

### **CHAPTER III - THE HARVEST IS REAPED.**

ON their way through the streets, Father Benwell talked as persistently of the news of the day as if he had nothing else in his thoughts. To keep his companion's mind in a state of suspense was, in certain emergencies, to exert a useful preparatory influence over a man of Romaine's character. Even when they reached his lodgings, the priest still hesitated to approach the object that he had in view. He made considerate inquiries, in the character of a hospitable man.

"They breakfast early at The Retreat," he said. "What may I offer you?"

"I want nothing, thank you," Romaine answered, with an effort to control his habitual impatience of needless delay.

"Pardon me--we have a long interview before us, I fear. Our bodily necessities, Romaine (excuse me if I take the friendly liberty of suppressing the formal 'Mr.')--our bodily necessities are not to be trifled with. A bottle of my famous claret, and a few biscuits, will not hurt either of us." He rang the bell, and gave the necessary directions "Another damp day!" he went on cheerfully. "I hope you don't pay the rheumatic penalties of a winter residence in England? Ah, this glorious country would be too perfect if it possessed the delicious climate of Rome!"

The wine and biscuits were brought in. Father Benwell filled the glasses and bowed cordially to his guest.

"Nothing of this sort at The Retreat!" he said gayly. "Excellent water, I am told--which is a luxury in its way, especially in London. Well, my dear Romaine, I must begin by making my apologies. You no doubt thought

me a little abrupt in running away with you from your retirement at a moment's notice?"

"I believed that you had good reasons, Father--and that was enough for me."

"Thank you--you do me justice--it was in your best interests that I acted. There are men of phlegmatic temperament, over whom the wise monotony of discipline at The Retreat exercises a wholesome influence--I mean an influence which may be prolonged with advantage. You are not one of those persons. Protracted seclusion and monotony of life are morally and mentally unprofitable to a man of your ardent disposition. I abstained from mentioning these reasons, at the time, out of a feeling of regard for our excellent resident director, who believes unreservedly in the institution over which he presides. Very good! The Retreat has done all that it could usefully do in your case. We must think next of how to employ that mental activity which, rightly developed, is one of the most valuable qualities that you possess. Let me ask, first, if you have in some degree recovered your tranquillity?"

"I feel like a different man, Father Benwell."

"That's right! And your nervous sufferings--I don't ask what they are; I only want to know if you experience a sense of relief?"

"A most welcome sense of relief," Romaine answered, with a revival of the enthusiasm of other days. "The complete change in all my thoughts and convictions which I owe to you--"

"And to dear Penrose," Father Benwell interposed, with the prompt sense of justice which no man could more becomingly assume. "We must not forget Arthur."

"Forget him?" Romaine repeated. "Not a day passes without my thinking of him. It is one of the happy results of the change in me that my mind does not dwell bitterly on the loss of him now. I think of Penrose with admiration, as of one whose glorious life, with all its dangers, I should like to share!"

He spoke with a rising color and brightening eyes. Already, the absorbent capacity of the Roman Church had drawn to itself that sympathetic side of his character which was also one of its strongest sides. Already, his love for Penrose--hitherto inspired by the virtues of the man--had narrowed its range to sympathy with the trials and privileges of the priest. Truly and deeply, indeed, had the physician consulted, in bygone days, reasoned on Romaine's case! That "occurrence of some new and absorbing influence in his life," of which the doctor had spoken--that "working of some complete change in his habits of thought"--had found its way to him at last, after the wife's simple devotion had failed, through the subtler ministrations of the priest.

Some men, having Father Benwell's object in view, would have taken instant advantage of the opening offered to them by Romaine's unguarded enthusiasm. The illustrious Jesuit held fast by the wise maxim which forbade him to do anything in a hurry.

"No," he said, "your life must not be the life of our dear friend. The service on which the Church employs Penrose is not the fit service for you. You have other claims on us."

Romaine looked at his spiritual adviser with a momentary change of expression--a relapse into the ironical bitterness of the past time.

"Have you forgotten that I am, and can be, only a layman?" he asked. "What claims can I have, except the common claim of all faithful

members of the Church on the good offices of the priesthood?" He paused for a moment, and continued with the abruptness of a man struck by a new idea. "Yes! I have perhaps one small aim of my own--the claim of being allowed to do my duty."

"In what respect, dear Romaine?"

"Surely you can guess? I am a rich man; I have money lying idle, which it is my duty (and my privilege) to devote to the charities and necessities of the Church. And, while I am speaking of this, I must own that I am a little surprised at your having said nothing to me on the subject. You have never yet pointed out to me the manner in which I might devote my money to the best and noblest uses. Was it forgetfulness on your part?"

Father Benwell shook his head. "No," he replied; "I can't honestly say that."

"Then you had a reason for your silence?"

"Yes."

"May I not know it?"

