, certainly, be a wonderful preacher!" exclaimed the priest in a sneering tone, "and your instructions must have been very superior to any she had before received! May I ask, if you displayed your eloquence in extempore peaching, or if you merely read to her from your heretical Bible?"

"I did neither," replied Isabel, with a look of calm and serious dignity, which seemed like a rebuke of the sarcastic levity of the priest! "I had not an opportunity of reading to her from the New Testament itself, but I was enabled to repeat several portions of it from memory, and they went to her heart with the authority and force of Divine truth."

"But what could you tell her, daughter, that was new to her,—living, as she had been, almost all her life, under the influence of the Scripture-principles, inculcated and enforced by the authority and teaching of holy mother church?"

"I repeated to her what the Bible says, that 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,' and she was enabled to rest upon that precious truth for pardon and peace."

"Wherein did that assertion differ from what she had always been taught? Does not holy church inculcate the same thing?"

"I never knew it, father, till I saw it written in the New Testament; nor had sister Giovanna ever been told of it. We had always understood that we could only obtain pardon by our repentance, penances, and mortifications, and could only be sure of it through priestly absolution."

The priest bit his lip in evident, though suppressed rage, but replied, with the same unvaried gentleness of tone and manner,

"Daughter, you already display the fearfully perverting effects of unauthorized Scripture-reading. The sacrifice of the Redeemer is certainly the great atonement for sin, and it is the only source from which the church derives her power to forgive the sins of her penitent members. But this is a matter for further private conversation, during the solemn ordinance of confession, at which I shall expect you the day after to-morrow. In the meantime, I trust your mind will be so much benefited by the preparatory exercises, as to give me, readily and obediently, whatever information I may require. The holy mother, I believe, has another question to propose to you, which you will, doubtless, answer with perfect sincerity."

The superior, whose countenance wore an expression of concentrated rage, made a sign to her deputy, and that lady, with a look of malignant triumph, drew from her pocket a

gentleman's diamond breastpin, and held it up before Isabel, asking, in a taunting tone, if she recognized it.

The novice slightly glanced at it, and unhesitatingly replied that she did not recollect ever having seen it before.

"It is false!" exclaimed the superior, with a burst of passion.

Isabel replied not, but the sub-superior immediately resumed,

"Do you mean to say,—do you dare to assert,—that you do not know this pin, and its owner? that you are not aware how it came within these walls?"

"I *do* mean to say it, and can most conscientiously assert it. But if you have any accusation to make against me, connected with that pin, let me hear what it is in plain language, and without any insinuations or inuendoes."

There was a proud dignity in Isabel's manner which was not calculated to benefit her cause, where abject submission and unbounded servility were the only qualities likely to secure favor; but the moment for punishment was not yet come, and the sub-superior, after receiving a permissive look from the Abbess, continued the interrogatory.

"Did you think yourself unobserved, and your wickedness unknown, when you visited the garden at night, to have interviews with a

lover? Answer this, vile hypocrite, and deny it if you dare!"

A cold trembling ran through Isabel's whole frame, as she suddenly perceived the abyss which was opening before her; but, sending up to heaven a fervent mental prayer for guidance and protection, she was able to answer with perfect calmness.

"I never visited the convent-garden to meet or converse with any lover, nor has such an idea ever entered my mind, since I have been an inmate of this house."

"You would act more wisely in not attempting to prevaricate," exclaimed the superior, while the priest's eyes were riveted upon her as if he could read her thoughts. She bore the look, however with unshrinking firmness, and did not deign to answer the superior's observation.

"Can you deny," resumed her questioner, "that you have met a man in the garden, and thus broken your vows in the most flagrant manner?"

Isabel was silent.

"You refuse to answer!—you dare not deny it!—your silence is an acknowledgment of your crime!" exclaimed the superior, her eyes flashing with the passion she could no longer repress. "I ask you, then, and I insist upon an answer, who is the wretch who dared thus

audaciously to invade the sanctity of this house?"

Isabel still remained silent, and the question was repeated, with increased vehemence several times, by each of her interrogators, till, enraged beyond all bounds at her determined silence, they ordered her back to her cell, and condemned her to increased penances and privations, in order to overcome her obstinate resolution.

A similar proceeding had before taken place, with the view of obtaining the same information from the youthful Rosa, but with no result more satisfactory to the convent-inquisitors. They had, indeed, to deal with a much more timid and yielding spirit; but, though Rosa could not deny that she had seen the pin before, (for it was one which her brother constantly wore, as being the gift of a deceased aunt, to whom he had been fondly attached,) yet the certainty that, by giving the least clue to the name of its owner, she would inevitably draw down fearful peril on the head of her beloved Francesco, nerved even her gentle and subdued mind to the most heroic and inflexible resolution. All fear for herself was swallowed up in terror for the safety of this dear and affectionate brother; and she felt that she could die a thousand deaths rather than involve him in any danger. Her nerves, how-

ever, were not equal to the trial of her strength, and she was taken back to her cell in a swoon so alarming, as almost to make her tormentors fear that they might prematurely lose their victim.

Shut up in unrelieved solitude, she wept day and night, and was unable either to eat, sleep, or collect her thoughts. The dread that Isabel (who, she felt convinced, would be questioned as well as herself) might be compelled to discover what she was so anxious to keep secret, preyed incessantly on her mind, and she saw, in imagination, her idolized brother seized, and conveyed to the horrid dungeons of the Inquisition, and, while the diabolical treatment experienced by its unhappy victims haunted her bewildered thoughts, she became a prey to the most deplorable mental agony.

Her fears, however, were entirely groundless, for the strong mind of Isabel, supported by that grace which is promised to the tried believer, in every "time of need," and which she had learned *where* and *how* to seek, bore her up amidst every trial, and preserved undiminished the native energy of her character, notwithstanding all the means which were used to crush and unnerve it. A miserable and scanty diet of bread and water, the want of exercise, confinement in a small, close cell, the unvarying monotony of total solitude, and the

want of books, or employment for either mind or body, except the tedious routine of countless Latin prayers which she was enjoined to repeat, were certainly well calculated to depress the mind, wear out the mental powers, and destroy the very springs of life. But she found an unfailing resource in prayer, and in the constant recollection of the blessed truths the had imbibed from her former study of the Scriptures. Now that she was deprived of her precious Testament, she could not but be thankful that it was deposited in a place of safety, and that she had been led to transcribe, as it were, so much of its contents on the tablet of her memory. Its well-remembered truths were now to her like "a well of water springing up to everlasting life;" and the continual refreshment she derived from them preserved the elasticity of her spirits, and the vigor of her mind, even under the pressure of corroding anxiety, and the apprehension of certain and impending evil.

She had every reason to rejoice that she had secured her Testament, instead of continuing to carry it about with her; for her cell had been repeatedly searched for it during her absence, and some one had twice stolen in at night, in the darkness, and when she was supposed to be asleep, to feel in the pockets of her garments for the missing book. She had heard

the intruder, and was quite aware of the object of these nocturnal visits; but prudence had kept her silent, and she was delighted thus to ascertain that her treasure was undiscovered. She felt the want of it, indeed, but could scarcely regret that it was thus providentially placed out of the reach of those who would, perhaps, have destroyed it, and certainly deprived her of it altogether. How long were these miseries to last? How long should she be exposed to the tyranny that now oppressed her? When might she hope to be released? The possibility of this eventual deliverance she never suffered herself for one moment to doubt,—the thought would have been insupportable, and she carefully banished it: the smiling charmer, Hope, illumined every cloud with the brilliancy of her rainbow-hues, and her voice of angel-sweetness was heard, even amidst the thunder of the raging storm.

Six days elapsed before she was summoned to confession, and she had thus abundant opportunity of preparing herself, by prayer and reflection, for the coming trial. She doubted not that every attempt would be made to shake her faith, and every kind of sophistry used, to entangle her again in the mazes of error; and feeling deeply her own weakness, and the insufficiency of her religious knowledge, she bitterly regretted the loss of her precious New

Testament. She, however, treasured up in her mind the inspired declarations she had committed to memory, and earnestly prayed that she might experience the fulfilment of that gracious assurance, "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall answer, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Relying on this recollected promise, she awaited, with trembling confidence, the ordeal that was approaching.

Slowly and sadly had the hours crept on to poor Rosa; only marked by her tears, and by the burdensome penances imposed upon her. She had seen no one but an old deaf nun, whose duty it was to bring bread and water every morning to the captives, and who obstinately refused to exchange a word with her; when, suddenly, one morning, the sub-superior entered her cell, and accosted her with a tone and manner of most unexpected kindness. She sat down by the drooping girl, and, noticing her pale, wan cheeks, and the alteration so visible in her whole appearance, exclaimed, in a voice of winning blandness,

"Why, my dear child, you are looking quite ill! You have been, perhaps, too closely confined, and have certainly given way to excessive sorrow. Come, come, you must not take

every little thing so much to heart, *carissima!* This penance was only intended to bring you to reflection, but certainly not to make you unhappy."

"Alas! madam," replied Rosa, bursting into tears, "how can I be otherwise than unhappy, in my present situation? Shut up in this dismal cell, cut off from all society, under the displeasure of my superiors, and not knowing what further miseries may be inflicted upon me. Oh! I am, indeed, very wretched!"

"But, *carina*, you know it is entirely your own fault. Why do you not openly confess your faults, and submit, like a dutiful child, to the discipline of our holy mother? You would then immediately be restored to favor, and your punishment would, at least, be greatly lightened."

"I have confessed my faults, reverend mother, as far as I am conscious of any. I have concealed nothing that relates to myself; but," she added, a ray of generous enthusiasm breaking through her tears, "I cannot,—I never will, whatever sufferings it may cost me, —draw down peril upon the heads of others!"

The young novice's heroic resolution seemed to transform her almost into another being; her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled, and the elevation of her feelings imparted its lofty expression to her hitherto dejected countenance.

The nun frowned, and a gleam of unspeakable malignity for a moment flitted across her face; but it was quickly banished, and, with a caressing smile, she laid her hand on her poor victim's arm, and drew her gently to herself.

"Hush, hush, *carissima!* Do not allow yourself to be so excited! Your pulse beats frightfully, and you are really quite ill and feverish. I must order you some calming medicines. In the mean time, we will not speak any more of what so greatly agitates you. A little quiet reflection, and the godly counsel of our holy father confessor, will, I have not the least doubt, soon make your duty clear, and remove all obstacles to its performance. But listen, *figlia mia*, I have news for you, which must soon restore your disturbed nerves to tranquillity, and make sorrow give way to pleasure. The Signora Contessa, your mamma, has just sent word that she would drive round this way, on her return from a visit to the country, and would call to see you this afternoon, with your sister, the Signorina Leonora. So, now, dry your eyes my child, put on your most cheerful looks, and prepare yourself to receive her ladyship with smiles. You would not, of course, vex and disquiet her by any appearance of sadness?"

The question which concluded this hypocritical speech was insinuated with winning,

almost affectionate softness; but there was a lurking expression of cunning and malice in the treacherous smile, which could scarcely escape the observation of Rosa. Her mind, however, was immediately occupied with one idea, which seemed to flash, like a sudden sunbeam, across the lurid darkness of her troubled sky.

"Is my father coming, too?" she inquired, in a tone of such eagerness, that the nun instantly divined her thoughts.

"There was no mention of his lordship in the message," she replied, "but calm yourself, my dear child; I will myself be present at the interview to assist and support you."

Rosa's heart sunk within her at this announcement, though she might have expected it, for she knew that no *religiosa* was ever allowed to see a visitor without the watchful presence of a superior nun; but, in the momentary excitement of fancied hope, she had entirely forgotten it. She had formed a sudden resolution, to disclose her real situation to her family, hoping that their humanity, if not any warmer feeling, would lead them to release her from the thraldom she now suffered, and the still greater evils she dreaded. From her mother and sister, indeed, she had little to expect; the fanatical bigotry of the one, and the instinctive jealousy of the other,

presented insurmountable obstacles to their interference in her favor. Her beloved, affectionate, and generous-minded brother was far away, and could give her no help; but her father was a man of feeling, and had not discarded her from his affections. She would appeal to his justice;—she would cast herself on his compassion, and implore him to break her bonds;—or, at least, allow her to remove to some other convent, where she might hope to live under a mild and equitable sway. These thoughts darted like lightning through her mind; but soon came the discouraging reflection, *how* was this to be accomplished? She could only speak in the presence of a spy; and to write would be equally hopeless, for no letter could be conveyed out of the convent without the superior's knowledge and perusal. The sub-superior's announcement, that her father was not likely to be of the party, completed her discouragement; yet she could not altogether relinquish the hope thus awakened, but resolved to reserve the project for further consideration, and felt that the very idea acted like a cordial on her sinking spirits. Little was she aware how completely she was understood, and how skilfully the serpent-craft of monastic vigilance was already working to circumvent her!

In pursuance of the system of conciliation

which it was now thought proper to exercise towards her, she was permitted to leave her cell, and to walk in the garden, until she was called to receive her mother and sister. The sub-superior then came to fetch her, and with hypocritical caresses, accompanied her into what was called the parlor,—a small room, divided in the centre by a double grating, to one side of which visitors were admitted, while, on the other, sat the nun or novice, conversing with them, under the watchful superintendence of an elder or superior one.

