

BOOK XIX.

THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES.

I.

In the lower old-fashioned part of the city, in a narrow street--almost a lane--once filled with demure-looking dwellings, but now chiefly with immense lofty warehouses of foreign importers; and not far from the corner where the lane intersected with a very considerable but contracted thoroughfare for merchants and their clerks, and their carmen and porters; stood at this period a rather singular and ancient edifice, a relic of the more primitive time. The material was a grayish stone, rudely cut and masoned into walls of surprising thickness and strength; along two of which walls--the side ones--were distributed as many rows of arched and stately windows. A capacious, square, and wholly unornamented tower rose in front to twice the height of the body of the church; three sides of this tower were pierced with small and narrow apertures. Thus far, in its external aspect, the building--now more than a century old,--sufficiently attested for what purpose it had originally been founded. In its rear, was a large and lofty plain brick structure, with its front to the rearward street, but its back presented to the back of the church, leaving a small, flagged, and quadrangular vacancy between. At the sides of this quadrangle, three stories of homely brick colonnades afforded covered communication between the ancient church,

and its less elderly adjunct. A dismantled, rusted, and forlorn old railing of iron fencing in a small courtyard in front of the rearward building, seemed to hint, that the latter had usurped an unoccupied space formerly sacred as the old church's burial inclosure. Such a fancy would have been entirely true. Built when that part of the city was devoted to private residences, and not to warehouses and offices as now, the old Church of the Apostles had had its days of sanctification and grace; but the tide of change and progress had rolled clean through its broad-aisle and side-aisles, and swept by far the greater part of its congregation two or three miles up town. Some stubborn and elderly old merchants and accountants, lingered awhile among its dusty pews, listening to the exhortations of a faithful old pastor, who, sticking to his post in this flight of his congregation, still propped his half-palsied form in the worm-eaten pulpit, and occasionally pounded--though now with less vigorous hand--the moth-eaten covering of its desk. But it came to pass, that this good old clergyman died; and when the gray-headed and bald-headed remaining merchants and accountants followed his coffin out of the broad-aisle to see it reverently interred; then that was the last time that ever the old edifice witnessed the departure of a regular worshiping assembly from its walls. The venerable merchants and accountants held a meeting, at which it was finally decided, that, hard and unwelcome as the necessity might be, yet it was now no use to disguise the fact, that the building could no longer be efficiently devoted to its primitive purpose. It must be divided into stores; cut into offices; and given for a roost to the gregarious lawyers. This intention was executed, even to the making

offices high up in the tower; and so well did the thing succeed, that ultimately the church-yard was invaded for a supplemental edifice, likewise to be promiscuously rented to the legal crowd. But this new building very much exceeded the body of the church in height. It was some seven stories; a fearful pile of Titanic bricks, lifting its tiled roof almost to a level with the top of the sacred tower.

In this ambitious erection the proprietors went a few steps, or rather a few stories, too far. For as people would seldom willingly fall into legal altercations unless the lawyers were always very handy to help them; so it is ever an object with lawyers to have their offices as convenient as feasible to the street; on the ground-floor, if possible, without a single acclivity of a step; but at any rate not in the seventh story of any house, where their clients might be deterred from employing them at all, if they were compelled to mount seven long flights of stairs, one over the other, with very brief landings, in order even to pay their preliminary retaining fees. So, from some time after its throwing open, the upper stories of the less ancient attached edifice remained almost wholly without occupants; and by the forlorn echoes of their vacuities, right over the head of the business-thriving legal gentlemen below, must--to some few of them at least--have suggested unwelcome similitudes, having reference to the crowded state of their basement-pockets, as compared with the melancholy condition of their attics;--alas! full purses and empty heads! This dreary posture of affairs, however, was at last much altered for the better, by the gradual filling up of the vacant chambers on high, by scores of those

miscellaneous, bread-and-cheese adventurers, and ambiguously professional nondescripts in very genteel but shabby black, and unaccountable foreign-looking fellows in blue spectacles; who, previously issuing from unknown parts of the world, like storks in Holland, light on the eaves, and in the attics of lofty old buildings in most large sea-port towns. Here they sit and talk like magpies; or descending in quest of improbable dinners, are to be seen drawn up along the curb in front of the eating-houses, like lean rows of broken-hearted pelicans on a beach; their pockets loose, hanging down and flabby, like the pelican's pouches when fish are hard to be caught. But these poor, penniless devils still strive to make ample amends for their physical forlornness, by resolutely reveling in the region of blissful ideals.

