

***MARIE
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***THE MASTER-
CHRISTIAN***

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Marie Corelli

The Master-Christian

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TO ALL THOSE CHURCHES WHO QUARREL IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

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The Master-Christian.

I.

All the bells were ringing the Angelus. The sun was sinking;—and from the many quaint and beautiful grey towers which crown the ancient city of Rouen, the sacred chime pealed forth melodiously, floating with sweet and variable tone far up into the warm autumnal air. Market women returning to their cottage homes after a long day's chaffering disposal of their fruit, vegetable, and flower-wares in the town, paused in their slow trudge along the dusty road and crossed themselves devoutly,—a bargeman, lazily gliding down the river on his flat unwieldy craft, took his pipe from his mouth, lifted his cap mechanically, and muttered more from habit than reflection—"Sainte Marie, Mere de Dieu, priez pour nous!"—and some children running out of school, came to a sudden standstill, listening and glancing at each other, as though silently questioning whether they should say the old church-formula among themselves or no? Whether, for example, it might not be more foolish than wise to repeat it? Yes;—even though there was a rumour that the Cardinal-Archbishop of a certain

small, half-forgotten, but once historically-famed Cathedral town of France had come to visit Rouen that day,—a Cardinal-Archbishop reputed to be so pure of heart and simple in nature, that the people of his far-off and limited diocese regarded him almost as a saint,—would it be right or reasonable for them, as the secularly educated children of modern Progress, to murmur an "Angelus Domini," while the bells rang? It was a doubtful point;—for the school they attended was a Government one, and prayers were neither taught nor encouraged there, France having for a time put God out of her national institutions. Nevertheless, the glory of that banished Creator shone in the deepening glow of the splendid heavens,—and—from the silver windings of the Seine which, turning crimson in the light, looped and garlanded the time-honoured old city as with festal knots of rosy ribbon, up to the trembling tops of the tall poplar trees fringing the river banks,—the warm radiance palpitated with a thousand ethereal hues of soft and changeful colour, transfusing all visible things into the misty semblance of some divine dwelling of dreams. Ding-dong—ding dong! The last echo of the last bell died away upon the air—the last words enunciated by devout priests in their cloistered seclusion were said—"In hora mortis nostrae! Amen!"—the market women went on their slow way homeward,—the children scampered off in different directions, easily forgetful of the Old-World petition they had thought of, yet left unuttered,—the bargeman and his barge slipped quietly away together down the windings of the river out of sight;—the silence following the clangour of the chimes was deep and impressive—and the great Sun had all the heaven to

himself as he went down. Through the beautiful rose-window of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, he flashed his parting rays, weaving bright patterns of ruby, gold and amethyst on the worn pavement of the ancient pile which enshrines the tomb of Richard the Lion-Hearted, as also that of Henry the Second, husband to Catherine de Medicis and lover of the brilliant Diane de Poitiers,—and one broad beam fell purpling aslant into the curved and fretted choir-chapel especially dedicated to the Virgin, there lighting up with a warm glow the famous alabaster tomb known as "Le Mourant" or "The Dying One." A strange and awesome piece of sculpture truly, is this same "Mourant"!—showing, as it does with deft and almost appalling exactitude, the last convulsion of a strong man's body gripped in the death-agony. No delicate delineator of shams and conventions was the artist of olden days whose ruthless chisel shaped these stretched sinews, starting veins, and swollen eyelids half-closed over the tired eyes!—he must have been a sculptor of truth,—truth downright and relentless,—truth divested of all graceful coverings, and nude as the "Dying One" thus realistically portrayed. Ugly truth too,—unpleasant to the sight of the worldly and pleasure-loving tribe who do not care to be reminded of the common fact that they all, and we all, must die. Yet the late sunshine flowed very softly on and over the ghastly white, semi-transparent form, outlining it with as much tender glory as the gracious figure of Mary Virgin herself, bending with outstretched hands from a grey niche, fine as a cobweb of old lace on which a few dim jewels are sewn. Very beautiful, calm and restful at this hour was "Our Lady's Chapel," with its high, dark intertwisting