The Contessa greeted her daughter with but little expression of maternal tenderness; but Rosa felt it not, for she had never experienced any thing but indifference from her mother. Her sister, also, was scarcely more than a stranger to her, for she had never shown her any thing like sisterly affection, and the coldness of her manner had always prevented all familiar intercourse. There was one individual of the party, for whom Rosa felt a warm interest, a little orphan girl, of seven years old, the child of her father's only brother, whose parents had appointed Mr. Melville her guardian, and who usually spent her school-holidays at his house. She had been taken several times to see Rosa, and had imbibed a very great affection for the gentle novice. The formal interchange of commonplace expres-

sions, which invariably formed the only conversation at these interviews, was greatly enlivened by the ingenuous prattle of little Maria, and, on this occasion, the child was even more than usually talkative.

"Look here, Rosa," she exclaimed,—then, glancing at the listening nun, she corrected herself, "*Sister* Rosa, they say I must call you,—I have brought you a little present,—such a beautiful illuminated mass-book! but how can I give it you? It is very small, but not small enough to pass it through these bars; oh! this horrid grating! it looks so much like a prison! You look exactly like my pretty linnet in its cage, only that his has but one grating to it, instead of two, and that his slight wires are very different from those great iron railings. Besides, I take my linnet out to play with it, twenty times a day; but you, poor bird, never come out of your cage."

The Contessa frowned at this awkward speech, and told the child, angrily, that if she said such foolish things she would send her out of the room, and never bring her to the convent again. To the surprise of every one present, however, the sub-superior, who might naturally have been expected to feel displeased, only smiled, and kindly requested that the child might not be checked.

"Well, signora, I will not say any thing more

to displease you," resumed little Maria, "but do tell me how I can give this pretty little book to Rosa."

"You shall give it her at the door, my little darling," observed the nun, with peculiar graciousness. "But tell me, *carina*, do you not think your linnet is very happy, although he is in a cage; when you feed him, and caress him, and attend to all his wants? In the same way, our blessed Lord and husband lavishes all His tenderness upon us, whom you call prisoners, but who are, in reality, His secluded spouses; and we enjoy in His favor, a happiness of which the world can form no idea."

"I suppose that is true," said the child, thoughtfully, "for every-body says so; and I *hope*,—yes, I *think*, my linnet is happy. But then, he is so tame, that I do not shut him up much, yet, when I take him into the garden, and he sees and hears the other birds, hopping about so freely, and chirping so merrily, I always fancy he *must* feel sad that he cannot fly away like them; and, when he flutters his wings, and stretches out his little neck towards the sky, I think he is longing to join his happy fellows, and to swell their songs of joy, while roving at liberty among the trees and blossoms. I do not like to make the pretty creature unhappy, and so I was going to let him fly away, if he liked; but my nurse tells me that he could not

now live like the wild birds, and that he would soon die from hunger or cold, after being so long petted and taken care of. I love him dearly, and I am sure he loves me, for he chirps so gayly, when he sees me, and kisses me so prettily! Rosa, should you not like to have a bird to amuse you? I think you want something to cheer you, *cara mia*, for you look so pale and sad! so unlike yourself! Shall I bring you a bird, the next time I come?"

Rosa thanked the youthful prattler, but declined her offer, observing, that she had not time to attend to such things? In spite, however, of every effort to check her, Maria exclaimed,

"Oh, then you have a great deal of work to do, and I suppose it is that which makes you look so pale! Poor Rosina! how I pity you! Look at her, Contessa! don't you think she looks very ill?"

"Be quiet, you little plague!" exclaimed the signora Leonora. "Of what consequence is it how a nun looks?"

This speech was accompanied by a spiteful push, which intimidated and silenced the child; but the Contessa, feeling that her maternal character required it, now made a few commonplace inquiries, as to the cause of Rosa's altered looks." The sub-superior immediately replied, that her dear young friend had for some

days been suffering from a nervous headache, but that she trusted the remedies which had been administered would very soon restore her former health and bloom. The mother was easily satisfied with this account; and Rosa, whatever might be her indignation at the falsehood, durst not contradict it. The conversation now turned upon the news of the day; and the Contessa asked her daughter if she was acquainted with the Signora Teresa di Sorelli, who, after finishing her education at the convent, was about to assume the novice's veil. Her father, the Duca di Sorelli, was most anxious to dissuade her from a monastic life, as she was his only daughter, and his state of widowhood and advancing age rendered her society peculiarly desirable to him; but the young lady was so fascinated by the attractions of the convent, that she could not be prevailed upon to relinquish her project. Rosa had never seen her but at the chapel, for a complete separation was kept up between the sisterhood and the few young ladies who, as a very great favor, were educated at Santa Rosalia. Their instruction was presided over by three of the elder nuns, whose zeal and discretion could be trusted; and these ladies were so skilful in securing the affections of their pupils, and in setting before them the mysterious charms, and all but celestial happiness, of a life of religious se-

clusion, that it was no uncommon thing to see, as in this instance, a deluded young creature, in the very bloom and ardor of inexperienced youth, devoting herself, not only without reluctance, but cheerfully and joyfully, to a living tomb, a life of hopeless, loveless, heart-withering, solitary imprisonment; lonely, without the freedom of solitude, and deathlike, without the peace and repose of the grave!

The Contessa and her younger daughter gave Rosa a very full and detailed account of the splendid *fêtes* which were to be given by the Duca, with a view of either winning his daughter from her purpose, by surrounding her with all the enchantments of worldly pleasure, or investing her retirement from the world with all the lustre and *éclat* that could be thrown around it. Poor, indeed, was the consolation which could thus be imparted to the wounded feelings of the heart-stricken, deserted father; but it would, at least, soothe and gratify his pride, to see the only hope of his age disappear from the world amidst a blaze of splendor, and the admiring gaze of an unthinking crowd.

"My dear," said the Contessa to Rosa, "we have been thinking, and it is the unanimous opinion of all our friends, that this will be a very proper and suitable occasion, for you to assume the black veil, at the same time that the Signora Teresa receives the white. The gran-

deur of the ceremony, and the illustrious rank of the young devotee, will reflect honor to our family; and, as it is now high time that you should set the final seal to your religious profession, you will do well to employ the few intervening weeks in preparing yourself for the important day."

These words, pronounced with heartless indifference by her mother, fell on the ear of Rosa like the knell of a death-doomed victim; a mist seemed to descend on her sight, like the heavy folds of a funeral curtain; a fainting sickness sent the rushing blood to her heart; an icy coldness overspread her whole frame; she clasped her hands, in involuntary supplication, and made a strong effort to speak; but the feeling of suffocation in her throat rendered the attempt abortive, and she would probably have swooned, had not her failing energies been recalled by the cold and cruel apathy of the Contessa, who, observing her emotion, and wishing to avoid what she called a *scene*, hastily rose to depart, and thus converted her mental anguish into a feeling of indignant resentment. The unhappy girl aroused herself to bid her callous relatives a calm farewell. Being permitted to approach the open door, in order to receive little Maria's present, she fondly kissed the interesting child, who clung

around her with undisguised affection, and whispered in her ear, before she released her,

"I will tell Signor Melville, *carissima*, how pale and ill you look, and I am quite sure he will come and see you."

The warm-hearted little girl was almost dragged away by her impatient companions; but her whisper acted like a charm on the sinking spirits of Rosalia. She had, just before, timidly inquired when she might hope to see her father, and been almost reduced to despair by the announcement, that he was so deeply occupied with diplomatic affairs, that it was not probable he could spare any time to visit her, before the day when she would pronounce the final and irrevocable vow. Her courage revived, however, at the assurance of little Maria, for she trusted the affectionate child would keep her word, and she felt that her father's heart would not be proof against her pleading, and the description of his daughter's evident indisposition. He had always treated her with the utmost tenderness; and often evinced towards her, a degree of feeling amounting to regret, and even almost to remorse, at the recollection of her being an involuntary victim, sacrificed to expiate the faults of her parents. It had, hitherto, been her constant endeavor to persuade him, that she was not only contented with her lot, but happy in

the mode of life to which she was destined; but she would now practise the deception no longer. She would tell him the truth, and entreat him to remove her from the convent. But *how* was this to be effected? She could not do it openly, for the least expression of discontent would, she well knew, only rivet more strongly the bars of her prison, and neither her father's influence, nor any other secular power, could tear her from the iron grasp of the church. Mr. Melville's interference might, and certainly would draw down peril on his own head, but could never release her. She had not grown up from infancy in the convent, without having acquired a considerable knowledge of the fearful arts, and irresistible power, by which monastic tyranny could, at all times, make sure of its victims. True, she had, till lately, been so fortunate as to live under the mild government of a kind and benevolent superior; she had seen but little of practical despotism, and no harshness had, during that happy time, been exercised towards herself; but she had often shuddered at the tales of former years, and at the artifices, cruelties, and even barbarities formerly practised, and afterwards related with approbation and pleasure. All these horrors now recurred to her memory with terrible distinctness, and she trembled to think of what not only *could*, but, under existing circumstan-

ces, certainly *would* be perpetrated, if it were necessary to avert either exposure, or loss to the convent. Were she but once outside those hated walls, she might, indeed, have some chance of deliverance; but the very idea was wild and impracticable. At all events, the only possible ray of hope depended upon the strictest secrecy; and she retired to her cell to brood over a thousand projects, resolved to struggle against despair to the very last, and to weary every saint in heaven with prayers for assistance. She soon recollected, however, that what she had heard and read of the Word of God proved the invocation of any created being to be, not only unauthorized, but unscriptural; and, amidst the distress and bewilderment of her mind, she was compelled to throw herself at the feet of Him who, she knew, had said, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

CHAPTER X.

THE CONFESSIONAL.

I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.—PSALM xxxii. 5.

THE day of trial at length arrived; and Isabel was summoned to attend Father Giacomo at the confessional. She went with trembling steps, but more courage and confidence than she had dared to expect. The sense of the Divine presence, and of her Saviour's promised support, seemed to bear up her mind above all apprehension; and, as she knelt in the usual place, a firm conviction of what was her duty on this trying occasion, imparted a calmness to her manner which somewhat surprised the priest. He waited in silence for her to begin, with the usual exordium, "to Almighty God, to the blessed Mary, always a virgin, to St. Michael the Archangel, St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph, St. Peter, St. Paul, and all the saints, &c.;" but what was his astonishment, when she merely said,

"I confess to Almighty God, ... and to

you, my father, that I have greatly sinned, in thought, word, and deed ; . . . . . "

"Stop, daughter," he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, that made her start, prepared as she was for a burst of anger from him, "what can you mean, by this insolent mockery of the sacrament of confession ?"

"I mean no mockery, father, I assure you," she mildly replied, "but I cannot utter the words you wish me to repeat."

"And pray, *why* can you not ?"

"Because I think it is insulting God, to associate any of His creatures with Him, as if they were His equals."

"Where have you learned to make such wise distinctions, and to set up your own judgment in opposition to that of your superiors ?"

"I do not think it is my own judgment, father, but that of Scripture. In the New Testament, we never find any created being thus associated with God ; we are never told to pray to the saints or angels, or even to the blessed Virgin ; there is not one instance of its ever being done ; nor are we led to believe that they either interfere in any worldly affairs, or that they can even hear the petitions presented to them."

"Cease your blasphemies, unhappy creature, and let me see that false Bible upon which you so daringly found them."

"It cannot be false, father, or in any way erroneous, for it is translated by a prelate of our own infallible church,—the Archbishop of Florence."

"It *is* false, I tell you!—it is a diabolical invention of the heretics, to which they have dared to attach the Archbishop's name! But let me see the vile fabrication, daughter, and I will soon convince you of the truth."

"I have it not, father," said Isabel, half smiling at the snare he was setting for her; "but perhaps you will be so kind as to give me a correct translation of the Scriptures, and then I shall be able to detect the errors of the other."

"Away with these subterfuges!" exclaimed the priest, impatiently, "and do not attempt to deceive me, or to evade my questions. How did you obtain that book? Who gave it to you? What have you done with it? And where is it now?"

He paused some minutes for a reply, but Isabel gave him none. With folded hands, and downcast eyes, she calmly waited till the explosion of his wrath should subside.

"Answer me, I command you!" he again thundered out, "give me that book instantly, or you may be compelled to it by measures which would be any thing but agreeable. Will you not answer?"

"I have told you already, father, that I *cannot* comply with either of your injunctions, and I can say no more, nor could tortures, or even death itself, elicit more from me."

The priest fixed his keen gaze upon her face; it was pale as marble, but the expression was firm and resolved, and he saw that she was not to be easily intimidated. He, therefore, changed his mode of attack, and in a tone of mild remonstrance, resumed,

"You are young, daughter, and you have entered upon a dangerous path. Reflect, I beseech you, on your ignorance and inexperience, and I am sure your own good sense will show you the folly and presumption of your present conduct. Return to the practice of pious humility, the only safe and becoming state of mind for your age and circumstances, and submit your sinful pride to the instructions of the holy mother to whom God has intrusted the care of your soul. It is thus alone that you can be safe and happy."

"I humbly desire, father, and sincerely seek, the teaching of the church; and it is for that purpose that I am now kneeling before you. I beseech you to instruct my ignorance, and enlighten my dark mind, by giving me the pure Word of God. You will find me most anxious to profit by its teaching, and to bow with implicit obedience to all its decisions."

"Before so great a favor can be granted you," replied the wily priest, "you must first of all, give up the pernicious book which has perverted you. The church is willing to show all reasonable indulgence to an obedient child, but it can concede nothing to the obstinate and refractory."

Isabel shook her head. "If these are the only terms, father, I have already told you that I cannot comply with them. But if the heretics have indeed, as you say, affixed the name of the Archbishop of Florence to a false translation of the Bible, why has he not publicly contradicted it? Surely, he ought to have done so, and I must still believe the book to be genuine, until I see his solemn denial of it, or until I am convinced of its errors, by the perusal of a faithful and orthodox translation."

