

A FRIENDLY STRANGER

Story of a Young Italian During the Days Following the Expulsion of the Jesuits.

By Sister Mary Oampron

CHAPTER I.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

In an old town in the north of Italy, which for convenience sake we will call Ronciglione, stood a palace which for centuries had belonged to the Counts Pontalto. The last count had died suddenly when his only son Giulio was but four years old, and the widowed young Countess was left as sole guardian of the boy and estates till he should attain his majority. The child was well grounded in the Catholic faith by his pious mother, and, as was then the custom, attended Catechism regularly in the church attached to the Jesuit College which stood on the Piazza nearly opposite his palace. At nine years of age he made his first confession, and soon after entered on his studies as day-boarder in the college where he received confirmation and First Communion at the age of eleven.

But all this was before the sad days which have seen the spread of secular colleges through Italy, and the consequent overthrow of faith and morality in the lives of her sons.

When Giulio was fourteen, the wave of destruction reached Ronciglione, and to the grief of the Countess the Jesuit Fathers were expelled from the college, which was handed over to secular professors; their church was taken from them, two secular priests being reckoned sufficient to carry up the services. Consequently there had to be greatly reduced, and earnestness in the clergy were in their labors. They could not give more than two daily Masses. With the lessening of opportunities for frequent attendance, excuses were readily found for its becoming infrequent, and with the necessary loss of dignity and numbers in the ceremonies of the Church, they became less attractive to the ignorant and the young of the flock, so that a general carelessness prevailed, and, in this condition, ridicule, sneers, and false statements easily penetrated unarméd souls, who gradually fell from bad to worse.

Among those who suffered was Giulio Pontalto. He inherited much of his father's nervous, impressionable character, and was at the age when a boy begins to take that independent stand, either for right or wrong, which often determines his future career.

The Father in charge of his camera, or division in the college, knew this well, and when the sad parting day came, said: "Remember, Giulio, you have received a gift which will supply all lack of my advice and warning if you will only listen to it. If it is true that the conscience we have at our birth makes cowards of us all it is because we forget that in our Confirmation it was enlightened by the Spirit of Counsel and refuse to attend to its voice." They parted, and Giulio felt as if with Father Ronconi went his sheet anchor, though he promised to keep to his religious duties and avoid getting drawn into the life of the professors outside the school.

At first all went well apparently. Giulio passed through the school routine daily and returned home. His companions were much the same as before, and the professor for his division was a singularly unattractive, studious man, who paid no attention to his boys outside the classroom. True, after a time the lad got used to hearing certain old college traditions sneered at as Jesuit superstitions, that they did not hold themselves, but forced on boys to keep them in slavish terror and abject submission. Giulio could not recall any sensation of "slavish terror" when he had uncapped to a Father and received a bright smile and nod in return, nor had he realized his abject submission when he knelt at the daily college Mass or in the Confessional before Feast days, but now he unconsciously got used to looking on such practices as things to be discarded with an advance in liberty of spirit and freethought, and when at seventeen he passed into the highest class he found himself in a still worse atmosphere.

The professor of rhetoric in his division was a certain Stefano Cipriani, comparatively young, though twice the age of Giulio. Particularly winning in his ways with lids and remarkably talented, he possessed a wonderful influence over the young fellows who were in their last year of studies. Before his appointment he was well known in the town as

having run through more money than his father, a wealthy vintner, could supply him with, and when bankruptcy, followed by suicide, which was just as the cardinal-vicar puts it in his pastoral letter for the month of the Holy Souls "becoming almost fashionable," ended his father's life, Stefano began to look about for a "professorship" to supply him with means to continue his career of luxury and gambling. The municipality of Ronciglione caught at him. Talents and attractive gifts all pointed him out as "the right man in the right place" according to their ideas, but the Countess and many other Catholic mothers wrung their hands and wept bitter tears as they thought of their innocent home boys exposed to such an influence day after day.

Up to this time Giulio had attended the week-day Mass in church with his mother occasionally, since the one at college had been discontinued, but now it gradually became a rare thing for him to be seen there with her even on days of obligation. Cipriani's winning voice always proposed a walk to a neighboring village, an excursion by rail to a near town, or a bath in a distant lake for Sundays and feast-days. The first time, when Giulio said, "I'll come as soon as I have been to the ten o'clock Mass with my mother," he was met by a pleasant laugh.