arches, mutilated statues, and ancient tattered battle-banners hanging from the black roof and swaying gently with every little breath of wind. The air, perfumed with incense-odours, seemed weighted with the memory of prayers and devotional silences,—and in the midst of it all, surrounded by the defaced and crumbling emblems of life and death, and the equally decaying symbols of immortality, with the splendours of the sinking sun shedding roseate haloes about him, walked one for whom eternal truths outweighed all temporal seemings,—Cardinal Felix Bonpre, known favourably, and sometimes alluded to jestingly at the Vatican, as "Our good Saint Felix." Tall and severely thin, with fine worn features of ascetic and spiritual delicacy, he had the indefinably removed air of a scholar and thinker, whose life was not, and never could be in accordance with the latter-day customs of the world; the mild blue eyes, clear and steadfast, most eloquently suggested "the peace of God that passeth all understanding";—and the sensitive intellectual lines of the mouth and chin, which indicated strength and determined will, at the same time declared that both strength and will were constantly employed in the doing of good and the avoidance of evil. No dark furrows of hesitation, cowardice, cunning, meanness or weakness marred the expressive dignity and openness of the Cardinal's countenance,—the very poise of his straight spare figure and the manner in which he moved, silently asserted that inward grace of spirit without which there is no true grace of body,—and as he paused in his slow pacing to and fro to gaze half-wistfully, half-mournfully upon the almost ghastly artistic

achievement of "Le Mourant" he sighed, and his lips moved as if in prayer. For the brief, pitiful history of human life is told in that antique and richly-wrought alabaster,—its beginning, its ambition, and its end. At the summit of the shrine, an exquisite bas-relief shows first of all the infant clinging to its mother's breast,—a stage lower down is seen the boy in the eager flush of youth, speeding an arrow to its mark from the bent bow,—then, on a still larger, bolder scale of design is depicted the proud man in the zenith of his career, a noble knight riding forth to battle and to victory, armed cap-a-pie, his war-steed richly caparisoned, his lance in rest,—and finally, on the sarcophagus itself is stretched his nude and helpless form, with hands clenched in the last gasping struggle for breath, and every muscle strained and fighting against the pangs of dissolution.

"But," said the Cardinal half aloud, with the gentle dawning of a tender smile brightening the fine firm curve of his lips,— "it is not the end! The end here, no doubt;—but the beginning—THERE!"

He raised his eyes devoutly, and instinctively touched the silver crucifix hanging by its purple ribbon at his breast. The orange-red glow of the sun encompassed him with fiery rings, as though it would fain consume his thin, black-garmented form after the fashion in which flames consumed the martyrs of old,—the worn figures of mediaeval saints in their half-broken niches stared down upon him stonily, as though they would have said,— "So we thought,—even we!— and for our thoughts and for our creed we suffered willingly, —yet lo, we have come upon an age of the world in which the people know us not,—or knowing, laugh us all to scorn."

But Cardinal Bonpre being only conscious of a perfect faith, discovered no hints of injustice or despair in the mutilated shapes of the Evangelists surrounding him,—they were the followers of Christ,—and being such, they were bound to rejoice in the tortures which made their glory. It was only the unhappy souls who suffered not for Christ at all, whom he considered were truly to be compassionated.

"And if," he murmured as he moved on—"this knight of former days, who is now known to us chiefly, alas! as 'Le Mourant', was a faithful servant of our Blessed Lord, why then it is as well with him as with any of the holy martyrs. May his soul rest in peace!"

Stopping an instant at the next sculptural wonder in his way—the elaborately designed tomb of Cardinal Amboise, concerning the eternal fate of which "brother in Christ" the good Felix had no scruples or fears whatever, he stepped softly down from the choir-chapel where he had been wandering to and fro for some time in solitary musings, and went towards the great central nave. It was quite empty,—not even a weary silk-weaver, escaped from one of the ever-working looms of the city, had crept in to tell her beads. Broad, vacant, vast, and suggestive of a sublime desolation, the grand length and width of the Latin Cross which shapes the holy precincts, stretched into vague distance, one or two lamps were burning dimly at little shrines set in misty dark recesses,—a few votive candles, some lit, some smouldered out, leaned against each other crookedly in their rickety brass stand, fronting a battered statue of the Virgin. The Angelus had ceased ringing some ten minutes since,—and now one solemn bell, swinging high up in the Cathedral

towers, tolled forth the hour of six, slowly and with a strong pulsating sound which seemed to shake the building down to its very vaults and deep foundations. As the last stroke shivered and thundered through the air, a strain of music, commencing softly, then swelling into fuller melody, came floating from aloft, following the great bell's vibration. Half way down the nave, just as he was advancing slowly towards the door of egress, this music overtook the Cardinal like an arresting angel, bringing him to a sudden pause.