They are mostly artists of various sorts; painters, or sculptors, or indigent students, or teachers of languages, or poets, or fugitive French politicians, or German philosophers. Their mental tendencies, however heterodox at times, are still very fine and spiritual upon the whole; since the vacuity of their exchequers leads them to reject the coarse materialism of Hobbs, and incline to the airy exaltations of the Berkelyan philosophy. Often groping in vain in their pockets, they can not but give in to the Cartesian vortices; while the abundance of leisure in their attics (physical and figurative), unite with the leisure in their stomachs, to fit them in an eminent degree for that undivided attention indispensable to the proper digesting of the sublimated Categories of Kant; especially as Kant (can't) is the one great palpable fact in their pervadingly impalpable lives. These are the

glorious paupers, from whom I learn the profoundest mysteries of things; since their very existence in the midst of such a terrible precariousness of the commonest means of support, affords a problem on which many speculative nutcrackers have been vainly employed. Yet let me here offer up three locks of my hair, to the memory of all such glorious paupers who have lived and died in this world. Surely, and truly I honor them--noble men often at bottom--and for that very reason I make bold to be gamesome about them; for where fundamental nobleness is, and fundamental honor is due, merriment is never accounted irreverent. The fools and pretenders of humanity, and the impostors and baboons among the gods, these only are offended with raillery; since both those gods and men whose titles to eminence are secure, seldom worry themselves about the seditious gossip of old apple-women, and the skylarkings of funny little boys in the street.

When the substance is gone, men cling to the shadow. Places once set apart to lofty purposes, still retain the name of that loftiness, even when converted to the meanest uses. It would seem, as if forced by imperative Fate to renounce the reality of the romantic and lofty, the people of the present would fain make a compromise by retaining some purely imaginative remainder. The curious effects of this tendency is oftenest evinced in those venerable countries of the old transatlantic world; where still over the Thames one bridge yet retains the monastic tide of Blackfriars; though not a single Black Friar, but many a pickpocket, has stood on that bank since a good ways beyond the days of Queen Bess; where still innumerable other historic anomalies sweetly and

sadly remind the present man of the wonderful procession that preceded him in his new generation. Nor--though the comparative recentness of our own foundation upon these Columbian shores, excludes any considerable participation in these attractive anomalies,--yet are we not altogether, in our more elderly towns, wholly without some touch of them, here and there. It was thus with the ancient Church of the Apostles--better known, even in its primitive day, under the abbreviative of The Apostles--which, though now converted from its original purpose to one so widely contrasting, yet still retained its majestic name. The lawyer or artist tenanted its chambers, whether in the new building or the old, when asked where he was to be found, invariably replied,--At the Apostles'. But because now, at last, in the course of the inevitable transplantations of the more notable localities of the various professions in a thriving and amplifying town, the venerable spot offered not such inducements as before to the legal gentlemen; and as the strange nondescript adventurers and artists, and indigent philosophers of all sorts, crowded in as fast as the others left; therefore, in reference to the metaphysical strangeness of these curious inhabitants, and owing in some sort to the circumstance, that several of them were well-known Teleological Theorists, and Social Reformers, and political propagandists of all manner of heterodoxical tenets; therefore, I say, and partly, peradventure, from some slight waggishness in the public; the immemorial popular name of the ancient church itself was participatively transferred to the dwellers therein. So it came to pass, that in the general fashion of the day, he who had chambers in the old church was familiarly styled an Apostle.