The priest could hardly restrain his anger, at this bold and explicit declaration; but, feeling that violence would not forward his object, he, by a strong effort, preserved the assumed mildness of his tone and manner, and said,

"Unhappy child! Deeply indeed are you seduced by the wiles of the evil one!" "As you are so conversant with that heretical book, you no doubt remember what the blessed St. Peter says to you, and all those who like you attempt to read the Scriptures without interpretation, 'that they contain many things hard

to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest to their own destruction.' "

"I have read that passage, father! But I have also read that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and instruct the minds of the ignorant; and in humble dependence on His teaching *alone*, have I studied that blessed volume, which, I believe, is able to make me wise unto salvation; and as the youthful Timothy knew those sacred truths *from a child*, I humbly trust that the same spirit of knowledge may be granted to me."

"Daughter, your presumption is indeed great! How can you, who are acting in direct disobedience to those who are in authority over you, and to whom you have promised obedience,—how can you expect the blessing of that Holy Spirit, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?"

"It deeply grieves me, father, to be compelled to rebel, and in all lawful things it is my sincere desire to submit myself to you and the superior; but my conscience will no longer permit me, to follow *blindly* any guides where my eternal salvation is at stake. Forgive me, father, when I say there are many things in the practice of our church, which I cannot reconcile with my knowledge of Scripture, such

as the Invocation of Saints, the sacrifice of the Mass, the . . . . . ."

"Peace! blasphemer!" interrupted the enraged confessor, "I will hear no more: no longer shall you pollute this place with your heretical notions. Retire instantly to the chapel, and pass the night before the image of the blessed Virgin; there, on your knees, implore her pardon for the wickedness of which you have been guilty—perhaps fasting and penance may yet restore you, as a wandering sheep, to the fold of our Shepherd. At eight o'clock to-morrow morning I shall expect you here, when I hope a more proper spirit of humility will pervade your mind."

Isabel arose, meekly bowed her head, and bent her steps to the chapel, not, as she had been ordered, to repeat prayers to a senseless image, but to pour out her soul in thankfulness to her heavenly Father, who had thus far supported her, and enabled her to speak the truth, according to her conscience, and to implore that He, who told His disciples, when they were delivered up, to "take no thought what they should say, as whatsoever they required should be given them in that hour," would be with her in the coming trial, for greatly did she fear the storm which she saw gathering around her; but her trust was not in man, and a feeling of child-like confidence gradually

stole over her, as passage after passage of her much-loved Testament recurred to her memory.

It was with difficulty Father Giacomo commanded his temper sufficiently to order the poor novice from his presence. That he had not been able to elicit from her the hiding-place of the hated volume, was, in itself, mortification sufficient; but, that she dared to question the doctrines of the church, was almost maddening to the bigoted priest. Deeply did he regret that she had not yet assumed the black veil. The vows once taken, nothing could have saved Isabel from his fury; but he felt that, to succeed at last, he must dissemble now. Her noviciate was nearly expired; he would bear with her, and not excite any unnecessary fears in her mind till that time. The ceremony of renouncing the world forever, once passed, then should the daring novice experience the full weight of the vengeance of the church, and his own.

Filled with these revengeful thoughts, he hastily paced the small parlor adjoining the confessional, when suddenly he remembered that another penitent had been ordered to attend him, and, peeping through the curtain, he perceived the unhappy Rosa already kneeling at the accustomed place.

"There," said he, mentally, "is another ac-

cursed heretic! though she has not the courage and nerve of her companion, and will be more easily subdued; but should she prove refractory, then with her also I must dissemble; a few short weeks, and she, too, will be in my power; then shall she feel that the church has the right, and the will, to punish her erring and disobedient children. Aye! not only to punish, but to exterminate, if need be. She will not be the first who has perished for her obstinacy within these walls."

The irritated father took a few more strides across his apartment, then smoothing his ruffled brow, entered the confessional, and, in the mildest tone imaginable, intimated to the agitated Rosa that he was ready to hear her confession.

The trembling girl was not so fully convinced as her companion of the sin of addressing created beings as mediators, though her faith in their intercession was shaken; neither had she the courage to avow her sentiments openly to the priest. Besides this, she had determined to outwit her rulers, if possible, by a system of deceit, which might enable her the better to carry into effect a plan for escape which she had formed. In pursuance, therefore, with this object, she commenced her confession in the usual form, and then awaited any interrogations which it might please Father Giacomo to put to her. The reverend father

was rather surprised, for he had expected a repetition of Isabel's refractory conduct, as he termed it, as the superior had informed him of Rosa's obstinate refusal to name the owner of the pin.

"Daughter," said he, "I trust you have performed, punctually, the penances enjoined you by the holy mother, and that they have restored you to a sense of your duty to her."

"Holy father! I have performed them, and humbly confess to you my sin in disobeying the holy *madre*, and profess my willingness to submit to any penance for my offence."

"I am glad, daughter, to find you thus humbled, as I trust it is a proof of your willingness now to atone, for a former disobedience, by a full confession, and that you will tell me how, and when, you became acquainted with the owner of that diamond pin which was shown you by the *madre*."

The heart of Rosa shrank from this much-dreaded question, as she answered, "Pardon me, holy father, that question I cannot answer; I will submit to any penance, but no torture shall ever draw it from me; any thing concerning myself I will communicate freely; but that relates to another—I cannot, therefore, obey you."

"Refractory child!" exclaimed the priest, forgetting for an instant, his intended duplicity,

"Will you likewise dare thus to trifle with the holy sacrament of confession? This arises from companionship with that heretic; but both she and you shall be brought to a more humble spirit. I command you instantly to obey me. Answer my question without prevarication."

"Holy father, spare me! I beseech you to forgive my disobedience! I cannot answer you."

The tremulous and scarcely audible tones of the poor novice recalled the exasperated father to his former intention, and vexed with himself for having for an instant, betrayed his violent feelings, he addressed his penitent in a milder manner.

"You have hitherto been an obedient daughter to holy church; you have been a much-loved child of your mother the superior; some evil influence must have possessed you thus to change your usual line of conduct. I am unwilling to adopt harshness towards you, and would treat you with all tenderness, in consideration of your former obedience, trusting that, in a short time, you will see the sin of your present conduct, and will submit yourself without reserve to your spiritual guides;—but, daughter, until that period, your penances shall be severe, as the natural will must be brought under the guidance of holy feelings,

which cannot be obtained while you are acting in disobedience to your appointed rulers. I therefore enjoin you a double portion of daily devotional exercises, besides such additional duties as your holy mother may see fit to lay upon you; and must deprive you of the benefit of absolution, until a full, free confession, and perfect submission have entitled you to it."

This sentence was so much more lenient than the terrified novice anticipated, that she could scarcely restrain herself from pouring out her thanks, but the father seeing her about to speak, motioned her to depart.

A few weeks before this period, such a sentence, far from filling Rosa with joy, would have overwhelmed her with terror; then to be deprived of the priest's absolution would have been an almost insupportable trial; but, from Isabel's inspired volume, she had learnt that the forgiveness she needed was "not of man, but of God," and to Him she sought for pardon of all her sins, and even entreated His assistance in her projected attempt to escape, for, though intending to practise deceit, in order to attain her end, she felt no fear in praying for His blessing on her endeavors.

The poor novice had been nurtured in that Church, one of whose maxims is, that *the end sanctifies the means*, and although the light o. Gospel-truth was beginning to gleam in her

soul, her mind was like a spacious chamber illumined by a single taper, whose feeble ray only served to render the darkness more apparent.

But He who had begun a good work in her soul, would not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; He did not "despise the day of small things;" and having commenced the work, would carry it on to the end.

He has said, that "His word shall not return unto Him void,—that it shall accomplish that whereto He sends it."

The contents of that small volume were commissioned to open the eyes of two poor blind novices, and, though priest and abbess may punish and torture their deluded victims, they have no power to stay that word which is "sharper than any two-edged sword."

The wily priest proceeded to the apartments of la *Madre Santa Teresa* immediately after the departure of his refractory novice.

He found that lady impatiently awaiting his arrival; and, though confesssions to a priest are considered sacredly secret, he allowed her to infer from his manner, if not from his words, that he had not succeeded any better in the confessional than in her apartment, in his endeavors to subdue the determination of the daring novices. The haughty Abbess could scarcely con-

tain her indignation, and terrible indeed would have been the punishments inflicted, had the unhappy offenders been then before her.

Gradually, Father Giacomo quelled the storm of passion which had burst from her on receiving this information, and they then mutually concerted a plan of pretended moderation towards Isabel and Rosa, by which they should be lulled into security ; and, while their former liberty should be allowed them, it should only be with a view of secretly watching their proceedings, in order that the charges against them should be more fully substantiated, and that the vengeance of the church, priest, and superior, might fall with greater certainty on their devoted heads, after they had assumed the black veil, and by that act, had placed themselves entirely at the mercy of their persecutors.

While this scheme was preparing in the superior's apartment, Isabel was pouring out her soul to Him who has said, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you."

The unhappy girl prayed for grace to support her in the coming trial ; she felt that she could no longer keep silence, that the time was come when she must answer for the new doctrines she had adopted. Much did she wish she could enjoy the society of her beloved

Rosa, during that long, dreary night, and still more did she hunger and thirst for her precious Testament, which she could almost see from the spot on which she knelt. Many times did she feel tempted to rise from her knees and steal one glance at her cherished treasure, but the dread that she might even then be watched deterred her, and she resolved to wait another opportunity, rather than risk detection.

And well was it for the kneeling novice that she acted in this resolution, for, from time to time, during that long, wearisome night, the sharp, twinkling eyes of the holy *Padre Giacomo* might be seen peering through the eyeballs of St. Peter, whose figure, in a massive frame, was suspended at some little distance from the spot where Isabel knelt, unconscious that the dreaded priest was so near her, though suspecting that she was not alone in the chapel. The weary night at length closed, interrupted only by the usual nocturnal services, and a lovely morning dawned on the convent of Santa Rosalia,—that, as the world imagined, happy abode of peace and love! Ah! little did they suspect that so many heavy hearts resided within its precincts, and how many were there, who would have submitted willingly to all the ills of poverty, loss of friends, and almost any privation, to be allowed to leave those hated walls.

Poor Isabel was weak and faint from fasting, and kneeling so many hours, but she had received that support from her heavenly Father which she had so earnestly entreated, and He, who is a "very present help in trouble," had refreshed her fainting spirit, with heavenly manna.

With a beating heart Isabel heard the convent clock strike the hour of eight; for an instant, her courage forsook her, and she fell, almost fainting, against the rails of the high altar, and the tempter suggested to her, that she had better submit herself to her spiritual guides, as she, a poor, lonely, defenceless nun, could expect nothing but defeat and punishment, perhaps even death, should she determine still to brave the anger of those who were in authority over her; but Scripture, blessed Scripture, which has a word of comfort and support for every trial, came to her assistance.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father."

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

"Fear *ye* not, therefore, *ye* are of more value than many sparrows."

This consolatory passage, gave her fresh energy; her faith in Christ was augmented,

and she determined to confess Him before men, trusting that He would give her adequate strength.

Isabel fell once more on her knees, and putting up one more fervent petition for heavenly guidance and support, arose strengthened and decided on the course she would pursue.

As the trembling nun approached the confessional, her steps tottered from bodily weakness and fatigue, caused by fasting and want of repose, and she felt relieved on finding that Father Giacomo had not entered, and that a few minutes' respite was thus granted her, to compose her agitated thoughts.

When the holy father's footsteps were heard approaching, they were quick and impatient, and Isabel's heart sank within her, as she thought of his dreaded anger.

The priest closed the door, but, instead of the violent tones she expected, he addressed her in his mildest accents; trusted that the inflicted penance had produced contrition, and that the novice was fully prepared to confess her fault, and receive his absolution, by which she might again be considered a favored daughter of holy mother church. This was a pleasant prospect to the exhausted, worn-out spirit of the poor girl, but her sense of duty forbade her to accept it.

"I feel sincerely grateful, holy father, for

your promised leniency, and most truly do I confess that I have been guilty of many faults, and among them that of involuntary disobedience to my superiors, for which I humbly beg your forgiveness, and that of the *Madre Superiore.*"

"I am glad, daughter, to find you thus penitent, and trust you will now recall the blasphemous speech you made yester-even."

"Pardon me, holy father, I am not sensible that I have committed this horrible sin."

"Do not prevaricate, daughter, without full and free confession, you can receive no absolution. Is it not blasphemy to doubt the efficacy of the Mass, and the Invocation of Saints? Recollect yourself, daughter, and allow that you were under the influence of the evil one, when you expressed those unholy sentiments."

"Forgive me, father, for displeasing you, but I cannot unsay those words. I have read, that 'Christ was *once* offered.'

"The Apostle to the Hebrews says:—

"'Then, said he, lo, I come to do thy will, O God.

"'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, *once for all.*

"'And every priest standeth daily minister-

ing and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which can *never* take away sins.

"'But this man after He had offered *one* sacrifice for sin, forever sat down on the right hand of God.

"'From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made his footstool.

"'For by *one* offering he hath perfected *forever* them that are sanctified.'"

A fine study for an artist would that confessional have presented! In the centre sat the reverend father, his whole frame convulsed with suppressed fury, for such daring conduct was scarcely anticipated by him; at his left hand knelt the beautiful novice, her face lighted up with holy ardor, her dark expressive eyes beaming with love to Him, who had offered Himself *once* for her sins, and was, as she felt, a sufficient atonement for them.