Father Benwell got up and walked to the fireplace. Now there are various methods of getting up and walking to a fireplace, and they find their way to outward expression through the customary means of look and manner. We may feel cold, and may only want to warm ourselves. Or we may feel restless, and may need an excuse for changing our position. Or we may feel modestly confused, and may be anxious to hide it. Father Benwell, from head to foot, expressed modest confusion, and polite anxiety to hide it.

"My good friend," he said, "I am afraid of hurting your feelings."

Romayne was a sincere convert, but there were instincts still left in him which resented this expression of regard, even when it proceeded from a man whom he respected and admired. "You will hurt my feelings," he answered, a little sharply, "if you are not plain with me."

"Then I will be plain with you," Father Benwell rejoined. "The Church--speaking through me, as her unworthy interpreter--feels a certain delicacy in approaching You on the subject of money."

"Why?"

Father Benwell left the fireplace without immediately answering. He opened a drawer and took out of it a flat mahogany box. His gracious familiarity became transformed, by some mysterious process of congelation, into a dignified formality of manner. The priest took the place of the man.

"The Church, Mr. Romayne, hesitates to receive, as benevolent contributions, money derived from property of its own, arbitrarily taken from it, and placed in a layman's hands. No!" he cried, interrupting Romayne, who instantly understood the allusion to Vange Abbey--"no! I must beg you to hear me out. I state the case plainly, at your own request. At the same time, I am bound to admit that the lapse of centuries has, in the eye of the law, sanctioned the deliberate act of robbery perpetrated by Henry the Eighth. You have lawfully inherited Vange Abbey from your ancestors. The Church is not unreasonable enough to assert a merely moral right against the law of the country. It may feel the act of spoliation--but it submits." He unlocked the flat mahogany box, and gently dropped his dignity: the man took the place of the priest. "As the master of Vange," he said, "you may be interested in

looking at a little historical curiosity which we have preserved. The title-deeds, dear Romaine, by which the monks held your present property, in their time. Take another glass of wine."

Romaine looked at the title-deeds, and laid them aside unread.

Father Benwell had roused his pride, his sense of justice, his wild and lavish instincts of generosity. He, who had always despised money--except when it assumed its only estimable character, as a means for the attainment of merciful and noble ends--he was in possession of property to which he had no moral right: without even the poor excuse of associations which attached him to the place.

"I hope I have not offended you?" said Father Benwell.

"You have made me ashamed of myself," Romaine answered, warmly. "On the day when I became a Catholic, I ought to have remembered Vange. Better late than never. I refuse to take shelter under the law--I respect the moral right of the Church. I will at once restore the property which I have usurped."

Father Benwell took both Romaine's hands in his, and pressed them fervently.

"I am proud of you!" he said. "We shall all be proud of you, when I write word to Rome of what has passed between us. But--no, Romaine!--this must not be. I admire you, feel with you; and I refuse. On behalf of the Church, I say it--I refuse the gift."

"Wait a little, Father Benwell! You don't know the state of my affairs. I don't deserve the admiration which you feel for me. The loss of the Vange

property will be no pecuniary loss, in my case. I have inherited a fortune from my aunt. My income from that source is far larger than my income from the Yorkshire property."

"Romaine, it must not be!"

"Pardon me, it must be. I have more money than I can spend--without Vange. And I have painful associations with the house which disincline me ever to enter it again."

Even this confession failed to move Father Benwell. He obstinately crossed his arms, obstinately tapped his foot on the floor. "No!" he said. "Plead as generously as you may, my answer is, No."

Romaine only became more resolute on his side. "The property is absolutely my own," he persisted. "I am without a near relation in the world. I have no children. My wife is already provided for at my death, out of the fortune left me by my aunt. It is downright obstinacy--forgive me for saying so--to persist in your refusal."

"It is downright duty, Romaine. If I gave way to you, I should be the means of exposing the priesthood to the vilest misinterpretation. I should be deservedly reprimanded, and your proposal of restitution--if you expressed it in writing--would, without a moment's hesitation, be torn up. If you have any regard for me, drop the subject."

Romaine refused to yield, even to this unanswerable appeal.

"Very well," he said, "there is one document you can't tear up. You can't interfere with my making another will. I shall leave the Vange property to

the Church, and I shall appoint you one of the trustees. You can't object to that."

Father Benwell smiled sadly.

"The law spares me the ungracious necessity of objecting, in this case," he answered. "My friend, you forget the Statutes of Mortmain. They positively forbid you to carry out the intention which you have just expressed."

Romayne dismissed this appeal to the law irritably, by waving his hand. "The Statutes of Mortmain," he rejoined, "can't prevent my bequeathing my property to an individual. I shall leave Vange Abbey to You. Now, Father Benwell! have I got the better of you at last?"