But as every effect is but the cause of another and a subsequent one, so it now happened that finding themselves thus clannishly, and not altogether infelicitously entitled, the occupants of the venerable church began to come together out of their various dens, in more social communion; attracted toward each other by a title common to all. By-and-by, from this, they went further; and insensibly, at last became organized in a peculiar society, which, though exceedingly inconspicuous, and hardly perceptible in its public demonstrations, was still secretly suspected to have some mysterious ulterior object, vaguely connected with the absolute overturning of Church and State, and the hasty and premature advance of some unknown great political and religious Millennium. Still, though some zealous conservatives and devotees of morals, several times left warning at the police-office, to keep a wary eye on the old church; and though, indeed, sometimes an officer would look up inquiringly at the suspicious narrow window-slits in the lofty tower; yet, to say the truth, was the place, to all appearance, a very quiet and decorous one, and its occupants a company of harmless people, whose greatest reproach was efflorescent coats and crack-crowned hats all podding in the sun.

Though in the middle of the day many bales and boxes would be trundled along the stores in front of the Apostles'; and along its critically narrow sidewalk, the merchants would now and then hurry to meet their checks ere the banks should close: yet the street, being mostly devoted to mere warehousing purposes, and not used as a general thoroughfare, it

was at all times a rather secluded and silent place. But from an hour or two before sundown to ten or eleven o'clock the next morning, it was remarkably silent and depopulated, except by the Apostles themselves; while every Sunday it presented an aspect of surprising and startling quiescence; showing nothing but one long vista of six or seven stories of inexorable iron shutters on both sides of the way. It was pretty much the same with the other street, which, as before said, intersected with the warehousing lane, not very far from the Apostles'. For though that street was indeed a different one from the latter, being full of cheap refectories for clerks, foreign restaurants, and other places of commercial resort; yet the only hum in it was restricted to business hours; by night it was deserted of every occupant but the lamp-posts; and on Sunday, to walk through it, was like walking through an avenue of sphinxes.

Such, then, was the present condition of the ancient Church of the Apostles; buzzing with a few lingering, equivocal lawyers in the basement, and populous with all sorts of poets, painters, paupers and philosophers above. A mysterious professor of the flute was perched in one of the upper stories of the tower; and often, of silent, moonlight nights, his lofty, melodious notes would be warbled forth over the roofs of the ten thousand warehouses around him--as of yore, the bell had pealed over the domestic gables of a long-departed generation.

II.

On the third night following the arrival of the party in the city, Pierre sat at twilight by a lofty window in the rear building of the Apostles'. The chamber was meager even to meanness. No carpet on the floor, no picture on the wall; nothing but a low, long, and very curious-looking single bedstead, that might possibly serve for an indigent bachelor's pallet, a large, blue, chintz-covered chest, a rickety, rheumatic, and most ancient mahogany chair, and a wide board of the toughest live-oak, about six feet long, laid upon two upright empty flour-barrels, and loaded with a large bottle of ink, an unfastened bundle of quills, a pen-knife, a folder, and a still unbound ream of foolscap paper, significantly stamped, "Ruled; Blue."

There, on the third night, at twilight, sat Pierre by that lofty window of a beggarly room in the rear-building of the Apostles'. He was entirely idle, apparently; there was nothing in his hands; but there might have been something on his heart. Now and then he fixedly gazes at the curious-looking, rusty old bedstead. It seemed powerfully symbolical to him; and most symbolical it was. For it was the ancient dismemberable and portable camp-bedstead of his grandfather, the defiant defender of the Fort, the valiant captain in many an unsuccumbing campaign. On that very camp-bedstead, there, beneath his tent on the field, the glorious old mild-eyed and warrior-hearted general had slept, and but waked to buckle his knight-making sword by his side; for it was noble knighthood to be slain by grand Pierre; in the other world his foes' ghosts bragged of the hand that had given them their passports.

But has that hard bed of War, descended for an inheritance to the soft body of Peace? In the peaceful time of full barns, and when the noise of the peaceful flail is abroad, and the hum of peaceful commerce resounds, is the grandson of two Generals a warrior too? Oh, not for naught, in the time of this seeming peace, are warrior grandsires given to Pierre! For Pierre is a warrior too; Life his campaign, and three fierce allies, Woe and Scorn and Want, his foes. The wide world is banded against him; for lo you! he holds up the standard of Right, and swears by the Eternal and True! But ah, Pierre, Pierre, when thou goest to that bed, how humbling the thought, that thy most extended length measures not the proud six feet four of thy grand John of Gaunt sire! The stature of the warrior is cut down to the dwindled glory of the fight. For more glorious in real tented field to strike down your valiant foe, than in the conflicts of a noble soul with a dastardly world to chase a vile enemy who ne'er will show front.

