

"That makes no difference; I am myself. I have *seen* this thing, and I belong to it."

There was silence again.

"You spoke just now of what Christ would have said——" Montanelli began slowly; but Arthur interrupted him:

"Christ said: 'He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.'"

Montanelli leaned his arm against a branch, and shaded his eyes with one hand.

"Sit down a moment, my son," he said at last.

Arthur sat down, and the Padre took both his hands in a strong and steady clasp.

"I cannot argue with you to-night," he said; "this has come upon me so suddenly—I had not thought—I must have time to think it over. Later on we will talk more definitely. But, for just now, I want you to remember one thing. If you get into trouble over this, if you—die, you will break my heart."

"Padre——"

"No; let me finish what I have to say. I told you once that I have no one in the world but you. I think you do not fully understand what that means. It is difficult when one is so young; at your age I should not have understood. Arthur, you are as my—as my—own son to me. Do you see? You are the light of my eyes and the desire of my heart. I would die to keep you from making a false step and ruining your life. But there is nothing I can do. I don't ask you to make any promises to me; I only ask you to remember this, and to be careful. Think well before you take an irrevocable step, for my sake, if not for the sake of your mother in heaven."

"I will think—and—Padre, pray for me, and for Italy."

He knelt down in silence, and in silence Montanelli laid his hand on the bent head. A moment later Arthur rose, kissed the hand, and went softly away across the dewy grass. Montanelli sat alone under the magnolia tree, looking straight before him into the blackness.

"It is the vengeance of God that has fallen upon me," he thought, "as it fell upon David. I, that have defiled His sanctuary, and taken the Body of the Lord into polluted hands,—He has been very patient with me, and now it is come. 'For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun; *the child that is born unto thee shall surely die.*'"

## CHAPTER II.

MR. JAMES BURTON did not at all like the idea of his young step-brother "careering about Switzerland" with Montanelli. But positively to forbid a harmless botanizing tour with an elderly professor of theology would seem to Arthur, who knew nothing of the reason for the prohibition, absurdly tyrannical. He would immediately attribute it to religious or racial prejudice; and the Burtons prided themselves on their enlightened tolerance. The whole family had been staunch Protestants and Conservatives ever since Burton & Sons, ship-owners, of London and Leghorn, had first set up in business, more than a century back. But they held that English gentlemen must deal fairly, even with Papists; and when the head of the house, finding it dull to remain a widower, had married

the pretty Catholic governess of his younger children, the two elder sons, James and Thomas, much as they resented the presence of a step-mother hardly older than themselves, had submitted with sulky resignation to the will of Providence. Since the father's death the eldest brother's marriage had further complicated an already difficult position; but both brothers had honestly tried to protect Gladys, as long as she lived, from Julia's merciless tongue, and to do their duty, as they understood it, by Arthur. They did not even pretend to like the lad, and their generosity towards him showed itself chiefly in providing him with lavish supplies of pocket money and allowing him to go his own way.

In answer to his letter, accordingly, Arthur received a cheque to cover his expenses and a cold permission to do as he pleased about his holidays. He expended half his spare cash on botanical books and pressing-cases, and started off with the Padre for his first Alpine ramble.

Montanelli was in lighter spirits than Arthur had seen him in for a long while. After the first shock of the conversation in the garden he had gradually recovered his mental balance, and now looked upon the case more calmly. Arthur was very young and inexperienced; his decision could hardly be, as yet, irrevocable. Surely there was still time to win him back by gentle persuasion and reasoning from the dangerous path upon which he had barely entered.

They had intended to stay a few days at Geneva; but at the first sight of the glaring white streets and dusty, tourist-crammed promenades, a little frown appeared on Arthur's face. Montanelli watched him with quiet amusement.

"You don't like it, carino?"

"I hardly know. It's so different from what I expected. Yes, the lake is beautiful, and I like the shape of those hills." They were standing on Rousseau's Island, and he pointed to the long, severe outlines of the Savoy side. "But the town looks so stiff and tidy, somehow—so Protestant; it has a self-satisfied air. No, I don't like it; it reminds me of Julia."