With Christian humility the Jesuit accepted the defeat, for which he had paved the way from the outset of the interview. At the same time, he shuffled all personal responsibility off his own shoulders. He had gained the victory for the Church--without (to do him justice) thinking of himself.

"Your generosity has conquered me," he said. "But I must be allowed to clear myself of even the suspicion of an interested motive. On the day when your will is executed, I shall write to the General of our Order at Rome, leaving my inheritance to him. This proceeding will be followed by a deed, in due form, conveying the property to the Church. You have no objection to my taking that course? No? My dear Romayne, words are useless at such a time as this. My acts shall speak for me. I am too agitated to say more. Let us talk of something else--let us have some wine."



He filled the glasses; he offered more biscuits.--he was really, and even perceptibly, agitated by the victory that he had won. But one last necessity now confronted him--the necessity of placing a serious obstacle in the way of any future change of purpose on the part of Romaine. As to the choice of that obstacle, Father Benwell's mind had been made up for some time past.

"What was it I had to say to you?" he resumed "Surely, I was speaking on the subject of your future life?"

"You are very kind, Father Benwell. The subject has little interest for me. My future life is shaped out--domestic retirement, ennobled by religious duties."

Still pacing the room, Father Benwell stopped at that reply, and put his hand kindly on Romaine's shoulder.

"We don't allow a good Catholic to drift into domestic retirement, who is worthy of better things," he said. "The Church, Romaine wishes to make use of you. I never flattered any one in my life, but I may say before your face what I have said behind your back. A man of your strict sense of honor--of your intellect--of your high aspirations--of your personal charm and influence--is not a man whom we can allow to run to waste. Open your mind, my friend, fairly to me, and I will open my mind fairly to you. Let me set the example. I say it with authority; an enviable future is before you."

Romaine's pale cheeks flushed with excitement. "What future?" he asked, eagerly. "Am I free to choose? Must I remind you that a man with a wife cannot think only of himself?"

"Suppose you were not a man with a wife."

"What do you mean?"

"Romaine, I am trying to break my way through that inveterate reserve which is one of the failings in your character. Unless you can prevail on yourself to tell me those secret thoughts, those unexpressed regrets, which you can confide to no other man, this conversation must come to an end. Is there no yearning, in your inmost soul, for anything beyond the position which you now occupy?"

There was a pause. The flush on Romaine's face faded away. He was silent.

"You are not in the confessional," Father Benwell reminded him, with melancholy submission to circumstances. "You are under no obligation to answer me."

Romaine roused himself. He spoke in low, reluctant tones. "I am afraid to answer you," he said.

That apparently discouraging reply armed Father Benwell with the absolute confidence of success which he had thus far failed to feel. He wound his way deeper and deeper into Romaine's mind, with the delicate ingenuity of penetration, of which the practice of years had made him master.

"Perhaps I have failed to make myself clearly understood," he said. "I will try to put it more plainly. You are no half-hearted man, Romaine. What you believe, you believe fervently. Impressions are not dimly and slowly produced on your mind. As the necessary result, your conversion being once accomplished, your whole soul is given to the Faith that is in you. Do I read your character rightly?"

"So far as I know it--yes."

Father Benwell went on.

"Bear in mind what I have just said," he resumed; "and you will understand why I feel it my duty to press the question which you have not answered yet. You have found in the Catholic Faith the peace of mind which you have failed to obtain by other means. If I had been dealing with an ordinary man, I should have expected from the change no happier result than this. But I ask You, has that blessed influence taken no deeper and nobler hold on your heart? Can you truly say to me, 'I am content with what I have gained; I wish for no more'?"

"I cannot truly say it," Romaine answered.

The time had now come for speaking plainly. Father Benwell no longer advanced to his end under cover of a cloud of words.

"A little while since," he said, "you spoke of Penrose as of a man whose lot in life you longed to share. The career which has associated him with an Indian mission is, as I told you, only adapted to a man of his special character and special gifts. But the career which has carried him into the sacred ranks of the priesthood is open to every man who feels the sense of divine vocation, which has made Penrose one of Us."

"No, Father Benwell! Not open to every man."

"I say, Yes!"

"It is not open to Me!"

"I say it is open to You. And more--I enjoin, I command, you to dismiss from your mind all merely human obstacles and discouragements. They are beneath the notice of a man who feels himself called to the priesthood. Give me your hand, Romaine! Does your conscience tell you that you are that man?"

Romaine started to his feet, shaken to the soul by the solemnity of the appeal.

"I can't dismiss the obstacles that surround me!" he cried, passionately. "To a man in my position, your advice is absolutely useless. The ties that bind me are beyond the limit of a priest's sympathies."

"Nothing is beyond the limit of a priest's sympathies."

"Father Benwell, I am married!"

Father Benwell folded his arms over his breast--looked with immovable resolution straight in Romaine's face--and struck the blow which he had been meditating for months past.

"Rouse your courage," he said sternly. "You are no more married than I am."