There, then, on the third night, at twilight, by the lofty window of that beggarly room, sat Pierre in the rear building of the Apostles'. He is gazing out from the window now. But except the donjon form of the old gray tower, seemingly there is nothing to see but a wilderness of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin;--the desolate hanging wildernesses of tiles, slate, shingles and tin, wherewith we modern Babylonians replace the fair hanging-gardens of the fine old Asiatic times when the excellent Nebuchadnezzar was king.

There he sits, a strange exotic, transplanted from the delectable alcoves of the old manorial mansion, to take root in this niggard soil. No more do the sweet purple airs of the hills round about the green fields of Saddle Meadows come revivingly wafted to his cheek. Like a flower he feels the change; his bloom is gone from his cheek; his cheek is wilted and pale.

From the lofty window of that beggarly room, what is it that Pierre is so intently eying? There is no street at his feet; like a profound black gulf the open area of the quadrangle gapes beneath him. But across it, and at the further end of the steep roof of the ancient church, there looms the gray and grand old tower; emblem to Pierre of an unshakable fortitude, which, deep-rooted in the heart of the earth, defied all the howls of the air.

There is a door in Pierre's room opposite the window of Pierre: and now a soft knock is heard in that direction, accompanied by gentle words, asking whether the speaker might enter.

"Yes, always, sweet Isabel"--answered Pierre, rising and approaching the door;--"here: let us drag out the old camp-bed for a sofa; come, sit down now, my sister, and let us fancy ourselves anywhere thou wilt."

"Then, my brother, let us fancy ourselves in realms of everlasting twilight and peace, where no bright sun shall rise, because the black night is always its follower. Twilight and peace, my brother, twilight

and peace!"

"It is twilight now, my sister; and surely, this part of the city at least seems still."

"Twilight now, but night soon; then a brief sun, and then another long night. Peace now, but sleep and nothingness soon, and then hard work for thee, my brother, till the sweet twilight come again."

"Let us light a candle, my sister; the evening is deepening."

"For what light a candle, dear Pierre?--Sit close to me, my brother."

He moved nearer to her, and stole one arm around her; her sweet head leaned against his breast; each felt the other's throbbing.

"Oh, my dear Pierre, why should we always be longing for peace, and then be impatient of peace when it comes? Tell me, my brother! Not two hours ago, thou wert wishing for twilight, and now thou wantest a candle to hurry the twilight's last lingering away."

But Pierre did not seem to hear her; his arm embraced her tighter; his whole frame was invisibly trembling. Then suddenly in a low tone of wonderful intensity he breathed:

"Isabel! Isabel!"

She caught one arm around him, as his was around herself; the tremor ran from him to her; both sat dumb.

He rose, and paced the room.

"Well, Pierre; thou camest in here to arrange thy matters, thou saidst. Now what hast thou done? Come, we will light a candle now."

The candle was lighted, and their talk went on.

"How about the papers, my brother? Dost thou find every thing right? Hast thou decided upon what to publish first, while thou art writing the new thing thou didst hint of?"

"Look at that chest, my sister. Seest thou not that the cords are yet untied?"

"Then thou hast not been into it at all as yet?"

"Not at all, Isabel. In ten days I have lived ten thousand years. Forewarned now of the rubbish in that chest, I can not summon the heart to open it. Trash! Dross! Dirt!"

"Pierre! Pierre! what change is this? Didst thou not tell me, ere we came hither, that thy chest not only contained some silver and gold, but

likewise far more precious things, readily convertible into silver and gold? Ah, Pierre, thou didst swear we had naught to fear!"