"The organist practises late," he said aloud, as though speaking to some invisible companion, and then was silent, listening. Round him and above him surged the flood of rich and dulcet harmony,—the sunset light through the blue and red stained-glass windows grew paler and paler—the towering arches which sprang, as it were, from slender stem-like side-columns up to full-flowering boughs of Gothic ornamentation, crossing and re-crossing above the great High Altar, melted into a black dimness,—and then—all at once, without any apparent cause, a strange, vague suggestion of something supernatural and unseen began suddenly to oppress the mind of the venerable prelate with a curious sense of mingled awe and fear. Trembling a little, he knew not why, he softly drew a chair from one of the shadowy corners, where all such seats were piled away out of sight so that they might not disfigure the broad and open beauty of the nave, and, sitting down, he covered his eyes with one hand and strove to rouse himself from the odd, half-fainting sensation which possessed him. How glorious now was the music that poured like a torrent from the hidden organ-loft! How full of searching and potential

proclamation!—the proclamation of an eternal, unguessed mystery, for which no merely human speech might ever find fit utterance! Some divine declaration of God's absolute omnipresence,—or of Heaven's sure nearness,—touched the heart of Felix Bonpre, as he sat like an enchanted dreamer among the tender interweavings of solemn and soothing sound;—carried out of himself and beyond his own existence, he could neither pray nor think, till, all at once, upon the peaceful and devout silence of his soul, some very old, very familiar words struck sharply as though they were quite new,—as though they were invested suddenly with strange and startling significance—

"When the son of Man cometh, think ye He shall find faith on earth?"

Slowly he withdrew his hand from his eyes and gazed about him, half-startled, half-appalled. Had anyone spoken these words?—or had they risen of themselves as it were in letters of fire out of the sea of music that was heaving and breaking tumultuously about him?

"WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMETH, THINK YE HE SHALL FIND FAITH ON EARTH?"

The question seemed to be whispered in his ears with a thrilling intensity of meaning; and moved by a sudden introspective and retrospective repentance, the gentle old man began mentally to grope his way back over the past years of his life, and to ask himself whether in very truth that life had been well or ill spent? Viewed by his own inner contemplative vision, Cardinal Felix Bonpre saw in himself

nothing but wilful sin and total unworthiness;—but in the eyes of those he had served and assisted, he was a blameless priest,—a man beloved of God, and almost visibly encompassed by the guardianship of angels. He had been singularly happy in his election to a diocese which, though it had always had an Archbishop for its spiritual head, boasted scarce as many inhabitants as a prosperous English village,—and the result of this was that he had lived altogether away from the modern world, passing most of his time in reading and study,—while for relaxation, he permitted himself only the innocent delight of growing the finest roses in his neighbourhood. But he had pious scruples even about this rose-growing fancy of his,—he had a lurking distrust of himself in it, as to whether it was not a purely selfish pleasure,—and therefore, to somewhat smooth the circumstance, he never kept any of the choice blooms for his own gratification, but gave the best of them with a trust, as simple as it was beautiful, to the altar of the Virgin, sending all the rest to the bedsides of the sick and sorrowful, or to the coffins of the dead. It never once occurred to him that the "Cardinal's roses," as they were called, were looked upon by the poor people who received them as miraculous flowers long after they had withered,—that special virtues were assigned to them—and that dying lips kissed their fragrant petals with almost as much devotion as the holy crucifix, because it was instinctively believed that they contained a mystic blessing. He knew nothing of all this;—he was too painfully conscious of his own shortcomings,—and of late years, feeling himself growing old, and realising that every day brought him