For some seconds Father Giacomo could not trust himself to utter a syllable, as he was unwilling that Isabel should know how deeply he was agitated, and did not desire to pour out the full measure of his wrath upon her, at that moment.

At length, though still with the half-stifled voice of a person striving to conceal his chagrin and anger, he said,

"Daughter, I fear your obstinacy is too great for any reasoning to be available; you are evi

dently under the influence of an evil spirit; therefore, I shall prescribe such penances, as may, with the blessing of the holy Virgin, be beneficial to you;—to her altar retire, and, while repeating to her the prayers of our most holy church, may she vouchsafe to deliver you from the spirit of blasphemy which has possessed you."

"Pardon me, holy father, but I cannot feel that the blessed Virgin possesses that power which you ascribe to her; I believe that to God alone belongs the forgiveness of sins."

"True, daughter, God does forgive sin; but He is too great, too holy, too terrible, to be approached by sinful mortals; therefore our holy mother, compassionating her penitent children, intercedes with her son on their behalf."

"Why then, father, do the Scriptures speak of Christ as the *only* mediator? St. Paul says, 'For there is one God, and *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'"

"Beware, daughter, you are on dangerous ground. Have I not already told you that you have an heretical translation of the Scriptures, and I now tell you, you will inevitably go to eternal perdition, if you do not give up that pernicious book; its baneful effects are even now visible, as you already doubt the efficacy of the prayers of the holy mother of God. I sincerely pity you, daughter, and would desire

to be the instrument of restoring you to peace and happiness. You know that I have the power to punish you, and deeply do you deserve punishment, but I forbear; I would willingly convince you of your errors, by gentle means. Go, then, daughter, give up the study of the Scriptures, if you still possess them; return to your usual avocations, repeat the prayers I have prescribed, and I trust, in a few days, to find your mind prepared for the arguments I will then bring forward to convince you of your error, should that be still necessary."

"Holy father," replied Isabel, really softened by the apparent kindness of the jesuitical monk, "I feel deeply grateful, and will endeavor, with God's assistance, to bring my mind to the state of humility you require, and will, so far as my duty to my heavenly Father allows, submit myself willingly to the *Madre Superiore* and yourself."

"'Tis well, daughter; let me not have cause to repent my leniency; and may the saints watch over you, and guide you aright, in spite of the heretical notions which you have adopted."

Isabel arose, and, obeying a waive of the hand from the priest, returned to the chapel, where, kneeling before the altar of the Virgin, as she had been ordered, she poured out her

whole soul in gratitude to Him who had not forsaken her, and who had, as she believed, put into the heart of Father Giacomo a sentiment of compassion, and who had, for His own wise purposes, whatever they might be, delayed the manifestation of that fierce anger which, she felt convinced, burned within the breast of the father. The bell for the early convent-dinner soon relieved Isabel from her duty of kneeling at the altar, and she took her accustomed place at the table, without exciting any visible attention. It so frequently occurred that a nun or novice was absent for prescribed penance, or other cause, known only to the superiors, that such absences never occasioned any surprise; neither the pale, worn appearance of Isabel, nor the absence of Rosa, elicited any remark.

Poor Isabel was faint and weak from long fasting, but scarcely could she partake of the food placed before her, so anxious was she respecting the fate of her beloved friend, whom she had not seen since she left her by the side of sister Giovanna's coffin.

What might the dear girl be even now suffering? what penances enduring? perhaps even something more terrible than spending the night in the gloomy abode of the dead. Had she even quitted that sepulchral vault? Isabel remembered the dreadful state of terror

in which she had found her, and feared that she might have relapsed into the same condition after her departure, and that she was, perhaps, even now, lying deprived of health, if not of reason, the effect of the cruel treatment she had received.

"Oh!" exclaimed Isabel, mentally, "can that system be true or right, which requires such degrading punishments, in order to keep its votaries in that state of slavish subjection so necessary to the belief of its tenets?"

As the day wore away, Isabel's anxiety increased to such a degree, that a violent nervous headache, and universal trembling seized her, and she was so evidently ill, that the sub-superior ordered her to her cell, and prescribed a composing draught.

And where was the youthful Rosa? A lonely inmate of her secluded cell, burdened with penances, but not deprived of hope.

The occurrences of the last few weeks had materially changed the novice; much of her natural timidity was gone, and in its place a spirit of determination had sprung up.

The solitude in which she had been left, far from inducing that spirit of subjection which her rulers desired, had given her more time for reflection, and greater opportunity for maturing a plan of escape which had entered her mind, as she had resolved to die rather than pro-

nounce the irrevocable vows, which would consign her forever to the power of her tormentors. But much circumspection would be necessary; and earnestly did she desire—if it were but for a few minutes'—conversation with her much-loved friend,—but how obtain this boon?

The offending novice had been deprived of the privilege of attending the service called "*nocturnes*," having, instead of it, a number of prayers to repeat in her own cell; and, thinking this would be the time when she was least likely to be discovered, she determined to steal cautiously to Isabel's cell, and see whether she, too, were, like herself, a prisoner.

In the meantime a private conference was held by the Father Giacomo, and the *Madre Superiore*.

Ill indeed could that lady endure the system of duplicity which the holy father enjoined; her natural disposition was hasty and passionate in the extreme, and it would have suited her state of mind far better, to make the offending novices feel at once the weight of her displeasure.

Father Giacomo's wishes were, however, considered by the Abbess as commands, and, as he decided that his plan would be most favorable to their ulterior object, she was compelled, though very unwillingly, to promise that

nothing in her demeanor should make the young girls fancy themselves more than usually the objects of suspicion.

"Well, then, holy father," exclaimed the Abbess, "you propose that the obstinate novice, sister Rosa, shall, in the morning, be allowed to resume her place in the sisterhood, after you have once more exhorted her to obedience."

"Yes, daughter, such is my wish; I know that you must feel justly indignant and displeased with her; but, from the symptoms of determination she has lately shown, I think there is some danger that, should she be too much exasperated, she may complain to the Count her father, who you tell me intends to visit her previously to her assuming the black veil, and, although the Contessa would never hear of her leaving a convent for the world, she might be persuaded to allow her devoted daughter to quit Santa Rosalia, and pronounce her abjuration of the world, in some other religious house.

"This you are aware, daughter, must be averted by *any means*, for her dower must not be lost to us, after having expected it for so many years, nay, almost considered it as our own; for, till the arrival of that heretical Spanish novice, who has bewitched her, sister Rosalia was ever the most devoted and obedient child in this house."

"I am willing to submit to your decision, holy father, and shall immediately give directions to sister Mariana never to lose sight of sisters Isabel and Rosalia until they have taken the vows.

"I shall each night require of her an account of any thing she may have noticed in their conduct which may give rise to suspicion; each incident shall be carefully noted down, and hereafter can be brought forward as evidence against them; they being left apparently at liberty, will act in their usual deceitful manner, and we shall, doubtless, by these means, discover the hidden volume, so strangely, hitherto, kept from us by that hypocritical novice."

The priest assented to this arrangement, and left the Abbess, to retire to his own apartments, in order to commune with himself as to the mode in which he would proceed with Rosa in the morning; he felt assured that it would be useless, at present, again to question her on the subject of their last discussion; he, therefore, determined to reprimand her kindly, and then allow her to leave her cell, and resume her usual employments.

Isabel had not been long on her couch before the sister Mariana entered, bearing the draught prescribed, and, at the same time, told the novice that the *Madre Superiore* com-

manded that she should not rise for any of the services in the chapel until she had visited her.

The novice expressed her thanks; drank the medicine, which, in a few minutes, threw her into a deep, feverish slumber.

From this, she was aroused by the convent-bell, sounding for *nocturnes*, and, almost at the same instant, the sister Mariana entered, and inquired how she was.

Isabel thanked her for her attention, and expressed herself as feeling better, but suffering much from thirst.

"I will fetch you something, *carina*, which will allay that painful sensation. I will excuse your absence to the superior, and hope you will arise quite restored in the morning."

In a few minutes the old nun returned with a cooling draught, and then, giving the novice her blessing, left her, to perform her own duties in the chapel.

Narrowly had Rosa escaped detection; eagerly she had listened for the bell, and anxiously watched till the last receding footstep made her aware that the whole community had retired to the chapel: silently opening her door, she was on the point of leaving her room, when the returning steps of sister Mariana startled her; she listened almost breathlessly, and found that the old nun entered her friend's cell; this, while it alarmed her for

Isabel's health, convinced her that she was in her room.

Rosa then closed her door, threw herself on her knees, and commenced repeating half audibly the prayers prescribed her at that hour. And fortunate was it for her that she was thus engaged, as the sister Mariana, on her way to the chapel, stealthily opened her door, and seeing her thus properly employed, cautiously closed it again, and passed on without making any observation.

No sooner was the sound of her footsteps lost, than Rosa started from her knees, and glided swiftly, though cautiously, to Isabel's cell, and after listening a moment at the door to ascertain that no one was with her, she slowly opened it, and in another instant, the novices were clasped in each other's fond embrace.

"Dearest Isabel!" "Dearest Rosa!" escaped from each, almost involuntarily.

"Thank God! that I hear your dear voice once more, my own loved friend," said Isabel. "I cannot express the agony I have suffered this day on your account; God be praised you are safe. But, tell me, dearest, where have you been since that dreadful night?"

"In my own cell, dear sister; our superiors hope to compel me to submission by this treatment, but Isabel, they will not succeed; I feel

myself endued with new energies, and I will exert them to the utmost to leave this place, even if I die in the attempt. If I fail, death will terminate my sufferings here, and I trust my parents will cause a sufficient number of masses to be performed to free my soul from purgatory."

"Dearest Rosa, do not talk thus, you shock me inexpressibly; the idea of death is in itself very awful, but with your views on the subject it is doubly so! Have we not read, *carina*, that it is through the blood of Christ *alone* we can be saved? there is no mention in Scripture of purgatorial fires."

"I am bewildered, dear Isabel, with these new doctrines; at present I cannot say I believe in them, neither do I disbelieve, but I cannot give up at once my religious opinions; though I should be most thankful to trust as you do, to the truths your Scriptures have taught you; but, dear sister, bear with me, and try to dispel my ignorance.

"I am fully convinced that our church must have fallen into many errors, my slight knowledge of the Word of God has taught me that; and, if I escape from this place, I will devote myself to the study of that word, and I pray that the Lord Jesus may teach me to understand it."

"He will, dear Rosa; for you have heard

me read His own promise, that if we ask, we shall receive.

"But, dear Rosa, you talk of escape as though you had some hope, some plan for such a blessed deliverance; tell me, dearest, to what do you allude?"

"I can scarcely do so, Isabel, for my plans are very vague; but on one thing I am determined, I will never assume the black veil in this house. They may torture me, they may confine me, they may even kill me, but they shall never force me to take the vows;" and the weeping girl threw her arms around her friend, in an agony of grief, which threatened almost to deprive her of reason.

"Calm yourself, *carissima,* I entreat you; this excitement will unfit you for exertion, so necessary at this trying moment. Oh! that we could escape! but we will pray for grace to act; we will pray that God himself will guide us;—say, dearest Rosa, shall we do so? shall we pray to God, for his dear Son's sake; not to the Virgin, not to saints, Rosa, but to God Himself?"

The friends agreed that their petitions to this effect should be fervent and frequent; and, as they became more calm, Rosa said,

"I cannot think, Isabel, that my dear father will allow me to be immured here forever, without once more seeing me. I am convin-

ced that he will come, and then I will endeavor by some means to inform him of my unwillingness to remain here. Oh! that my beloved brother were in Sicily! he, I know, would do his utmost to save me; he is so kind, so affectionate, dear, dear Francesco; but I do not know when he will return; perhaps, ere that period arrives, they may compel me to assume the veil; but no, they shall not succeed! I will remember my promise to him, as well as my own determination."

"Dearest Rosa, much do I wish to detain you; yet I fear that the service in the chapel must be nearly over, and probably sister Mariana will be here again. I cannot account for the change in her conduct; she is become so kind and attentive to me—she who is usually so harsh."

"It is to answer some end of their own, believe me; beware, dear sister, do not be overcome by her *pretended* affection; she hopes to discover your precious book, or some similar cause makes her act as she is now doing. Oh Isabel, what a system of deceit is theirs, from beginning to end all the same; and we also, Isabel, though feeling it to be sinful, must act with the greatest duplicity if we wish ever to be free from the influence of the pernicious doctrines we are taught; but I think I hear footsteps—our sisters, poor deluded victims,

are leaving the chapel—*addio, carissima;*" and Rosa sprang from the room, and in a few seconds, had any prying eye observed her, she would have been found kneeling before a print of the Virgin, apparently in deep devotion.

At an early hour the following morning, Rosa was summoned to attend Father Giacomo.

"May the saints ever bless you, my daughter," said he, as the trembling girl fell on her knees before him. "Much has your recent conduct, daughter, grieved me and your kind mother; your late behavior has been so different from your former dutiful conduct, that we are quite at a loss to account for the change. It is for this, daughter, that we have considered it expedient to forbid your leaving your cell during the last few days, in order that you might have time to reflect on the consequences likely to attend the continuation of such a refractory spirit as you have lately shown; and we sincerely hope that the holy Virgin has listened to your prayers, and that she will now restore you to her favor. You have doubtless performed the penances prescribed?"

"I have, holy father," replied Rosa, half-suffocated by contending emotions.