"If I have ever willfully deceived thee, Isabel, may the high gods prove Benedict Arnolds to me, and go over to the devils to reinforce them against me! But to have ignorantly deceived myself and thee together, Isabel; that is a very different thing. Oh, what a vile juggler and cheat is man! Isabel, in that chest are things which in the hour of composition, I thought the very heavens looked in from the windows in astonishment at their beauty and power. Then, afterward, when days cooled me down, and again I took them up and scanned them, some underlying suspicions intruded; but when in the open air, I recalled the fresh, unwritten images of the bunglingly written things; then I felt buoyant and triumphant again; as if by that act of ideal recalling, I had, forsooth, transferred the perfect ideal to the miserable written attempt at embodying it. This mood remained. So that afterward how I talked to thee about the wonderful things I had done; the gold and the silver mine I had long before sprung for thee and for me, who never were to come to want in body or mind. Yet all this time, there was the latent suspicion of folly; but I would not admit it; I shut my soul's door in its face. Yet now, the ten thousand universal revealings brand me on the forehead with fool! and like protested notes at the Bankers, all those written things of mine, are jaggingly cut through and through with the protesting hammer of Truth!--Oh, I am sick, sick, sick!"

"Let the arms that never were filled but by thee, lure thee back again,

Pierre, to the peace of the twilight, even though it be of the dimmest!"

She blew out the light, and made Pierre sit down by her; and their hands were placed in each other's.

"Say, are not thy torments now gone, my brother?"

"But replaced by--by--by--Oh God, Isabel, unhand me!" cried Pierre, starting up. "Ye heavens, that have hidden yourselves in the black hood of the night, I call to ye! If to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista, where common souls never go; if by that I take hold on hell, and the uttermost virtue, after all, prove but a betraying pander to the monstrousest vice,--then close in and crush me, ye stony walls, and into one gulf let all things tumble together!"

"My brother! this is some incomprehensible raving," pealed Isabel, throwing both arms around him;--"my brother, my brother!"

"Hark thee to thy furthest inland soul"--thrilled Pierre in a steeled and quivering voice. "Call me brother no more! How knowest thou I am thy brother? Did thy mother tell thee? Did my father say so to me?--I am Pierre, and thou Isabel, wide brother and sister in the common humanity,--no more. For the rest, let the gods look after their own combustibles. If they have put powder-casks in me--let them look to it! let them look to it! Ah! now I catch glimpses, and seem to half-see, somehow, that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of

the mark. The demigods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash!
Isabel, I will write such things--I will gospelize the world anew, and
show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse!--I will write it, I will
write it!"

"Pierre, I am a poor girl, born in the midst of a mystery, bred in
mystery, and still surviving to mystery. So mysterious myself, the air
and the earth are unutterable to me; no word have I to express them. But
these are the circumambient mysteries; thy words, thy thoughts, open
other wonder-worlds to me, whither by myself I might fear to go. But
trust to me, Pierre. With thee, with thee, I would boldly swim a
starless sea, and be buoy to thee, there, when thou the strong swimmer
shouldst faint. Thou, Pierre, speakest of Virtue and Vice; life-secluded
Isabel knows neither the one nor the other, but by hearsay. What are
they, in their real selves, Pierre? Tell me first what is
Virtue:--begin!"

"If on that point the gods are dumb, shall a pigmy speak? Ask the air!"

"Then Virtue is nothing."

"Not that!"

"Then Vice?"

"Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and

another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are Virtue and Vice."

"Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"

"It is the law."

"What?"

"That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream--we dream that we dreamed we dream."

"Pierre, when thou just hovered on the verge, thou wert a riddle to me; but now, that thou art deep down in the gulf of the soul,--now, when thou wouldst be lunatic to wise men, perhaps--now doth poor ignorant Isabel begin to comprehend thee. Thy feeling hath long been mine, Pierre. Long loneliness and anguish have opened miracles to me. Yes, it is all a dream!"

Swiftly he caught her in his arms:--"From nothing proceeds nothing, Isabel! How can one sin in a dream?"

"First what is sin, Pierre?"

"Another name for the other name, Isabel."

"For Virtue, Pierre?"

"No, for Vice."

"Let us sit down again, my brother."

"I am Pierre."

"Let us sit down again, Pierre; sit close; thy arm!"

And so, on the third night, when the twilight was gone, and no lamp was lit, within the lofty window of that beggarly room, sat Pierre and Isabel hushed.