nearer to that verge which all must cross in passing from Time into Eternity, he had been sorely troubled in mind. He was wise with the wisdom which comes of deep reading, lonely meditation, and fervent study,—he had instructed himself in the modern schools of thought as well as the ancient,—and though his own soul was steadfastly set upon the faith he followed, he was compassionately aware of a strange and growing confusion in the world,—a combination of the elements of evil, which threatened, or seemed to threaten, some terrible and imminent disaster. This sorrowful foreboding had for a long time preyed upon him, physically as well as mentally; always thin, he had grown thinner and more careworn, till at the beginning of the year his health had threatened to break down altogether. Whereupon those who loved him, growing alarmed, summoned a physician, who, (with that sage experience of doctors to whom thought-trouble is an inexplicable and incurable complication) at once pronounced change of air to be absolutely necessary. Cardinal Bonpre must travel, he said, and seek rest and minddistraction in the contemplation of new and varying scenes. With smiling and resigned patience the Cardinal obeyed not so much the command of his medical attendant, as the anxious desire of his people,—and thereupon departed from his own Cathedral-town on a tour of several months, during which time he inwardly resolved to try and probe for himself the truth of how the world was going,—whether on the downward road to destruction and death, or up the high ascents of progress and life. He went alone and unattended,—he had arranged to meet his niece in Paris and accompany her to her father's

house in Rome,—and he was on his way to Paris now. But he had purposely made a long and round-about journey through France with the intention of studying the religious condition of the people; and by the time he reached Rouen, the old sickness at his heart had rather increased than diminished. The confusion and the trouble of the world were not mere hearsay,—they in very truth existed. And what seemed to the Cardinal to be the chief cause of the general bewilderment of things, was the growing lack of faith in God and a Hereafter. How came this lack of faith into the Christian world? Sorrowfully he considered the question,—and persistently the same answer always asserted itself—that the blame rested principally with the Church itself, and its teachers and preachers, and not only in one, but in all forms of Creed.

"We have erred in some vital manner," mused the Cardinal, with a feeling of strange personal contrition, as though he were more to blame than any of his compeers—"We have failed to follow the Master's teaching in its true perfection. We have planted in ourselves a seed of corruption, and we have permitted—nay, some of us have encouraged—its poisonous growth, till it now threatens to contaminate the whole field of labour."

And he thought of the words of St. John the Divine to the Church of Sardis—

**"/ KNOW THY WORKS,—THAT THOU
HAST A NAME THAT THOU LIVEST AND
ART DEAD.**

**"BE WATCHFUL, AND STRENGTHEN
THE THINGS THAT REMAIN, THAT ARE
READY TO DIE,—FOR / HAVE NOT
FOUND THY WORKS PERFECT BEFORE
GOD. REMEMBER THEREFORE HOW
THOU HAST RECEIVED AND HEARD,
AND HOLD FAST AND REPENT.**

**"IF, THEREFORE, THOU SHALT NOT
WATCH, / WILL COME ON THEE AS A
THIEF, AND THOU SHALL NOT KNOW
WHAT HOUR I WILL COME UPON THEE.**

**"THOU HAST A FEW NAMES EVEN IN
SARDIS, WHICH HAVE NOT DEFILED
THEIR GARMENTS, AND THEY SHALL
WALK WITH ME IN WHITE, FOR THEY
ARE WORTHY.**

**"HE THAT OVERCOMETH, THE SAME
SHALL BE CLOTHED IN WHITE
RAIMENT; AND I WILL NOT BLOT HIS
NAME OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE,
BUT I WILL CONFESS HIS NAME
BEFORE MY FATHER AND BEFORE HIS
ANGELS."**

Dimmer and duskier grew the long shadows now gathering in the Cathedral,—two of the twinkling candles near the Virgin's statue suddenly sank in their sockets with a spluttering noise and guttered out,—the solemn music of the organ continued, growing softer and softer as it sounded, till it crept through the vastness of the building like a light breeze wafted from the sea, bringing with it suggestions of far flower-islands in the tropics, golden shores kissed by languid foam, and sweet-throated birds singing, and still the Cardinal sat thinking of griefs and cares and inexplicable human perplexities, which were not his own, but which seemed to burden the greater portion of the world. He drew no comparisons,—he never considered that, as absolutely as day is day and night is night, his own beautiful and placid life, lived in the faith of God and Christ, was tortured by no such storm-tossed tribulation as that which affected the lives of many others,—and that the old trite saying, almost despised because so commonplace, namely that "goodness makes happiness," is as eternally true as that the sun shines in heaven, and that it is only evil which creates misery. To think of himself in the matter never occurred to him; had he for a moment entertained the merest glimmering of an idea that he was better, and therefore happier than most men, he would, in his own opinion, have been guilty of unpardonable arrogance and presumption. What he saw, and what sincerely and unselfishly grieved him, was that the people of this present age were unhappy—discontented—restless,—that something of the simple joy of existence had gone out of the world,—that even the brilliant discoveries of science and