"As you like, my dear boy, but we can't wait for you, I promised to meet my friends in — by eleven, and the thing is impossible unless we leave here at nine. We can all go to the twelve o'clock Mass in town if you are troubled with scruples, but I advise you to begin and take your own line of action soon or you will be a suspected man for the rest of your life!"

A general laugh followed, and Giulio flushed and replied haughtily, "Oh! I am free now to please myself in those things, of course I don't wish to inconvenience others!"

As he went home that evening fully intending to go with them but to assist in the late Mass in the town they were to visit, he had an uncomfortable sensation of being dogged by some one behind him. It was a lovely summer evening, and the Italian crepuscule, or twilight, which follows so immediately on the evening "Ave" made it difficult to distinguish objects. As he went, Giulio was a nervous subject, and he felt a reluctance to look around; so it was only on running up the steps of the palazzo and turning sharp round to close the door after him, that he found himself face to face with a tall, spectral form, blacker than night. Round its figure was gathered a long, thick garment in heavy folds. The face was hardly visible, for one end of the cloak was thrown over the shoulder in Italian fashion and held well over it, but two piercing eyes seemed to fix the youth to the spot and read his inmost soul.

The hand was raised, and seemed to implore a hearing.

"Who are you?" said Giulio, breathless with fright.

"A friend," replied a deep voice. "Don't go to — tomorrow; you will lose Mass if you do. Your mother needs you. She has been ailing for some time, and you should give her your strong arm to church and back."

"Really," answered the boy in an offended tone, "my mother and I can arrange matters without any interference from you. Certainly I shall not go unless she agrees to it. Good night!" — and he endeavored to close the door once more, but found that the stranger, whoever he was, meant to come in, and entered quietly, saying: "I have some business with your mother also; but first I warn you again! — and this time the raised hand was threatening, and the eyes flashed—"It will be a decided step downhill if you go tomorrow, for you will miss a Mass of obligation for the first time in your life."

How did this strange figure know all about him? thought Giulio, and in his excited condition he shrunk back as the form passed quickly up stairs to the Countess's sitting-room, where Giulio had been wont to spend many happy hours in old times. Now he fled up another staircase instead, and paced up and down his room for an hour or more, while the stranger's voice rang in his ears: "Don't go!" At last, worn out by emotion, he flung himself on his bed, and was soon fast asleep and all unconscious of his mother's loving kiss when, tired of waiting for him, she came to look for him, but would not disturb him.

Next morning he came down late, took a cup of chocolate, and hurriedly kissing his mother said, "I shall not be with you for Mass this morn-

ing. Mother, I am going to walk to — and go to the twelve o'clock Mass there."

"Are you going with Stefano Cipriani?" asked his mother, anxiously.

"Yes, mother, and Enrico Gallo, Carlo Manotti, and some more of my set."

"Don't go yet, Giulio, wait for Mass with me, neither those boys nor Cipriani ever go to Mass, nor will you if you are with them."

Giulio drew off in an annoyed manner. "They are going with me today, at all events," he said triumphantly.

"Ah! they say so now, but you will see how it will be," said the poor Countess sadly, as she saw her tall, handsome boy run off, turning round to kiss his hand and laugh at her fears. "Don't creak, dear mother, I am not a baby; I can take care of my own soul."

In the charm of Cipriani's conversation Giulio soon forgot his last night's fears, and was still fully determined on going to Mass in — But when they reached the park where they were to meet with friends, there was no church in sight. So he whispered to the professor: "Excuse me for half an hour or so, I'll be back after Mass."

Cipriani only laughed good-naturedly, and said: "All right, good little boy! You'll find us at Mass at the restaurant opposite."

Giulio took no notice of the irreverent sneer, but hurried off. At the first church he came to, the late Mass had been at nine o'clock; at the next, there had been one at ten, and there he was told the only twelve o'clock Mass was at the Duomo, more than a mile distant, and even as the sacristan spoke the midday Angelus rang out. At that moment, as the lad stood in the cool shade of the doorway, the heavy leather curtain behind him seemed to move and he heard the voice that had warned him the night before say: "The late!" He looked round quickly, but saw no one, and with the words echoing in his ears he tore down the steps to reach his companions. They took no notice of his absence, except that one, when something unusually profane was said by one of them, Cipriani turned his finger in his lips, saying: "Hush! we're giving a Mass by here; he had no appetite for dinner till he had been through the ceremony. Did you serve Giulio, and which of your old friends the results did you find?"