Montanelli laughed. "Poor boy, what a misfortune! Well, we are here for our own amusement, so there is no reason why we should stop. Suppose we take a sail on the lake to-day, and go up into the mountains to-morrow morning?"

"But, Padre, you wanted to stay here?"

"My dear boy, I have seen all these places a dozen times. My holiday is to see your pleasure. Where would you like to go?"

"If it is really the same to you, I should like to follow the river back to its source."

"The Rhone?"

"No, the Arve; it runs so fast."

"Then we will go to Chamonix."

They spent the afternoon drifting about in a little sailing boat. The beautiful lake produced far less impression upon Arthur than the gray and muddy Arve. He had grown up beside the Mediterranean, and was accustomed to blue ripples; but he had a positive passion for swiftly moving water, and the hurried rushing of the glacier stream delighted him beyond measure. "It is so much in earnest," he said.

Early on the following morning they started for Chamonix. Arthur was in very high spirits while driving through the fertile valley country; but when they entered upon the winding road near

Cluses, and the great, jagged hills closed in around them, he became serious and silent. From St. Martin they walked slowly up the valley, stopping to sleep at wayside châteaux or tiny mountain villages, and wandering on again as their fancy directed. Arthur was peculiarly sensitive to the influence of scenery, and the first waterfall that they passed threw him into an ecstasy which was delightful to see; but as they drew nearer to the snow-peaks he passed out of this rapturous mood into one of dreamy exaltation that Montanelli had not seen before. There seemed to be a kind of mystical relationship between him and the mountains. He would lie for hours motionless in the dark, secret, echoing pine-forests, looking out between the straight, tall trunks into the sunlit outer world of flashing peaks and barren cliffs. Montanelli watched him with a kind of sad envy.

"I wish you could show me what you see, carino," he said one day as he looked up from his book, and saw Arthur stretched beside him on the moss in the same attitude as an hour before, gazing out with wide, dilated eyes into the glittering expanse of blue and white. They had turned aside from the high-road to sleep at a quiet village near the falls of the Diosaz, and, the sun being already low in a cloudless sky, had mounted a point of pine-clad rock to wait for the Alpine glow over the dome and needles of the Mont Blanc chain. Arthur raised his head with eyes full of wonder and mystery.

"What I see, Padre? I see a great, white being in a blue void that has no beginning and no end. I see it waiting, age after age, for the coming of the Spirit of God. I see it through a glass darkly." Montanelli sighed.

"I used to see those things once."

"Do you never see them now?"

"Never. I shall not see them any more. They are there, I know; but I have not the eyes to see them. I see quite other things."

"What do you see?"

"I, carino? I see a blue sky and a snow-mountain—that is all when I look up into the heights. But down there it is different."

He pointed to the valley below them. Arthur knelt down and bent over the sheer edge of the precipice. The great pine trees, dusky in the gathering shades of evening, stood like sentinels along the narrow banks confining the river. Presently the sun, red as a glowing coal, dipped behind a jagged mountain peak, and all the life and light deserted the face of nature. Straightway there came upon the valley something dark and threatening—sullen, terrible, full of spectral weapons. The perpendicular cliffs of the barren western mountains seemed like the teeth of a monster lurking to snatch a victim and drag him down into the maw of the deep valley, black with its moaning forests. The pine trees were rows of knife-blades whispering: "Fall upon us!" and in the gathering darkness the torrent roared and howled, beating against its rocky prison walls with the frenzy of an everlasting despair.

"Padre!" Arthur rose, shuddering, and drew back from the precipice. "It is like hell."

"No, my son," Montanelli answered softly, "it is only like a human soul."

"The souls of them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death?"

"The souls of them that pass you day by day in the street."

Arthur shivered, looking down into the shadows. A dim white mist was hovering among the pine trees, clinging faintly about the desperate agony of the torrent, like a miserable ghost that had no consolation to give.

"Look!" Arthur said suddenly. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light."

Eastwards the snow-peaks burned in the after-glow. When the red light had faded from the summits Montanelli turned and roused Arthur with a touch on the shoulder.

"Come in, carino; all the light is gone. We shall lose our way in the dark if we stay any longer."

"It is like a corpse," Arthur said as he turned away from the spectral face of the great snow-peak glimmering through the twilight.