the so-called "progress" of men only served apparently to increase their discontent,—that when they were overcome by sorrow, sickness, or death, they had little philosophy and less faith to support them,—and that except in the few cases where Christ was still believed in, they gave way altogether and broke down like frightened children in a storm.

"Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis!" A few names! But how few! Universal weariness of life seemed a disease of the time,—there was nothing that seemed to satisfy—even the newest and most miraculous results of scientific research and knowledge ceased to be interesting after the first week of their triumphant public demonstration and acceptance.

"The world must be growing old," said the Cardinal sadly,—"It must be losing its vigour,—it is too tired to lift itself to the light; too weary and worn out to pray. Perhaps the end of all present things is at hand,—perhaps it is the beginning of the promised 'new heavens and new earth.'"

Just then the organ-music ceased abruptly, and the Cardinal, waking from his thoughts as from a trance, rose up slowly and stood for a moment facing the great High Altar, which at that distance could only just be discerned among its darkening surroundings by the little flickering flame of the suspended lamp burning dimly before the holy Tabernacle, wherein was locked with golden key behind snowy doors of spotless marble, the sacred and mysterious Host.

"WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMETH, THINK YE HE SHALL FIND FAITH ON EARTH?"

Again that searching question repeated itself in his mind so distinctly as to be echoed in his ears,—the deep silence around him seemed waiting expectantly for some reply, and moved by a strange spirit of exaltation within him, he answered half aloud—

"Yes! Surely He will find faith,—if only in the few! There are 'a few names, even in Sardis!' In the sorrowful and meek,—in the poor and patient and downtrodden martyrs of humanity, He will find faith;—in the very people He died to save He will discover that most precious and inspiring of all virtues! But in the so-called wise and brilliant favourites of the world He will not find it,—in the teachers of the people He will search for it in vain. By the writers of many books He shall find Himself scorned and rejected,—in the cheap and spurious philosophy of modern egotists He will see His doctrines mocked at and denounced as futile. Few men there are in these days who would deny themselves for His sake, or sacrifice a personal passion for the purer honouring of His name. Inasmuch as the pride of great learning breeds arrogance, so the more the wonder of God's work is displayed to us, the more are we dazzled and confounded; and so in our blindness we turn from the worship of the Creator to that of His creation, forgetting that all the visible universe is but the outcome or expression of the hidden Divine Intelligence behind it. What of the marvels of the age!—the results of science!—the strange psychic prescience and knowledge of things more miraculous yet to

be!—these are but hints and warnings of the approach of God himself—'coming in a cloud with power and great glory'!"

As he thus spoke, he raised his hand out of old habit acquired in preaching, and a ray from the after-glow of the sunken sun lit up the jewel in the apostolic ring he wore, warming its pale green lustre to a dim violet spark as of living fire. His fine features were for a moment warm with fervour and feeling,—then,—suddenly, he thought of the great world outside all creeds,—of the millions and millions of human beings who neither know nor accept Christ,—of the Oriental races with their intricate and beautiful systems of philosophy,—of savage tribes, conquered and unconquered,—of fierce yet brave Turkish warriors who are, with all their faults, at any rate true to the faith they profess—and lastly—more than all—of the thousands upon thousands of Christians in Christian lands, who no more believe in Him whose holy name they take in vain, than in any Mumbo-Jumbo fetish of untaught barbarians. Were these to perish utterly? Had THEY no immortal souls to save? Had the churches been at work for eighteen hundred years and more, to bring about no better results than this,—namely that there were only "A FEW NAMES IN SARDIS"? If so, were not the churches criminally to blame? Yea, even holy Mother-Church, whose foundation rested on the memory of the Lying Apostle? Rapidly, and as if suggested by some tormenting devil, these thoughts possessed the Cardinal's brain, burning into it and teasing and agonising the tender fibres of his conscience and his soul. Could God, the great loving Creator of countless universes, be so cruel

as to wantonly destroy millions of helpless creatures in one small planet, because through ignorance or want of proper teaching they had failed to find Christ?—was it possible that he could only extend his mercy and forgiveness to the "few names in Sardis"?