Poor Giulio! He was only seventeen and could not stand this, so he burst out with an emphatic denial of having been at Mass at all, which was just what Cipriani wanted, as from that day he had no excuse for refusing to join in these excursions. In vain the Countess urged and pleaded with him to break off with the college set and come home in the evening and sit with her in the society and friendship of the few Catholic families whose sons remained untainted by the fatal influence at work. Once she told him of sermons being preached by a Jesuit Father in a church in another part of the town.

"I don't think you can ever have seen Father Zampini," she said; "he was at the college in your father's time, and married us." He used to visit here a good deal, for your father depended so much on his advice, and he was his confessor till he was sent on the mission to England. He was here this morning. You must have met him as you went to college, I think."

"Very likely, mother mine," said Giulio with an indifferent air; "I suppose he is much like other men though he is a Jesuit, but you must excuse me from listening to his sermons. Jesuits are out of date; their philosophy won't bear looking into, the human mind will no longer submit to be fettered, and in this age of free thought we cannot but laugh at the trammels our fathers bore so easily." So saying, he turned and left the room. His mother never mentioned Father Zampini's name to him again seeing it was useless.

But there was one friend he could not shake off, and that was the Ghost, as he had settled in his own mind the appearance must be. He only met it at rare intervals in the dusk of the afternoon as he left college, or the dark winter evenings as he came home. The were much the same always.

"Where are you going to?" the deep voice would say anxiously. "Don't you see how ill your mother is looking? Don't keep troubling her for money; why should you help Cipriani and his followers? You know they always win when you play!" Home truths, but unpleasant ones which were sometimes mingled with allusions to old college days and Father Ronconi, and served to keep

Giulio's conscience uneasy, and even sometimes to check him for a few days, but that was all.

CHAPTER II.

SOWING TO THE WIND.

Giulio's birthday was on New Year's Day, and in Italy, "Il capo d'anno," is, as everywhere, a great day of festivity. On the eve he remained till after midnight playing with his friends and losing money as usual. It was a clear moonlight night. The stars shone and danced like diamonds in the dark sky. Strange fantastic shadows were cast on the streets of the old town by the rays of the moon falling on churches, palaces, trees and fountains. Silence reigned, but here and there a light shone in some window telling of life within. Suddenly the stillness was broken by mirthful voices laughing, singing, and shouting by turns. A group of young men came quickly down the broad street and paused at the fountain in the Piazza. Here the noisy party separated. "Now we part but only for a few hours, Giulio, and then once more, 'buon anno' to us all."

Giulio stood alone in the moonlight. His handsome boyish face wore, as at the restless look which tells of innocence lost and a life bleached. His face was flushed, and his lips still parted by the smile with which he had answered his friends' parting words, but that smile faded, and suddenly he shuddered as at some fearful sight. Clenching his fist he motioned some one back who stood at his side, and ran quickly across the piazza to his home. But the ghost followed, never two steps behind him. Giulio entered without daring to look back, and banged the door behind him.

"I have got rid of this time," he said with a forced hollow laugh, "seizing a lamp from the hall table he hurried up stairs. His mother, tall, graceful, and sad looking, met him on the landing."

"Oh, Giulio, it is you at last. I have been watching for you to wish you a happy birthday and New Year. Where have you been so late?"

Giulio's face clouded, but he followed her to her room without answering, throwing himself on a sofa and closing his eyes. His mother looked anxiously at him, and placing her hand on his forehead said, "How it burns!"

He shook her off impatiently and muttered something about having run fast for fear of keeping her waiting up. It was a lie, and he flushed as he said it, and looking up saw standing behind a portiere that hung over one of the doors in the room and was at this moment raised by a thin, white hand, the ghost!

"This is unbearable!" he said between his teeth.

"My darling boy," said his mother, "what is unbearable? Young as you are, what should you know of sorrow, or indeed," she added with a sigh, "of sin? Where have you been that you find home unbearable?"

With friends, mother, Cipriani, Carlo, Enrico and the rest."

"Friends! do you call them friends?"