They descended cautiously among the black trees to the *châlet* where they were to sleep.

As Montanelli entered the room where Arthur was waiting for him at the supper table, he saw that the lad seemed to have shaken off the ghostly fancies of the dark, and to have changed into quite another creature.

"Oh, Padre, do come and look at this absurd dog! It can dance on its hind legs."

He was as much absorbed in the dog and its accomplishments as he had been in the after-glow. The woman of the *châlet*, red-faced and white-aproned, with sturdy arms akimbo, stood by smiling, while he put the animal through its tricks. "One can see there's not much on his mind if he can carry on that way," she said in patois to her daughter. "And what a handsome lad!"

Arthur coloured like a schoolgirl, and the

woman, seeing that he had understood, went away laughing at his confusion. At supper he talked of nothing but plans for excursions, mountain ascents, and botanizing expeditions. Evidently his dreamy fancies had not interfered with either his spirits or his appetite.

When Montanelli awoke the next morning Arthur had disappeared. He had started before day-break for the higher pastures "to help Gaspard drive up the goats."

Breakfast had not long been on the table, however, when he came tearing into the room, hatless, with a tiny peasant girl of three years old perched on his shoulder, and a great bunch of wild flowers in his hand.

Montanelli looked up, smiling. This was a curious contrast to the grave and silent Arthur of Pisa or Leghorn.

"Where have you been, you madcap? Scampering all over the mountains without any breakfast?"

"Oh, Padre, it was so jolly! The mountains look perfectly glorious at sunrise; and the dew is so thick! Just look!"

He lifted for inspection a wet and muddy boot.

"We took some bread and cheese with us, and got some goat's milk up there on the pasture; oh, it was nasty! But I'm hungry again, now; and I want something for this little person, too. Annette, won't you have some honey?"

He had sat down with the child on his knee, and was helping her to put the flowers in order.

"No, no!" Montanelli interposed. "I can't have you catching cold. Run and change your wet things. Come to me, Annette. Where did you pick her up?"

"At the top of the village. She belongs to the man we saw yesterday—the man that cobbles the commune's boots. Hasn't she lovely eyes? She's got a tortoise in her pocket, and she calls it 'Caroline.'"

When Arthur had changed his wet socks and came down to breakfast he found the child seated on the Padre's knee, chattering volubly to him about her tortoise, which she was holding upside down in a chubby hand, that "monsieur" might admire the wriggling legs.

"Look, monsieur!" she was saying gravely in her half-intelligible patois: "Look at Caroline's boots!"

Montanelli sat playing with the child, stroking her hair, admiring her darling tortoise, and telling her wonderful stories. The woman of the chalet, coming in to clear the table, stared in amazement at the sight of Annette turning out the pockets of the grave gentleman in clerical dress.

"God teaches the little ones to know a good man," she said. "Annette is always afraid of strangers; and see, she is not shy with his reverence at all. The wonderful thing! Kneel down, Annette, and ask the good monsieur's blessing before he goes; it will bring thee luck."

"I didn't know you could play with children that way, Padre," Arthur said an hour later, as they walked through the sunlit pasture-land. "That child never took her eyes off you all the time. Do you know, I think——"

"Yes?"

"I was only going to say—it seems to me almost a pity that the Church should forbid priests to marry. I cannot quite understand why. You

see, the training of children is such a serious thing, and it means so much to them to be surrounded from the very beginning with good influences, that I should have thought the holier a man's vocation and the purer his life, the more fit he is to be a father. I am sure, Padre, if you had not been under a vow,—if you had married,—your children would have been the very——"

"Hush!"

The word was uttered in a hasty whisper that seemed to deepen the ensuing silence.

"Padre," Arthur began again, distressed by the other's sombre look, "do you think there is anything wrong in what I said? Of course I may be mistaken; but I must think as it comes natural to me to think."

"Perhaps," Montanelli answered gently, "you do not quite realize the meaning of what you just said. You will see differently in a few years. Meanwhile we had better talk about something else."

It was the first break in the perfect ease and harmony that reigned between them on this ideal holiday.