"It is well, daughter."

The priest then pronounced the usual ab

solution, and desired her to present herself before the Abbess.

With a palpitating heart Rosa left the presence of the priest, and proceeded to obey his command. Slowly she ascended the staircase leading to the superior's apartment, and tremblingly requested the attendant nun to conduct her to the much-dreaded presence of the Madre-Superiore.

She scarcely dared raise her eyes when brought before her, but the kind tone in which the lady inquired whether the holy father Giacomo had sent her, somewhat restored her self-possession, and she collected her thoughts sufficiently to kneel before the Abbess and beg her forgiveness for her past undutiful conduct.

"I need not tell you, daughter, that I have been greatly pained by your disobedience; but, as you are sent here by the holy father, you have doubtless received his absolution. I will not, therefore withhold my forgiveness, and trust that your future behavior will be such as to prove to us that you feel grateful for our present leniency towards you. Go, daughter, resume your usual employments, and may the blessed Virgin watch over you."

Rosa arose, made a profound obeisance, and, conducted by the nun in waiting, left the presence of the superior.

Isabel was much refreshed from the night's

repose, and the consciousness that her beloved friend was in health; she therefore descended at the accustomed hour, though not before the sub-superior had entered her apartment, and expressed her gratulation.

"You are much better, sister, and, as all the feverish symptoms are abated, you may leave your cell, in perfect safety."

Isabel thanked her for her kindness and sympathy, and repaired to her usual tasks. She did not see Rosa till the dinner-hour, their employment being in different rooms; but their eyes met as each took her seat at the table, though both felt that they were under strict surveillance, and therefore no other sign of recognition was allowed to escape them. Yet each felt happy that the other was restored so far to favor as to be allowed to mix once more with the convent-family.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.—PSALM cxxiv. 7.

A FEW days after the incidents narrated in the preceding chapter, a *fête*-day occurring, gave the novices some hope of being able to converse without exciting more suspicion than usual.

These days had passed over in the ordinary manner except that both the girls felt instinctively that their actions were all observed, and this rendered them very cautious. The morning before the fête-day, Isabel being sent into the chapel to perform some duty, had contrived to take her treasure from its hiding-place. Its thick covering of dust showed palpable evidence that it had remained perfectly secure and undiscovered. Her heart rose in thankfulness to her Heavenly Father for this mercy, and carefully concealing her precious book, she sought her friend on the morning of the fête with renewed hope. "Dear sister," said Rosa on meeting her, "I told you it would be so; I

knew my dear father would not abandon me. The sub-superior has just informed me that he intends to visit me the day after to-morrow; how shall I act? What shall I contrive to let him know my misery?"

"Calm yourself, Rosa; sister Mariana's eyes are fixed upon us; we shall excite suspicion."

"Oh! that I could procure materials for writing, I think I could slip a note into my dear parent's hand unobserved."

"I have been thinking, dear Rosa, whether we could trace some words with our hair. A short time since I discovered a small cambric pocket-handkerchief, which, by some accident had been overlooked when I came here, and has ever since remained in my possession. I considered it as mere chance, and thought no more of it; but now, dear Rosa, it strikes me as a direct interposition of Providence on our behalf. This, dear sister, will serve instead of paper, and my black hair will be a substitute for ink. But, should it fail! should you be discovered! oh, dear Rosa, I cannot bear to think of the dreadful punishment which would await us! however it is our only chance of success. And now, dearest, let us separate till the afternoon; I will walk with sister Mariana for a time, and so lull her suspicions, for I am fully convinced that she is placed as a spy on our actions." The dinner-bell soon sounded to the great re-

lief of all parties, after which the whole community went to the garden. Isabel and Rosa retired to their favorite bower, the one with her embroidery frame, the other with materials for sketching, hoping to escape the vigilance of the sub-superior and enjoy a little quiet uninterrupted conversation. From the commanding situation of their retreat they knew they could not be approached without warning, and their frames hid from sight the precious Testament, which Isabel had taken from its hiding-place, that they might together read some of the texts which perplexed her.

She felt perfectly convinced, that Scripture contained no warrant for praying to angels or saints, and she was anxious, that her dear Rosa should also see the sinfulness of complying with the custom.

"It has often struck me, Rosa, that in the lives of the saints, which we are in the habit of reading, are many things which prove them to have been great sinners, how then can we hope that their mediation will be available for our salvation?—I should think, that, if we require a mediator at all, he should be one, who has not incurred the displeasure of our Heavenly Father, for if he is or was as much under the influence of sinful passions as ourselves, wherein are his prayers likely to be more efficacious than our own?

"This was a doubt which often occurred to my mind even before reading the Holy Scriptures, and now I am convinced, that they never could offer prayers for us. Are the saints omnipresent and omniscient, dear Rosa, if not, how can they hear our prayers, and how know what we require?"

"You know," dear sister, "that our church teaches us, that God, who possesses the attributes of which you speak, makes known to each blessed saint the subject of the prayers and applications of the votaries, and then he or she presents the petition to God in behalf of the sinner."

"But, *carissima*, does it not appear very absurd, that God Almighty should *first* receive the petitions Himself, then repeat them to the saint, in order that he or she may again address them to Him?"

"It never occurred to me before, though it does seem very strange; but tell me dear Isabel, what do your Scriptures say on this point?"

"They tell us, dear Rosa, that there is but *One Mediator:* here is the passage, 1 Timothy ii. 5.:

'For there is one God, and *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

'Who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.'

"And again in the first Epistle of St. John, the second chapter, and first verse:

'And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

"These passages prove, that Jesus Christ is our mediator certainly, but, dear sister, they do not forbid other mediators."

"Do you think, sister, we should have been told, that there was *one mediator*, if it were not intended to show, that there was but one? besides, I find numerous portions of Scripture, in which Christ is represented as the 'Way,' the mode of 'access' to the Father, but I never read of any saints as fulfilling this office. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, says, —'We have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we have access by Faith.'

"And our blessed Lord himself says, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, *but by me*.'

"And another, to me, very convincing proof of the sinfulness of 'worshipping of angels' or saints, is, that neither angels nor apostles permitted it when they were on the earth.

"In the book of Revelation, St. John tells us, 'And I fell at his (the angel's) feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not; I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy

brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God.'

"St. Peter likewise as positively prohibited such worship, 'And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.'

"But Peter took him up, saying, 'Stand up, I myself am also a man.'

"Now, my dear Rosa, do you think, that these apostles, who would not be worshipped when on earth, would wish, if they were conscious of it, to receive the adorations of Christians after their death?"

"Dear sister, I am, indeed, unable to answer you, my knowledge of Scripture is, as you know, very limited. I have from infancy been taught to venerate and worship the blessed saints, yet, my faith in them is shaken; I feel, that, what you have read, is the Word, not of man, but of God; I seem compelled to believe what I hear, though every sentiment you read pulls down, as it were, one or other of my preconceived opinions.

"But, dearest Isabel, how, how shall we gain more light, more knowledge, debarred as we are from the pursuit of it? and yet our eternal salvation depends on our reception or rejection of true religion: oh, that I could have an answer to the question, What is true religion?"

"This book," said Isabel, "contains the Word of God; the very sayings and actions of our Saviour Himself are related in it, He tells us, that He is the Way, and that He will send His Holy Spirit to guide us. See here, dear Rosa, what He says in the 14th of St. John, 26th verse, 'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall *teach* you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.'

"Here, dear sister, is a teacher to whom we may apply at all times, and He is one, who will teach us all things; no mention is here made of any intervention of saints, but Jesus Himself says:

'And whatsoever ye shall ask in *my* name; that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

'If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.'"

"What more can we require? Oh, dearest sister, may that Holy Spirit vouchsafe to be our teacher! This is, indeed, a blessed religion, I feel almost lifted from earth to heaven with the thought, that Jesus is *alone* the way, that He is exalted a 'Prince and a Saviour, to *give repentance*,' that 'He died for our sins,' and that 'His blood cleanseth from all sin.'"

So absorbed was Isabel in the delightful

subject on which she was conversing, so overjoyed to find that "Christ is all, and in all," that the Gospel scheme of salvation was so free, so independent of man's deserts, so completely of *grace* alone, that she had not observed the approach of the sister Mariana.

The old nun had been for some time hidden behind a group of orange-trees, but too distant to catch the subject of their conversation, or to see the Testament, which the novices held carefully between them, hidden beneath the folds of Rosa's embroidery: several times had she changed her position, till at length, perceiving by Isabel's heightened color and emphatic gestures, that the conversation was of more than common interest, she cautiously approached the bower, and stood before the startled girls, almost before Isabel could conceal her precious volume in the loose sleeve of her dress.

She was first made aware of the nun's approach, by an exclamation from Rosa.

"I assure you, sister, that acacia is not sufficiently drooping; just look at the flowering shrubs below it, and you will perceive that the lower branches fall completely over some parts of them, whereas in your copy of the tree, they are far above them."

"I thank you sister," said Isabel, immediately understanding the hint, "your eye is generally

more correct than mine, I am surprised that you do not practise drawing more than you have lately done."

At this moment the sister Mariana entered the bower, and smilingly inquired in what they were engaged.

Isabel presented her group of trees for her inspection, at the execution of which the old nun expressed herself pleased, and then proceeded to examine Rosa's embroidery.

Though apparently occupied with the objects before her, it was evident to a close observer, that her suspicions were aroused, as with a scrutinizing gaze she stealthily watched every movement of the novices.

Isabel trembled from conscious deception, and almost feared the nun's searching eyes would pierce through the folds of her dress to the volume beneath.

"You are very fond of this bower, sisters, and I always remark that you, sister Isabel, are particularly animated when seated here."

"How can I be otherwise, sister, when, from this lovely spot, such beautiful scenery is so invitingly spread before me: look around sister, and tell me if your heart does not acknowledge its influence?"

"It is all very pretty sister, hill and dale, trees, flowers, and here and there glimpses of a stream, but these things do not affect me, as

they appear to do you, if I may judge from the expression of your countenance, and your animated gestures as I approached."

Isabel blushed, as the falsehood she was *acting* occurred to her, but she had not been taught, that to *make a lie*, as it is expressed in the last chapter of the Revelation, is equally sinful, and will merit the same punishment as shall be inflicted on those who *tell* lies,—namely, banishment forever from the presence of God and the Lamb. Oh! that my youthful readers, who are not, like these poor novices, deprived of the Word of God, may remember, that God looks at the *heart*, the source from which their actions arise, and that though they may deceive their rulers by prevarication, as in the case before them, yet they cannot deceive Him, to whom all thoughts are known, for "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

But Isabel did not reason in this manner, she knew that if the true subject of their conversation had been known, they would both have met with the severest penances, and feeling that it was God's command to study the Scriptures, she thought with the Apostle, that she ought "to obey God, rather than man," but, not sufficiently understanding the spirit of that blessed word, she did not scruple to deceive her superiors.

Before retiring to rest, Isabel had given Rosa a part of her cambric handkerchief, with a quantity of hair; and, with the first dawn of day, the unhappy girl began her fearful task, trembling at every sound, lest some unwelcome intruder might discover her thus employed. She had spent the night in a state of feverish excitement, longing for the day, and unable to decide upon what words should be written, sufficiently to alarm her father, yet so brief as to be quickly executed.

At length she determined to state her wishes plainly, though briefly, and sat down to her task to delineate the words, "Take me from this house, or I die."

Two days elapsed ere Rosa completed this undertaking, and tremblingly concealed it in her dress; she had marked the words as small as possible, in order that it might be put into her father's hand secretly.

At noon on this eventful day, the Count, accompanied by Francesco, who had unexpectedly arrived in Sicily the evening previous, visited the convent Santa Rosalia; and Rosa was conducted by the sub-superior to the so much-wished for, and yet so much-dreaded interview. Her heart bounded with joy, when she heard that her dear brother was in the parlor; her agitation was so great, as she ad-

vanced to the room, that the nun noticed it, and inquired what disturbed her so greatly.

"The arrival of my dear brother is so unexpected," said Rosa, "that it has almost overcome me, but I am better now sister, and we will if you please hasten to my dear relatives."

The old nun eyed her suspiciously, and Rosa, feeling that her very life depended on her caution, exerted herself to appear gay and unconcerned. Early in the morning, Isabel had been sent to the chapel, to re-arrange some *bouquets* of flowers on the altar, and, after cautiously examining every part of the edifice, and, thinking herself unnoticed, deposited her precious book again in its former niche.

Most reluctantly did she part with it, but she was fully convinced that she was sedulously watched; and, therefore, that if kept in either her cell or about her person, it would inevitably be discovered.

The two friends had been unable to have a minute's private conversation, since the afternoon spent in the arbor. Isabel knew not, therefore, whether Rosa had put her intention into effect, or whether she had abandoned the scheme; most anxious was she on this point, as it appeared to her the only chance they had of success; and fervently did she pray, that He, who had protected them thus far, would continue His care over them.

A look from Rosa, as she passed her friend on the way to the parlor, informed Isabel that she had not abandoned her project.

The poor novice was in a state of dreadful anxiety until the family met at supper. Rosa was there, and her happy look conveyed to Isabel's troubled heart the knowledge of her success.

What would she have given for five minutes' conversation, but that small boon was denied by convent-discipline.

If two of the inmates of that house were seen in earnest conversation, suspicion was immediately awakened, and the poor victims of it were watched, questioned, and punished.

Our novices were well aware of this, and that, if they did meet to communicate their intentions and hopes to each other, it must be clandestinely.