"Yes, mother, and dear ones too! By the way, they are young—at least Cipriani is—it is all his doing to give me a grand banquet tomorrow to fete my birthday and the 'capo d'anno.' There will be thirty of us, at least, and it is to be extra splendid, for Cipriani says he must do it to honor to the best student in the camera and his best friend."

His mother sighed. "Giulio, believe me, Cipriani is no friend for you. Before you were born he was old in vice. Many a fair, spotless soul, he has dragged down to his own vile level. May God and our Lady preserve you, for indeed, Giulio, you have made an evil, it may be a fatal choice in your friend. You are so young you know not half his wickedness which is all the more dangerous because he hides it under such a fascinating exterior. Be warned in time, for he is a hollow and heartless man!"

"Cipriani hollow and heartless! Mother, how can you say such things? He is the most generous, unselfish friend I have. Even now he is preparing such a fete for me as none of his friends have ever witnessed."

To be continued.

An Anti-Masonic journal is to be established in Germany. The Stuttgart Volksblatt announces that the first number will appear in January 1897.

Dr. John Rains, a well-known Manchester physician and formerly a leading light among Freemasons, has been received into the Church by Father Bernard Vaughan, S. J.

IRISH VALOR.

Edmund D. Whelan Writes From Enniscorthy of Ireland's Heroic Struggle at Vinegar Hill.

Sentiments Aroused by the Historic Scenes.

ENNISCORTHY, IRELAND.

Like most of the Irish towns Enniscorthy is well provided with schools and churches. It has a Loreto, Mercy, and Presentation convent. The latter is charmingly situated on a green slope, directly in view of the rock-crowned Vinegar Hill. The Christian Brothers conduct a well-attended school and have a beautiful new residence on the banks of the Slaney, and the Mission Fathers have a nice church and dwelling-house on another hill. What one admires, too, about Enniscorthy are the nice ranges of artisans' dwellings now taking the place of the old tumbledowns, which were an eye-sore to the approaches to the town. In this respect the merchants of Enniscorthy deserve to be congratulated, for while doing a good stroke of business they have rendered a patriotic duty to their country, in furnishing better habitations for the working classes. Well might they be held up for an example to other towns in Ireland. This humorous, plucky little town has made another step in advancement by furnishing itself with a club house called the Athletic Club, only built within the last three or four years. It contains two billiard rooms, a reading room and library, and has a fine, spacious hall for theatrical performances, in which "McCarthy," if he lived today, would have lots of room to dance. I had a look through the workhouse and saw a good deal of suffering humanity there. Here, attached to the hospital wards, are sixty or seventy idiots whom it is painful to look at—the largest number of such pitiful creatures I have seen at any institution of this sort in the country. The Sister who accompanied me could not account why so many poor, mentally diseased papers are found in the Enniscorthy poorhouse. The Sisters of St. John of God have charge of the hospital. Then just opposite, across the Slaney, is the lunatic asylum—an immense building, containing hundreds of lunatics, but evidently it is not big enough, for they are putting an addition to it. Doctors are puzzled about the cause of increased insanity in Ireland. They variously attribute it to excessive tea-drinking, whiskey, and the frequency of inter-marriage by blood relations. Perhaps all these causes combined contribute to the trouble. The two principal sources of employment in the town are Butler Brothers' bacon factory, a prosperous concern, and Davis' flour mills. These are energetic businessmen and are deservedly esteemed by the people.

A visitor to Enniscorthy feels somehow that he is in a town noted for mirth and rollicking fun, where they danced, sang, rollicked, and quaffed "mountain dew" until clear daylight in the morning, inspired by the mirth-provoking "McCarthy" who "held the floor" against all comers. But when one takes his stand on Vinegar Hill, just overhanging this historic town, what are his thoughts? Surely, he feels he is treading on historic ground. For there is no spot in Ireland more interesting under all its circumstances than Vinegar Hill—a spot associated with one of the most memorable armed efforts ever made for Ireland's freedom.