"Yet our world is but a pin's point in the eternal immensities," argued the Cardinal almost wistfully—"Only a few can expect to be saved."

Nevertheless, this reasoning did not satisfy him. Again, what of these millions? Were they to be forever lost? Then why so much waste of life? Waste of life! There is no such thing as waste of life—this much modern science the venerable Felix knew. Nothing can be wasted,—not a breath, not a scene, not a sound. All is treasured up in Nature's store-house and can be eternally reproduced at Nature's will. Then what was to become of the myriads of human beings and immortal souls whom the Church had failed to rescue? THE CHURCH HAD FAILED! Why had it failed? Whose the fault?—whose the weakness?—for fault and weakness were existent somewhere.

"WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMETH, THINK YE HE SHALL FIND FAITH ON EARTH?"

"No!" whispered the Cardinal, suddenly forced, as it were in his own despite, to contradict his former assertion—"No!" He paused, and mechanically making his way towards the door of the Cathedral, he dipped his fingers into the holy water that glistened dimly in its marble basin near the black oak portal, and made the sign of the cross on brow and

breast;—"He will not find faith where faith should be pre-eminent. It must be openly confessed—repentingly admitted,—He will NOT find faith even in the Church He founded,—I say it to our shame!"

His head drooped, as though his own words had wounded him, and with an air of deep dejection he slowly passed out. The huge iron-bound door swung noiselessly to and fro behind him,—the grave-toned bell in the tower struck seven. Outside, a tender twilight mellowed the atmosphere and gave brightness to approaching evening; inside, the long shadows, gathering heavily in the aisles and richly sculptured hollows of the side-chapels, brought night before its time. The last votive candle at the Virgin's shrine flickered down and disappeared like a firefly in dense blackness,—the last echo of the bell died in a tremulous vibration up among the high-springing roof-arches, and away into the solemn corners where the nameless dead reposed,—the last impression of life and feeling vanished with the retreating figure of the Cardinal—and the great Cathedral, the Sanctuary and House of God, took upon itself the semblance of a funeral vault,—a dark, Void, wherein but one red star, the lamp before the Altar, burned.

II.

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Lovely to a poet or an artist's eye is the unevenly-built and picturesque square of Rouen in which the Cathedral

stands,—lovely, and suggestive of historical romance in all its remote corners, its oddly-shaped houses, its by-ways and crooked little flights of steps leading to nowhere, its gables and slanting roofs, and its utter absence of all structural proportion. A shrine here, a broken statue there,—a half-obliterated coat-of-arms over an old gateway,—a rusty sconce fitted fast into the wall to support a lantern no longer needed in these days of gas and electricity,—an ancient fountain overgrown with weed, or a projecting vessel of stone for holy water, in which small birds bathe and disport themselves after a shower of rain,—those are but a few of the curious fragments of a past time which make the old place interesting to the student, and more than fascinating to the thinker and dreamer. The wonderful "Hotel Bourgtheroulde," dating from the time of Francis the First, and bearing on its sculptured walls the story of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, in company with the strangely-contrasting "Allegories", from Petrarch's "Triumphs", is enough in itself to keep the mind engrossed with fanciful musings for an hour. How did Petrarch and the Field of the Cloth of Gold come together in the brain of the sculptor who long ago worked at these ancient bas-reliefs? One wonders, but the wonder is in vain,—there is no explanation;—and the "Bourgtheroulde" remains a pleasing and fantastic architectural mystery. Close by, through the quaint old streets of the Epicerie and "Gross Horloge", walked no doubt in their young days the brothers Corneille, before they evolved from their meditative souls the sombre and heavy genius of French tragedy,—and not very far away, up one of those little shadowy winding streets and out at the corner,

stands the restored house of Diane de Poitiers, so sentient and alive in its very look that one almost expects to see at the quaint windows the beautiful wicked face of the woman who swayed the humours of a king by her smile or her frown.