As Isabel passed Rosa, on leaving the table, the latter contrived to whisper, "Expect me after nocturnes."

During the remainder of the day, the friends studiously avoided each other. The nocturnal service being concluded, each retired to her own cell, and a few minutes after, Isabel's door was cautiously opened, and then closed. The novice, expecting her friend, started up in her bed, but the instantaneous closing of the door

convinced her that it was only one of those visits which of late had become so frequent.

Isabel trembled lest Rosa should be met in the passage, by the unwelcome intruder, but the youthful novice had deemed it prudent to remain quietly in her own room for a short time, judging it probable that she would be watched, for she feared, that her feeling of exultation, after she had put her piece of cambric into her brother's hand, had been noticed by her companion, who had eyed her with jealous suspicion on her return from the door to which she had gone to summon the portress, in order to send her on a message to the Abbess.

Rosa had availed herself of this momentary absence to convey her note through the grating. Francesco, quick as light, deposited it in his pocket, before either the nun or his father perceived the manœuvre.

The sister Mariana had received fresh orders to increase her watchfulness, as the book had not yet been discovered, much to the chagrin of Father Giacomo and the Abbess, who had frequent conversations on the subject, after the daily examinations to which the sister Mariana was subjected.

She had related to her superiors the manner in which the afternoon of the fête-day had been passed, but providentially she had made

no discoveries, and had nothing but her own suspicions to bring her employers.

As she passed Rosa's room, she gently unclosed the door, and seeing the novice apparently sleeping, and feeling very drowsy herself, the old nun thought as her charges were both so well employed, sleeping quietly in their cells, she could not do better than follow their example, and accordingly repaired to her own cell, when a very few minutes sufficed to render her quite incapable of any further *surveillance*.

When Rosa thought time enough had elapsed for this purpose, she arose, traversed the *corridor* rapidly, and almost breathless, from the palpitation of her heart, and threw herself into the arms of her friend.

"Dearest sister, we are saved! we shall not be sacrificed, my noble brother is here, he will save us; I feel new hope, new life within me, since I have seen him."

"God grant that it may be so, my beloved Rosa," exclaimed Isabel, almost as much overcome by the delightful prospect as Rosa was, "but, dearest girl, did you speak to the Count, your father? did you give him the cambric? has he promised to take you from this dreadful place? Tell me all, dearest."

"I will, dear sister, but I am so flurried that I scarcely know where to begin.

"I was so delighted when told that my dearest brother was in the parlor, that I almost betrayed myself; and, perhaps, should have done so completely, had not the piercing, malicious features of the sub-superior taught me that I was giving her cause for suspicion.

"My dear father is looking very ill; he was evidently anxious about me, as the *Contessa*, he said, had informed him that I was unwell; he inquired most affectionately about my present state of health, while I, desiring to relieve him of a load I saw he was not able to bear, assumed a gayety I was far from feeling.

"My brother was frank, cheerful, and affectionate, as usual, and we had a very delightful chat, but my heart almost died within me, when my father spoke of the preparations which were being made at home, for my taking the veil; and turning to the sub-superior, told her that his little *protégé*, Maria, had assisted in embroidering the pocket-handkerchief to be used on the occasion, that she was most desirous of presenting it to Rosa herself, and he begged to know whether it would please the Abbess to favor him, by allowing his family one more interview with his beloved Rosa, previously to her assuming the veil, as, in that case, the child's earnest desire should be complied with.

"The nun expressed in strong terms her af-

fection for the child, and hoped the *Madre Superiore* would not refuse the request, if it were only that she might again have the pleasure of embracing her little favorite; as she finished this flattering speech, the nun arose, and opened the door to call the portress, while I, watching every step she took, slipped my note into Francesco's hand, resumed my seat, and continued the conversation, without apparently exciting her notice.

"Oh, Isabel! I cannot describe the feeling of hope and joy which took possession of my heart, when this object was obtained, when I saw my precious note securely placed in the pocket of my beloved brother's vest. I fancied myself already free; nay, Isabel, do not sigh! do you not think we shall succeed? Oh! do not crush me with despair. I know not what means can be adopted, but I rely on my brother's love, and my father's affection, and, surely, I shall not trust in vain. Oh, no! the thought is too horrible!—and the tone in which Francesco whispered, as he bade me adieu, '*Sperate, carissima,*' assured me that he has some plan, and I cannot help fancying that my father's request to the *Abbessa*, for the whole family to visit me, is in some measure connected with it. I forgot to tell you, sister, that the *Madre Superiore*, from respect to the Count and Contessa, has consented to depart

from the usual custom of the house, and to allow the visit on this day-week, only one day before the awful ceremony should be performed.

"How I shall exist till that time I know not, for my heart throbs so violently that I almost fancy its pulsations can be heard; but, dear sister, why do you weep?"

"Dearest sister," said the weeping girl, clasping Rosa to her heart, "I will not pain you by expressing a doubt of your affection, it has been too well tried; but your family, what claim have I on their sympathy? what right have I to depend, or even hope, for their assistance on my behalf!"

"Calm yourself, dearest Isabel, be assured that I will avail myself of no deliverance of which you are not a partaker; we will together leave this dreadful place, or together suffer whatever tortures our unfeeling rulers may see fit to make us undergo! but, courage, sister, this will not happen, we shall yet be happy; and now, *addio carina*, the first dawn of day warns us to part."

Rosa reached her room without detection, and, throwing herself on her couch, endeavored to obtain a little rest, before the matin-bell summoned her to the regular round of wearisome duties; but to sleep was impossible; her imagination was too much excited, her feelings

had been over-wrought; so finding the effort ineffectual, she arose, and threw herself on her knees, to beseech that God would guide her during the trying week before her.

Isabel, too, was similarly employed, when sister Mariana entered, to summon her to attend father Giacomo in the chapel.

The poor girl trembled at the call, for, knowing herself to be guilty of deceit and hypocrisy in her present conduct and proceedings, she always feared a discovery would be made.

In the present instance she was relieved by the confessor, in his kindest tones, telling her, that, as the term of her noviciate was on the point of expiring, he and the Abbess considered that it would be advisable for her to pronounce her vows at the same time as her friend the sister Rosa.

Though Isabel had been expecting some such announcement for several days, it came upon her now like the shock of an earthquake, her mind was in so disturbed a state; determined, as she was, not to adopt the black veil, yet not daring at present to refuse, she scarcely knew what answer to return.

At length, collecting her scattered thoughts, she answered, bowing submissively before the priest, that she would in that particular submit herself to the direction of her holy mother, after having conversed with her on the subject.

Father Giacomo was well pleased to find the hitherto refractory novice so tractable, and, bestowing his blessing on her, allowed her to retire.

Poor Isabel was very unhappy! the system of hypocrisy and deceit she was practising was painful to her naturally ingenuous disposition; it would have been unpleasant to her at any time; but now that her mind was partially enlightened, she felt that her mode of acting towards her superiors was sinful, and, therefore, she could not expect the blessing of God on her endeavors.

True, these superiors were not of her own choosing, she had not voluntarily placed herself under their control; her brother had sent her to Santa Rosalia, without consulting her inclination; she had, certainly, pronounced the vows of a novice, but, at the same time, her senses were scarcely under her own command, —she was almost driven to despair.

Would these palliating circumstances remove her guilt in the eyes of a heart-searching God? She feared not; yet what else could she do? how resolve to pass the remainder of her life in the dreary abode of sinful superstition in which she was then immured,—how submit to the loss of her invaluable book, and again pray to senseless paintings and images?

This she knew was the only alternative, for

she was convinced that harsher measures would be adopted towards her, when once that barrier, between herself and the outer world, the black veil, was adopted.

After much conflicting feeling, and much unhappiness, she at length determined that she would cast in her lot with her friend, that together they would escape, if God blessed their endeavors; or together they would suffer and die, if discovered.

When Isabel was summoned to attend the superior, she had, in some degree, recovered her accustomed firmness.

The Madre Santa Teresa received the novice with much kindness of manner, and repeated what she had already heard from Father Giacomo.

"Before giving my consent to pronounce the vows," said Isabel, "may I be allowed to ask, holy mother, whether you have lately heard from my brother?"

"Yes, daughter," replied the Abbess, "and it is chiefly from the contents of that letter that I, in accordance with your brother's desire, wish to hasten the ceremony. Here, daughter, read for yourself."

Isabel took the offered epistle, in which the writer requested that the ceremony of renouncing the world might be performed as speedily as possible, as he had determined his sister

should never return to that home, rendered so miserable by her disobedient and sinful conduct; and to prevent any possibility of it, he wished her to pronounce the vows, which would bind her forever to a convent-life, before he left his country, which he intended to do for a few years, and only waited to hear from the holy Abbess that the ceremony was performed, before he set out.

"Cruel, persecuting tyrant," exclaimed the unhappy girl, passionately, "he wishes to feel that there can be no possibility of my demanding the property of which he has robbed me, and which he now enjoys; but let him beware; the time may come when . . . . . ."

"*When what,* daughter?" inquired the Abbess, in a soothing tone.

"Pardon me, holy mother, I scarcely know what I say; but my brother has behaved most unkindly, most ungenerously to me, and, as I believe, chiefly from the wish to augment his own possessions."

"Daughter, you will soon be of age, and it will then be in your power to dispose of your own personal property; to you it would be unavailing, except as a means of purchasing pardon from the pains of purgatory:—Make it over to the church, my child; you will thereby perform a meritorious action, and defeat the unjust projects of your brother."

Isabel would have answered that the Scriptures spoke of no such place as purgatory; that Christ had told the thief on the cross, "*To-day* shalt thou be with me in paradise;" that the Apostle Paul had expressed a wish "to depart, and be *with Christ*," that "to *die* was *gain*," and many similar passages; but this was not the time to excite her suspicion; she therefore merely answered,

"I thank you, holy mother, for your pious advice, and will request your assistance when the time arrives; and, in the meanwhile, I submit myself to your guidance, as to the preparations necessary before pronouncing the vows."

The superior saw, with much pleasure, the change in the novice's manner and conduct, and attributed it to the penances she had formerly prescribed, and her subsequent kindness towards her.

"I rejoice, daughter, to find you in so humble a spirit; I will consult our reverend confessor on the subject of your property, and will inform you of the result of our conversation; and now retire, and prepare yourself with all solemnity for the happy event so soon to take place."

Isabel left the Abbess's apartment, almost overwhelmed with a sense of her duplicity.

"My God, forgive me!" burst in real anguish from her overcharged heart, and a vi-

olent flood of tears in some measure relieved her oppressed feelings.

Many were the prescribed forms and prayers laid upon the novices during the following important week, all in the house was excitement and preparation for the imposing ceremony about to be performed.

The poor nuns looked forward to any such event with pleasure, as it was to them a holiday, and procured some relaxation from their burdensome duties.

Daily Father Giacomo, or the Abbess, exhorted the novices to perform the duties imposed, and endeavored to render the observance of them less burdensome, by setting before them the merits of storing up, as it were, a superabundance of prayers and good works for their souls' future benefit

Isabel remembered that it is written, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say,—We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our *duty* to do." And, again, in Gal. ii. 16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

To the watchful eyes of sister Mariana the novices' conduct appeared most exemplary; they omitted no duty, appeared to repeat all the prescribed prayers, spent some time each day in the chapel before the image of the Virgin, and, in fact, left no room for reproof, or fault of any kind.

The dreadful state of torturing suspense, in which the unhappy novices were kept, may be more easily imagined than described.

Each day, as it passed and brought no intimation from Francesco, added to their distress, for, although Rosa still fancied the intended visit was in some way connected with her wish to escape, yet, she continued to hope, almost against hope, that each day would bring some alleviation to their sufferings; but they were destined to find the truth of the proverb, that "Hope deferred, makes the heart sick;" for, night succeeded night, and all things remained in their usual state.

Isabel crept to Rosa's cell, after nocturnes, as they found, from experience, that that was the hour when sister Mariana slept most soundly, on the night preceding that day on which their hopes hung.

"Dear sister," said Rosa, "my courage almost fails, the events of this week have nearly overpowered me; I could not sustain another such, and you, dear Isabel, are quite exhausted.

Oh! what will become of us, if my dear brother be unable to liberate us?"

"The thought is distraction, dear Rosa; but keep up your spirits, *carina*. I trust that God will not desert us; true, we are all unworthy of his protection, but I have prayed, fervently prayed, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that our sin may be forgiven us; and I do feel a confidence, that He, who has said, 'If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it,' will not forsake us now at our utmost need.

"Dear Rosa, what a blessed thing it will be, if ever we escape, and are allowed to worship God, according to God's Holy Word, and the dictates of our own conscience; my heart bounds with joy at the bare idea of it. Courage, dear sister; let us renew our supplications to God, for Jesus Christ's sake, that He may guide and assist us, through this dreadful trial."

The violent closing of a distant door alarmed the novices; Isabel rushed from her friend's cell, and, trembling with terror, reached her own without meeting with any obstacle.

The few minutes they had passed together, had availed to relume the spirit of hope in Rosa's heart. Hers was naturally a timid disposition, not calculated for the stormy life she had now entered on; yet, she was not destitute of fortitude, now that circumstances

had occurred to render it necessary for her to act with decision.

A lovely morning dawned on the day that Rosa so much dreaded, yet so much desired,—that day which was to be the harbinger of hope, or of the deepest despair; how fervent were her prayers and those of Isabel, few can picture to themselves, unless they have been somewhat similarly circumstanced.

Isabel and Rosa were both kneeling in the chapel, when the sub-superior entered, and beckoned the latter to follow her, as some of her family had called to see her.