There is a glory about an Irish landscape on certain days, especially after rain, peculiar, it seems, to the Emerald Isle. The milky softness of the sky, contrasted with the deeper blue of the distant mountains, and still more with the nearer purple-clad hills and the intense foreground, which altogether produces the most beautiful combination in landscape it is possible to imagine. Such was the day I decided to climb Vinegar Hill. Behold that fair country spread out before you—green hills, valleys, rivers and mountains—all at their best, and each adding a charm to the whole picture. In place of siege train or cannon, as I walked up that rather steep road from the town, I saw a picturesque-looking Irishman with a pony and cart crying fresh fish(?) a corpulent old woman selling buttermilk and cabbage, and a chap about sixteen years of age with a belt holding up his rags, while he vigorously pulled a short pipe. No more warlike scenes around the famous hill than a few blooming women nursing babies and singing at their cottage doors, while a girl played "Make Haste to the Wedding" on a

concertina. Peace now reigns—with poverty it is true—where once were enacted scenes of strife, blood and carnage. The only sign of life on the famous hill, as I climbed up its side, was an old grey horse plucking away at the green grass, while a few ploughmen pursued their calling down to the valley. The approach to Vinegar Hill from the east side is gentle and sloping, while that from the west is more steep and rocky. The views of the surrounding country from the hill are varied and beautiful—in fact, no lovelier prospect might one behold. No wonder that the patriot's hearts were fired with love of country, when they beheld their beautiful but oppressed motherland from this noted hill. The most striking objects in the picture are the Blackstairs Mountains, White Mountains, Mount Leinster, the Wicklow Mountains, and the charming valley of the Slaney, with the town of Enniscorthy at the foot of the hill. On the summit of the hill is a dilapidated circular tower, beside which is cut in the green grass the words "Who fears to speak of Ninety-eight?" "God Save Ireland!"

The words were evidently carved by some ardent patriot, who in the absence of a better monument satisfied his heart's longing. It seems a shame for Irishmen that there is no monument on Vinegar Hill. The hill, which has several ledges of rock, is partly covered with a short growth of furze. But the prettiest view to be had here is when approaching the hill, between it and the Mission Fathers' house, to stand and look back—no fear of the fate of Lot's wife—and see the town and the beautiful Cathedral in the foreground, with Mount Leinster directly in the background. Truly it is a memorable, most interesting spot, this Vinegar Hill—a spot which suggests many thoughts to the visitor, especially if he has been reading John Mitche's "History of Ireland."

This interesting book was kindly presented to the writer by a kind, patriotic young clergyman of Enniscorthy. The story of Ireland is characteristically and graphically told by that rugged patriot. Here on this eventful hill, on that memorable June morning ninety-eight years ago, that brave army of insurgents vowed vengeance against the destroyers of their country. And little wonder. For here from their elevated position they beheld with dismay and horror the smoking ruins of the cabins and homes of their friends in the valleys below, from whence they could almost hear the wailing of women and children, who were being butchered by brutal soldiers and venal men, on every side crying to heaven for vengeance! It was at Vinegar Hill, on the 21st of June, 1798, that the insurgents awaited the approach of 13,000 British troops commanded by six English generals, at the head of which was General Lake, a cold-blooded, stern commander. Without ammunition or sufficient arms it was hardly surprising that an undisciplined body of peasantry had to yield before veteran troops, superior in number, well armed and disciplined. But the wonder is that the insurgents were able to make such an admirable retreat on Wexford which they occupied. After having been in possession of the Irish army for several weeks, Enniscorthy once more fell into the hands of the British troops, who pillaged the place and murdered many of the inhabitants. General Lake at the break of day disposed his attack in four columns. One of the columns (whether by accident or design is strongly debated) did not arrive in time at its station, by which the insurgents were enabled to retreat to Wexford through a country where they could not be pursued by cavalry or cannon. It was a foreshadowing what fortitude the peasantry uncovered stood the fire opened upon them from four sides of their position. A stream of shells were poured upon the multitude. The leaders encouraged them by exhortations, the women by their cries, and every shell that broke amongst them was followed by shouts of defiance. Surely here pulsated the heart of a nation!

EDMUND D. WHELAN

The bravery of a Capuchin, Father Adriano da Celaffo, in defending Armenians who took refuge in the house which he founded at Karput has been mentioned by the Consuls and is the subject of many eulogiums.

The cornerstone of the new St. Leonard's German Church, at Jefferson street and Hamburg avenue, Williamsburgh, Brooklyn, was laid by Bishop McDonnell Sunday afternoon in the presence of fully 5,000 persons.