Cardinal Bonpre, walking past the stately fourteenth-century Gothic pile of the Palais de Justice, thought half-vaguely of some of these things,—but they affected him less than they might have done had his mind not been full of the grand music he had just heard in the Cathedral, and of the darkness that had slowly gathered there, as though in solemn commingling with the darkness which had at the same time settled over his soul. A great oppression weighed upon him;—almost he judged himself guilty of mortal sin, for had he not said aloud and boldly, while facing the High Altar of the Lord, that even in the Church itself faith was lacking? Yes, he, a Cardinal-Archbishop, had said this thing; he had as it were proclaimed it on the silence of the sacred precincts,—and had he not in this, acted unworthily of his calling? Had he not almost uttered blasphemy? Grieved and puzzled, the good Felix went on his way, almost unseeingly, towards the humble inn where he had elected to remain for the brief period of his visit to Rouen,—an inn where no one stayed save the very poorest of travellers, this fact being its chief recommendation in the eyes of the Cardinal. For it must be conceded, that viewed by our latter-day ideas of personal comfort and convenience, the worthy prelate had some very old-world and fantastic notions. One of these notions was a devout feeling that he should, so far as it was humanly possible, endeavour to obey the Master whose

doctrine he professed to follow. This, it will be admitted, was a curious idea. Considering the bold and blasphemous laxity of modern Christian customs, it was surely quite a fanatical idea. Yet he had his own Church-warrant for such a rule of conduct; and chief among the Evangelic Counsels writ down for his example was Voluntary Poverty. Yes!—Voluntary Poverty,—notwithstanding the countless treasures lying idle and wasted in the Vatican, and the fat sinecures enjoyed by bishops and archbishops; which things exist in direct contradiction and disobedience to the command of Christ. Christ Himself lived on the earth in poverty,—He visited only the poorest and simplest habitations,—and never did He set His sacred foot within a palace, save the palace of the High Priest where He was condemned to die. Much symbolic meaning did Cardinal Felix discover in this incident,—and often would he muse upon it gravely.

"The Divine is condemned to die in all palaces," he would say,—"It is only in the glorious world of Nature, under the sunlit or starlit expanse of heaven, that the god in us can live; and it was not without some subtle cause of intended instruction to mankind that the Saviour always taught His followers in the open air."

There was what might be called a palace hard by, to which Bonpre had been invited, and where he would have been welcome to stay as long as he chose,—the house of the Archbishop of Rouen—a veritable abode of luxury as compared with the Hotel Poitiers, which was a dingy little tumble-down building, very old, and wearing a conscious air of feebleness and decrepitude which was almost apologetic. Its small windows, set well back in deeply hollowed carved

arches had a lack-lustre gleam, as of very aged eyes under shelving brows,—its narrow door, without either bolts or bars, hung half-aslant upon creaking rusty hinges, and was never quite shut either by day or night,—yet from the porch a trailing mass of "creeping jenny" fell in a gold-dotted emerald fringe over the head of any way-worn traveller passing in,—making a brightness in a darkness, and suggesting something not altogether uncheery in the welcome provided. They were very humble folk who kept the Hotel Poitiers,—the host, Jean Patoux, was a small market-gardener who owned a plot of land outside Rouen, which he chiefly devoted to the easy growing of potatoes and celery—his wife had her hands full with the domestic business of the hotel and the cares of her two children, Henri and Babette, the most incorrigible imps of mischief that ever lived in Rouen or out of it. Madame Patoux, large of body, unwieldy in movement, but clean as a new pin, and with a fat smile of perpetual contentment on her round visage, professed to be utterly worn to death by the antics of these children of hers,—but nevertheless she managed to grow stouter every day with a persistency and fortitude which denoted the reserved forces of her nature,—and her cooking, always excellent, never went wrong because Babette had managed to put her doll in one of the saucepans, or Henri had essayed to swim a paper boat in the soup. Things went on somehow; Patoux himself was perfectly satisfied with his small earnings and position in life—Madame Patoux felt that "le bon Dieu" was specially engaged in looking after her,—and as long as the wicked Babette and the wickeder Henri threw themselves wildly