"*Some!* are they not *all* here?" exclaimed she, forgetting her caution in her anxiety lest her beloved brother, on whom her very life appeared to hang, should be absent.

"Dear sister, how nervously irritable you have become; pray do not alarm yourself thus, for so trifling a circumstance; the Contessa, your mamma, is rather indisposed, but only slightly so, and as she will see you to-morrow, in a situation most gratifying to so pious a lady, she would not venture out to-day, fearing to unfit herself from being present at the ceremony."

Rosa was much relieved when she heard who was the absent one, for her mother had always shown her less affection than the other

part of her family, and they were in consequence much dearer to her.

The poor girl almost fainted when she entered the parlor, but a timid glance at Francesco reassured her; she saw that he had not come to crush her hopes, but to fulfil them.

Oh! the rush of joy, which overwhelmed her at this certainty! again she felt that ultimate success would follow, and, though not knowing the plan to be adopted, she was sure, that, with the blessing of God on her dear brother's endeavors, all would yet be well.

The sub-superior was delighted with little Maria; and indeed she was a most engaging child, so exceedingly artless and unaffected.

"See Rosa, sister Rosa, I have embroidered all this side of the handkerchief myself, I hope you will like it, as I have tried very much to do it well, and Leonora was very kind to teach me, was she not?"

"The handkerchief is very handsome my darling, and were it not so, I should equally value it, as your gift, and your work, but will you not pass it through the grating to me, that I may examine it more closely?"

"No Rosa, I have to beg a favor of that kind lady, I am so glad she is here to-day, some of the sisters look so cross, that I should be afraid to ask them, but the last time I came to see you I was allowed to kiss you at the open door;

and now I have brought you a basket of fruit, and one for that kind sister who opened the door; will you, madam, let me give them to you myself, I should so much like to put my arms round Rosa's neck and embrace her once more?"

"You shall my little darling," said the sister, much gratified, by the high opinion of herself the little girl had expressed. "I will open the door, and you shall embrace your cousin."

"You are a cunning little puss," said Francesco, "this, then, is the reason why the fruit was not to be packed in a small basket, you feared it might pass through this envious grating. I wish that I had brought sister Rosa a large present, that I too might have had the door opened for me."

All the party laughed, much to the discomfort of little Maria, who did not expect her plan to be so easily discovered.

The sub-superior then arose, and desiring Rosa to precede her, walked to the door.

As soon as it was opened, the child rushed into her cousin's arms, embraced her most affectionately, and then threw her arms around the nun, who was much delighted, for she had really a feeling of affection for the child.

Maria then presented her with the two baskets of fruit, begging she would choose that she preferred, saying, "I am sure cousin Rosa would like you to choose first."

The old nun thanked her, and while she was admiring the fruit, Maria presented Rosa with hers, and then saying, "now dearest Rosa, one more kiss," pressed into her hand a small piece of paper, and again embracing the nun drew off her attention from Rosa, while the latter, scarcely knowing what she did, hurriedly hid the much-prized note in her dress.

Maria then rejoined her uncle and cousins, and Rosa and the sub-superior resumed their seats.

The conversation now turned chiefly on the to-morrow's ceremony. Leonora and the sub-superior spoke of the splendid preparations which were made, and the number of influential families in Sicily who were to be present.

"You will have a goodly company of British officers, too, I am told," said Francesco, "for the admiral never having witnessed this imposing ceremony, intends being present with his officers, so I was informed on my way hither, therefore, *sorella mia*, conduct yourself with all due dignity, for our family's credit."

"Yes," answered his father, "and I am glad of it, as the English in general, have a very great contempt for our religious ceremonies; but this will be one so unusually splendid and attractive, that it may perhaps cause those who witness it, to change their opinion, as I know the duke will spare no expense to add éclat to

his daughter's renunciation of the world, and I should wish my own dear child's profession to be as imposing as possible."

The old gentleman's lips quivered as he uttered the last words, and all there present suspected that, were it not for the Contessa's unbounded influence over him, that profession would never be made at all.

Leonora, tossing her head proudly, could not imagine why such heretics should dare to pollute their chapels with their presence; they never came to worship, and most frequently only to scoff; if she could act as she would like, she would forbid the officers' entrance.

"But my dear daughter forgets that at present our island is under British government, and therefore it would be rather an imprudent action, to shut them out, or to exclude them from any ceremony, much less from one of so public a nature as the assumption of the veil."

"True," said Leonora, "I had forgotten that circumstance, which, though it renders forbearance necessary, does not make it more agreeable."

The sub-superior had warmly joined Leonora in her outcry against heretics, and, in the heat of the discussion, Francesco contrived to whisper, "Fear nothing, throw yourself on the protection of the British commander, to-morrow."

After a little more affectionate intercourse with her father, the visitors arose to depart, and, with a beating heart, Rosa bade them adieu.

Was it forever? She knew not; for, should her attempt to escape be suspected, measures would certainly be adopted to prevent it. Did not her rulers already suspect her? Was she not, even now, jealously watched and guarded? Her heart sank at the idea of the bold step proposed by her brother. Could she, a poor timid girl, dare, before an assembled multitude, renounce her allegiance to the church? And even if she did assume sufficient courage to act as directed, would the English Admiral trouble himself about so unimportant an individual as herself?

How did Rosalia long for night to close over them, that she might propose the scheme to Isabel; the hours appeared interminable; and a long exordium, which was delivered to Isabel and herself, by Father Giacomo, on the blessed state they were about to enter on the morrow, appeared to her as though it would never end.

It was fortunate for the novices that they had not to render any account of this discourse afterwards, for had they been compelled to do so, the reverend father would certainly have discovered that his words had passed unheeded.

They had but one more trial to undergo with the priest, and that was, a confession on the next morning; but this was not much dreaded by either; they thought their pretended obedience had been accepted, and that their confessor, as well as the superior, had been completely blinded by it: though both felt assured that ultimate vengeance was contemplated, and they thought truly that it only slumbered until they had placed themselves unreservedly, and forever, under the power of their spiritual guides.

What a fearful thing is absolute power! To the commission of what deeds of sin does it not lead, even in temporal affairs; and how much more dreadful is it, when it extends not only over the lives, but also the consciences of those who are under its sway? Yet is this power committed to men and women, in the Church of Rome; and many a dungeon, many a vault,—in that day when "all shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ," who has said, "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known," —shall testify to their cruel use of that authority.

On the night preceding the day of their Profession, the novices were commanded to pass the greater part of it in the chapel, prostrate before the Virgin.

Rosa's anxiety to read the contents of Francesco's note was almost overwhelming; she had already become so much excited from her previous sufferings that she really feared her senses would abandon her, before she could put her project into execution.

In a few brief words she begged Isabel to contrive some excuse to detain sister Mariana, when they left the refectory, after supper; and then, hurrying to her cell, tore open the letter, and read as follows:

"DEAREST ROSA,

"I will not now waste your precious time by expressing my indignation at the sufferings I know you must have undergone, before writing the words I received; but will hasten to congratulate you that any thing has occurred to cause you to quit your present dreary abode. But I lose time,—to the point, then. Allow the ceremony to proceed, on the day appointed for you to become a nun, as though you were perfectly willing to complete the sacrifice of yourself, until the priest asks whether 'it is of your own free-will that you renounce the world;' then answer boldly,—No! and immediately throw yourself on the protection of the British Government. Your friend would do well to follow your example.

"Fear not the result, *carissima*, you may not

see me, but I shall watch over you; and now, *sorrella mia*, may God, in His infinite mercy, protect you, and assist you through this trial. Not to the saints, but to His care do I commit you, my darling sister.

"FRANCESCO."

Rosa's heart beat tumultuously as she clasped this affectionate letter; and her next impulse was to hide it securely about her dress; she then prostrated herself at the foot of the crucifix, and prayed earnestly that God would not cast her off; the consciousness of her own sinfulness and unworthiness compelled her to appeal to a Mediator; and now, in her distress, she realized the insufficiency of aid from created beings, and, turning from angels and saints, prayed to be forgiven, for Jesus Christ's sake alone; she felt that He was the Intercessor she required, and her prayers were not left unanswered; for a holy calm succeeded her mental agony, and she arose from her knees refreshed in spirit, and determined that, cost what it might, henceforth she would pray to no other mediator than to Him who "ever liveth to make intercession for us."

On meeting Isabel in the way to the chapel, Rosa intrusted her precious letter to her care; but it was not till she retired for the night that she could decipher it.

Gratitude filled her heart, when she found that her escape was also meditated by Francesco, and the plan appeared to her quite feasible.

She knew that British officers were not at all likely to pass the cry of distress unheeded; she knew, also, that liberty, especially liberty of conscience, was dear to every Englishman, whatever his grade; and she felt convinced that if the ceremony proceeded in the usual way, they should succeed; but much she dreaded lest the priest might suspect her design, and counteract it, by omitting that important part of the ceremony, the question as to their free consent.

At nocturnes the novices met, and Rosa again received her letter; fearful of keeping it, lest its discovery should inculpate her beloved brother, she took the earliest opportunity to destroy it, which she did by first soaking it in water, and then rubbing it between her hands till it was completely pulverized, so much was she afraid that a single letter of it should remain legible.

Instead of retiring to her cell, Isabel had been ordered to pass the next two hours in the chapel, when Rosa was to replace her.

She remained for some time in prayer; when, thinking that all was now quiet in the house, she determined to take her beloved

Testament from its nook; before doing so, she cautiously examined the chapel, and seeing no cause for alarm, went to the hiding-place, and took from it her treasure, being determined that this solace of all her troubles should accompany her on her pilgrimage, wherever it might please her heavenly Father to direct her steps.

The novice's wide sleeve once more received the Testament, and Isabel, thinking herself unnoticed, returned to her appointed station before the altar.

Narrowly as the novice had searched the chapel, her eye had not penetrated the folds of a damask curtain, placed before a small gallery at the side of the altar: behind this screen sat the sister Mariana, by Father Giacomo's orders, watching Isabel.

The poor old nun, fatigued with her daily duties, had fallen asleep; but, awaking suddenly, started from the recumbent posture into which she had fallen, and looking through a small glass, inserted in the curtain,—though invisible from the chapel,—she missed her charge from the altar, but at the same moment perceived her at the pedestal, and, to her horror and amazement, saw her put her hand into the cavity, supposed to be entirely unknown except to a few of the initiated, and draw from it a small book.

No doubt existed in her mind as to the nature of that volume,—she was convinced it was the heretical book, so long and so vainly sought.

Her first impulse was to rush upon the unsuspecting novice, seize the Testament, and convey both to the superior's apartment, but at the same time remembering the line of policy lately adopted towards the novices, she thought it better to inform the superior of it immediately, and then to act from her orders.

On coming to this decision, she hurried to the Abbess's apartment, and there, in a tone of horror, related the circumstance.

The Madre Santa Teresa commended her prudence and zeal, and desired her immediately to request that Father Giacomo would do her the favor to visit her.

As she went to the apartments, occupied by the father, she met Rosa on her way to the chapel; she scowled upon her most malignantly, and passed on without even a blessing.

Rosa trembled, and hurried to the chapel.

"Something has occurred, dear sister," she whispered to Isabel, "I am certain of it: oh! if our project should have been discovered, what will become of us?"

"What has alarmed you, dearest? you are pale with agitation."

"I have just met sister Mariana, who passed

me with such a malicious look, that I felt quite terrified."

"Is that all, carina? oh! do not fear, you know it requires very little to make her look very ill-tempered: but what could she be doing about the house now,—where did you meet her?"

"She had just left the superior's room, and was on her way to Father Giacomo; for, feeling anxious, I watched her to his door: but, dear sister, how have you decided to act?"

"As your kind brother recommends, I shall not hesitate to intrust myself to the honor of a British officer; I have but little fear of success; I feel a confidence that we shall not be deserted in this hour of peril: bear up, my Rosa, all will yet be well, and see, dearest, I have my invaluable book, once more, in my possession; it shall accompany us on our journey, wherever that may be."

"Hide it, hide it, conceal it carefully, dear sister, perhaps, even now, our proceedings are watched. I fancied that curtain moved; do not look up, dear sister, but hasten to your cell, be assured we shall be visited to-night."

Isabel reluctantly left the trembling girl, and whispered, "'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do,' but trust in Him, 'who is able to save

them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.'

"To-morrow, dearest, I hope we shall be *free*, oh, charming word. Be firm, speak audibly, and all will be well."

Father Giacomo, much perplexed at the cause of this unseasonable disturbance, arose hastily, and soon entered the superior's apartment.

"What has occurred, daughter; has any fresh circumstance arisen to perplex you?"

"Holy father, I am almost overpowered by indignation; that heretical, sacrilegious novice has discovered our most cherished secrets; has dared to desecrate the pedestal, by placing her Scriptures in the very cavity containing the miraculous springs."

It would be difficult to describe the effect produced on the priest by this burst of anger from the Abbess.

He started from his seat, clenched his hands, and stamped with rage; and then rushed towards the affrighted Mariana, apparently, in his anger, mistaking her for sister Isabel.

The terrified creature shrank from his approach, when, recollecting himself, he turned to the Abbess, and, in a fierce tone, demanded, "What does *she* here? why is she not at her post?"

"It is sister Mariana, holy father, who has just made the discovery."

"Tell me instantly," exclaimed the irritated priest, "all you know on the subject; on peril of eternal perdition hide nothing from me."

The nun, pale and trembling, related all she had seen, suppressing, however, the circumstance of her having slept nearly an hour.