into her arms and clung round her fat neck imploring pardon after any and every misdeed, and sat for a while "en penitence" in separate corners reading the "Hours of Mary", they might be as naughty as they chose over and over again so far as the good-natured mother was concerned. Just now, however, unusual calm appeared to have settled on the Patoux household,—an atmosphere of general placidity and peace prevailed, which had the effect of imparting almost a stately air to the tumble-down house, and a suggestion of luxury to the poorly-furnished rooms. Madame Patoux herself was conscious of a mysterious dignity in her surroundings, and moved about on her various household duties with less bounce and fuss than was her ordinary custom,—and Henri and Babette sat quiet without being told to do so, moved apparently by a sudden and inexplicable desire to study their lessons. All this had been brought about by the advent of Cardinal Bonpre, who with his kind face, gentle voice and beneficent manner, had sought and found lodging at the Hotel Poitiers, notwithstanding Madame Patoux's profuse apologies for the narrowness and inconvenience of her best rooms.

"For look you, Monseigneur," she murmured, deferentially, "How should we have ever expected such an honour as the visit of a holy Cardinal-Archbishop to our poor little place! There are many new houses on the Boulevards which could have accommodated Monseigneur with every comfort,—and that he should condescend to bestow the blessing of his presence upon us,—ah! it was a special dispensation of Our Lady which was too amazing and wonderful to be at once comprehended!"

Thus Madame Patoux, with breathless pauses between her sentences, and many profound curtseyings; but the good Cardinal waived aside her excuses and protestations, and calling her "My daughter", signed the cross on her brow with paternal gentleness, assuring her that he would give her as little trouble as any other casual visitor.

"Trouble!—Ah, heaven!—could anything be a trouble for Monseigneur!" and Madame Patoux, moved to tears by the quiet contentment with which the Cardinal took possession of the two bare, common rooms which were the best she could place at his disposal, hurried away, and hustling Henri and Babette like two little roly-poly balls before her into the kitchen, she told them with much emphasis that there was a saint in the house,—a saint fit to be the holy companion of any of those who had their niches up in the Cathedral near the great rose-window,—and that if they were good children they would very likely see an angel coming down from heaven to visit him. Babette put her finger in her mouth and looked incredulous. She had a vague belief in angels,—but Henri, with the cheap cynicism of the modern French lad was anything but sure about them.

"Mother," said he, "There's a boy in our school who says there is no God at all, and that it's no use having priests or Cardinals or Cathedrals,—it's all rubbish and humbug!"

"Poor little miserable monster!" exclaimed Madame Patoux, as she peered into the pot where the soup for the Cardinal's supper was simmering—"He is arranging himself to become a thief or a murderer, be sure of that, Henri!—and thou, who art trained in all thy holy duties by the good

Pere Laurent, who teaches thee everything which the school is not wise enough to teach, ought never to listen to such wickedness. If there were no God, we should not be alive at all, thou foolish child!—for it is only our blessed Saviour and the saints that keep the world going."

Henri was silent,—Babette looked at him and made a little grimace of scorn.

"If the Cardinal is a saint," she said—"he should be able to perform a miracle. The little Fabien Doucet has been lame for seven years; we shall bring him to Monseigneur, and he will mend his leg and make him well. Then we shall believe in saints afterwards."

Madame Patoux turned her warm red face round from the fire over which she was bending, and stared at her precocious offspring aghast.

"What! You will dare to address yourself to the Cardinal!" she cried vociferously—"You will dare to trouble him with such foolishness? Mon Dieu!—is it possible to be so wicked! But listen to me well!—If you presume to say one saucy word to Monseigneur, you shall be punished! What have you to do with the little Fabien Doucet?—the poor child is sickly and diseased by the will of God."

"I don't see why it should be God's will to make a boy sickly and diseased—" began the irrepressible Henri, when his mother cut him short with a stamp of her foot and a cry of—

"Tais-toi! Silence! Wicked boy!—thou wilt kill me with thy naughty speeches! All this evil comes of the school,—I would thy father had never been compelled to send thee there!"