"It is enough, daughter. Where is the incorrigible novice now? Let her be instantly summoned hither; we will teach her to pry into the secrets of the church."

"But, reverend father," interposed the Abbess, "will it not be better to delay our well-merited punishment another day? We have spared sister Isabel hitherto, to be more secure respecting her hereafter. One day more, holy father, let her enjoy her fancied security: this day is her triumph; to-morrow shall be ours!"

"True, daughter, this affair has so much excited me, that I had almost forgotten the prudence necessary; and now, daughter, allow sister Mariana to retire. Be watchful, and inform us of every suspicious circumstance; and, above all, endeavor to ascertain whether sister Rosa is a participator in her friend's guilt; if she is so, then death, a lingering death, to both; thus shall they expiate the crimes of heresy, curiosity, and disobedience."

Sister Mariana returned to her post in the

chapel; but nothing further occurred during the night; the novices were too much alarmed to seek each other's society again.

The priest and Abbess soon after retired to their respective apartments; and Father Giacomo scarcely succeeded in subduing his angry feelings, when Isabel and Rosa presented themselves before him, to listen to his last directions for the important ceremony, and receive his blessing.

The latter was pronounced in a hurried tone; and Rosa trembled beneath the flashing expression of his eyes, as, rising from her kneeling position, she raised hers to his face, for the first time since her entrance.

Several of the elder nuns had been engaged, from the earliest dawn of day, in decorating the chapel; and it certainly presented a most sumptuous and splendid appearance; every thing costly and elegant was scattered in profusion over the altars. The Virgin Mary, in her richest robes, looked benignantly on her votaries; gold, precious stones, and plate, dazzled the eyes in every direction; the seats for the most distinguished visitors were covered with crimson velvet; all that the mind can imagine of gorgeous splendor was there.

At an early hour visitors began to arrive. It was generally known that the daughter of the Duca di Sorrelli was to enter on her no-

viciate, and that Rosa was to make her *profession*, as assuming the black veil is called.

Two ladies from the principal families in the island retiring from the world together, naturally excited a great degree of interest.

The chapel was soon crowded to excess, and it was with difficulty that seats could be reserved for the immediate friends of the novice and her companion.

A burst of the most exquisite music, announced the approach of the inmates of the convent; every voice was hushed, and every eye intently fixed on the door, by which the procession was to enter.

The Duca di Sorrelli, attended by a circle of friends, sat in one of the principal situations, his features wore an expression of melancholy resignation; and a close observer would have seen that the tear unbidden frequently started to his eye. The loss of his beloved child was to him a most dreadful and unexpected blow; and many, who saw him on that day, predicted, that the daughter would soon weep over the grave of that parent she had so unnaturally deserted.

Nearly opposite to him sat Rosa's family, except Francesco; he had boldly expressed his disapproval of the whole proceeding, upbraided his parents as unjust, in thus condemning one of their children to perpetual imprisonment,

not for any fault of her own, but merely to fulfil a sinful vow, which ought never to have been made. But finding all his arguments unavailing, he had declared he would not sanction by his presence so barbarous a sacrifice.

This conversation occurred a few days previously to his receiving Rosa's note, and he still determined to adhere to his resolution, thinking he could the better assist her by absenting himself from the chapel.

The door slowly opened, a band of children tastefully dressed entered, strewing the floor in front of the altar with the most fragrant flowers; the nuns followed, then the novices, each bearing a lighted taper and chanting a hymn.

The candidates were then brought forward, and placed in front of the altar; their appearance inspired deep interest. The intended novice, a beautiful young creature, whose laughing eyes seemed ill able to assume the solemnity necessary on the present occasion, was placed on Isabel's right hand, while Rosa was on her left.

Isabel's countenance assumed that haughty expression so common to her nation; her beautiful black eyes almost flashing with suppressed indignation; yet her whole form trembling visibly from the excitement caused by her peculiar situation.

Poor Rosa cast one glance towards the chapel, and seeing many officers present, but not her beloved Francesco, sank on the seat prepared for her, and was only kept from fainting by Isabel's imploring looks; the haggard face, and the expression of ill-concealed misery, with which she turned towards her parents, was more than her unhappy father could endure; he was compelled to retire, and, hastening to his carriage, reproached himself with his inhuman conduct in suffering so fair a flower to be reared in so uncongenial a soil.

As the ceremony of "taking the veil" is fully described in a former work,* it is needless for me here to repeat it, suffice it to say, then, the ceremony proceeded in the usual form; the prayers were repeated, the hymns chanted, and the time arrived when the novices should have repeated the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience; that irrevocable vow, which would bind them forever to seclusion—perpetual seclusion.

Father Giacomo blessed the black veils, which were lying on a table before him, and, approaching the novices, asked them, "Daughters, is it by your own free will that you now devote yourselves to God?"

"No!" burst simultaneously from the lips of the agitated novices, and, before the reverend

* "The School-Girl in France."

father had recovered from his surprise, they rushed to the railing which separated the chapel from the altar, and, throwing themselves on their knees, Isabel exclaimed, "Englishmen, help us, deliver us from this cruel bondage;" then rising up, emphatically begged the interference of the British Government on their behalf.

It is impossible to describe the scene of tumult that followed.

The incensed priest rushed upon the terrified girls, and, seizing each by the arm, attempted to drag them from the rails, to which they clung in desperation; while, at the same moment, two lieutenants, by the admiral's order, leapt over the slight barrier, and, in the name of the British Government, demanded that the young ladies should be given up to them!

The priest, rendered furious by this interference, stamped and stormed, but unavailingly; other officers had now surrounded the trembling novices. Even the admiral himself was at their side. Hope began to spring up in their hearts, at finding their call thus promptly responded to.

The priest advanced towards the admiral, and inquired "by what right he interfered in ecclesiastical matters?"

"This is not exactly an ecclesiastical mat-

ter," he replied. "These ladies are asked by you, 'whether it is of their own will that they assume the veil?' They answer, it is not. They are therefore free from your jurisdiction, as your own question proves that you have *no right* to compel them, *against their will*, to renounce the world. The British Government permits no slavery in its dominions, and this is slavery of the worst kind. I, therefore, as its representative here, order you to release these ladies. They shall be immediately conveyed on board my ship, until the matter has been properly investigated. Then it will be decided by competent judges, whether they return to Santa Rosalia, or follow their own inclinations. To you, Mr. Willoughby, and you, Mr. St John, I intrust the duty of escorting the ladies to my carriage."

In an instant the novices were lifted over the barrier, and surrounded by the officers; and, without any further opposition, were conducted to the carriage, whither the admiral immediately followed them.

"Drive to the Porta, Felice," said the Admiral. The door closed, the wheels rattled, and, almost before the bewildered novices could believe themselves really free, the streets of Palermo resounded to the clattering of the horses' hoofs.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Isabel, "dear,

dear Rosa, we are then indeed *free!* really *free!*" "Oh, sir, how can we express the gratitude we feel to you, as our deliverer. You know not the misery from which you have rescued us!" And the poor girl, totally overcome by a sense of the happiness of freedom, burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears.

The Admiral was much affected by the grateful thanks which the poor girls continued to express.

"My dear ladies," said he at length, "pray be calm. I trust I shall be able to protect you. But I scarcely merit all these thanks; any Englishman, in my situation, would have acted as I have done. Your brother, young lady, informed me of the perilous situation in which you were placed, and begged my assistance. Right glad was I, then, to hear you, madam, (turning to Isabel,) so boldly claim our protection. I feared, when I saw the assembled multitude, and all the pomp and splendor of Romish superstition, that you would be overawed—that your courage would fail—then could I have done nothing; but, thank God, you have 'escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler.' May you long live to enjoy the freedom you now possess."

"But where is my beloved brother?" said Rosa. "No evil, I trust, will happen to him on my account; better, far better, would it

have been for me to linger out a long and wretched life in my cell!"

"Fear not, my dear young lady, Francesco is well, but we thought it better for him not to appear in this matter; we shall find him on board. And now we must alight. Wrap yourselves around in these cloaks, to elude observation." "Willoughby!" he exclaimed—as that gentleman appeared at the door, "escort this lady; I will take charge of *sister Isabel*—for by this name only do I know you at present," added he, bowing politely to her.

Rosa trembled exceedingly; she never remembered being outside of the convent-walls before; and the noise and bustle of embarking nearly overcame her.

The sail was hoisted, and less than half an hour brought them to the side of the gallant ship to which the officers belonged.

Francisco received his sister in his arms, but totally senseless. He conveyed her to a cabin which had been prepared for her reception; and with the assistance of Isabel, who, though much excited, possessed more strength of mind than her friend, applied the proper restoratives.

Gradually she recovered, and a violent flood of tears relieved her, as she clasped her brother round the neck, exclaiming, "Dear, dear, Francisco, what do I owe you? Oh! I am too

happy! Can it be true that I am free? or is it some tantalizing dream?"

"No dream, dear sister, all is pleasing reality. And now, dear madam, allow me to congratulate you, also, on your escape. I thought that, if you had perused the Testament I gave you, Santa Rosalia was no abode for you; for I am fully convinced that the more the Word of God is studied, the greater will be our distaste to the sinful doctrines of that church in which we have all been educated. I have, blessed be God, been likewise led by His Spirit to lay hold of the truths of that inspired volume, and have renounced my allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church."

The ladies were much surprised at this bold avowal, but both rejoiced that henceforth they should have an assistant in their search after truth; for both were fully determined that to "Search the Scriptures," should be their constant employment.

In the evening, after having enjoyed a few hours' repose, the Admiral, Mr. Willoughby, and Mr. St. John, were formally introduced by Francesco, when the most grateful thanks were renewed; and they learned some of the occurrences of the day.

Two of the officers, who had remained in the chapel, stated, that the priest raved like a madman, after their departure; that the supe-

rior had retired with all her household; and, in consequence of the disturbance, the remainder of the ceremony had not been completed, and, from some expressions which fell from the poor old duke, they hoped it never would be, so far as his daughter was concerned.

It was long before the tumult in the chapel ceased. The Contessa and her daughter had been overwhelmed with condolences from one party, and execrations from the other, who called her an unnatural parent, thus to sacrifice her child.

The whole town was quite in an uproar, from the different views of the circumstances taken by various parties; the one considering the novices as girls of spirit and determination; the others, the bigoted part of the community, regarding them as under the influence of some evil spirit; but how few knew the real motive of their conduct—a sincere desire to serve God in the way which He himself has commanded. This they could not do while in communion with that church which, to sanction its unholy practices, hesitates not to alter Scripture, and even to erase entirely some of the most positive commands from its pages; and even then forbids the study of the sacred volume, though the command to do so is positive.

The Sicilian authorities of the town did not

presume to interfere with the decision of the Admiral; and it was, therefore, agreed that the novices should be allowed to go where they pleased.

Francesco did not consider that his beloved sister would be safe in Sicily; he knew that the priests would exert themselves to regain possession of her; he therefore hired a small vessel to transport them to England, whither Isabel was also to accompany them. Before leaving the Island, Rosa received a visit from her father and little Maria. The child was half wild with joy at being able to embrace her beloved Rosa, without the horrid bars being between them; her grief at their separation was most poignant, till the Count promised that, when she was old enough, she should visit Rosa in England.

Rosa embraced her father, again and again, while he assured her of his forgiveness for the step she had taken; he was unwilling to own it to his children, but he felt more happy than he had done for many years; as Rosa's incarceration had been a frequent subject of dispute between himself and his lady, though he was too much under her influence to be able to act contrary to her will, even when his beloved child's happiness was at stake.

The Contessa was too highly offended with her daughter to visit her, or send her any mes-

sage. A fine breeze and favorable winds prospered their voyage. Isabel and Rosa much regretted leaving the kind-hearted Admiral; they had spent some happy hours in his ship, and his generous attention to them was ever gratefully remembered. Francesco purchased a cottage in one of the most romantic spots in Devonshire, where the three friends resided for some years.

Isabel recovered some portion of her property, and the name of Mrs. Morton, will be long remembered by many humble individuals with gratitude, as the means employed by Divine Providence for their conversion. She and Rosa were indefatigable in their endeavors to impress upon their neighbors the benefits arising from the study of the Holy Scriptures, and the danger of trusting to any thing short of the infinite merit of Christ for salvation. Francesco had for some time been betrothed to the sister of his friend Willoughby, and the society at the cottage was much enlivened by the addition of this amiable lady to their party, as he married her a few months after their arrival in England.

Nothing could exceed the consternation that reigned in the convent; the priest and superior, fancying that Isabel and Rosa might have had some accomplices, and confided to them the secret of the springs, redoubled their

vigilance; penances, privations, and punishments, were heaped on the poor nuns to such a degree that their lives were burdensome to them. At length the priest was removed to another station; and the *Madre Superiore*, worn out with anxiety and bodily infirmity, died, regretted by none of the inmates of Santa Rosalia.

As time partially erased these events from the public mind, Rosa, accompanied by her brother and friend, visited her parents. The Contessa had been prevailed on to forgive her daughter, but she never received her cordially.

Although the friends frequently visited other countries, they still considered *England* as their home.

They prized the religious toleration of this favored land, where the Bible is within the reach of the poorest individual; where the minister of the Gospel, far from requiring blind submission to his word, says boldly, "Search, and see whether these things be so," and requires nothing to be believed but what is agreeable to the Word of God.

Happy, happy England! well would it be for thy sons and daughters, if they valued, as they should, the blessed privilege of being allowed free access to the Holy Scriptures.

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