From Chamonix they went on by the Tête-Noire to Martigny, where they stopped to rest, as the weather was stifflingly hot. After dinner they sat on the terrace of the hotel, which was sheltered from the sun and commanded a good view of the mountains. Arthur brought out his specimen box and plunged into an earnest botanical discussion in Italian.

Two English artists were sitting on the terrace; one sketching, the other lazily chatting. It did not seem to have occurred to him that the strangers might understand English.

"Leave off daubing at the landscape, Willie," he said; "and draw that glorious Italian boy going into ecstasies over those bits of ferns. Just look at the line of his eyebrows! You only need to put a crucifix for the magnifying-glass and a Roman toga for the jacket and knickerbockers, and there's your Early Christian complete, expression and all."

"Early Christian be hanged! I sat beside that youth at dinner; he was just as ecstatic over the roast fowl as over those grubby little weeds. He's pretty enough; that olive colouring is beautiful; but he's not half so picturesque as his father."

"His—who?"

"His father, sitting there straight in front of you. Do you mean to say you've passed him over? It's a perfectly magnificent face."

"Why, you dunder-headed, go-to-meeting Methodist! Don't you know a Catholic priest when you see one?"

"A priest? By Jove, so he is! Yes, I forgot; vow of chastity, and all that sort of thing. Well then, we'll be charitable and suppose the boy's his nephew."

"What idiotic people!" Arthur whispered, looking up with dancing eyes. "Still, it is kind of them to think me like you; I wish I were really your nephew— Padre, what is the matter? How white you are!"

Montanelli was standing up, pressing one hand to his forehead. "I am a little giddy," he said in a curiously faint, dull tone. "Perhaps I was too much in the sun this morning. I will go and lie down, carino; it's nothing but the heat."

After a fortnight beside the Lake of Lucerne

Arthur and Montanelli returned to Italy by the St. Gothard Pass. They had been fortunate as to weather and had made several very pleasant excursions; but the first charm was gone out of their enjoyment. Montanelli was continually haunted by an uneasy thought of the "more definite talk" for which this holiday was to have been the opportunity. In the Arve valley he had purposely put off all reference to the subject of which they had spoken under the magnolia tree; it would be cruel, he thought, to spoil the first delights of Alpine scenery for a nature so artistic as Arthur's by associating them with a conversation which must necessarily be painful. Ever since the day at Martigny he had said to himself each morning: "I will speak to-day," and each evening: "I will speak to-morrow;" and now the holiday was over, and he still repeated again and again: "To-morrow, to-morrow." A chill, indefinable sense of something not quite the same as it had been, of an invisible veil falling between himself and Arthur, kept him silent, until, on the last evening of their holiday, he realized suddenly that he must speak now if he would speak at all. They were stopping for the night at Lugano, and were to start for Pisa next morning. He would at least find out how far his darling had been drawn into the fatal quicksand of Italian politics.

"The rain has stopped, carino," he said after sunset; "and this is the only chance we shall have to see the lake. Come out; I want to have a talk with you."

They walked along the water's edge to a quiet spot and sat down on a low stone wall. Close beside them grew a rose-bush, covered with scar-

let hips; one or two belated clusters of creamy blossom still hung from an upper branch, swaying mournfully and heavy with raindrops. On the green surface of the lake a little boat, with white wings faintly fluttering, rocked in the dewy breeze. It looked as light and frail as a tuft of silvery dandelion seed flung upon the water. High up on Monte Salvatore the window of some shepherd's hut opened a golden eye. The roses hung their heads and dreamed under the still September clouds, and the water plashed and murmured softly among the pebbles of the shore.

"This will be my only chance of a quiet talk with you for a long time," Montanelli began. "You will go back to your college work and friends; and I, too, shall be very busy this winter. I want to understand quite clearly what our position as regards each other is to be; and so, if you——" He stopped for a moment and then continued more slowly: "If you feel that you can still trust me as you used to do, I want you to tell me more definitely than that night in the seminary garden, how far you have gone."

Arthur looked out across the water, listened quietly, and said nothing.

"I want to know, if you will tell me," Montanelli went on; "whether you have bound yourself by a vow, or—in any way."

"There is nothing to tell, dear Padre; I have not bound myself, but I am bound."

"I don't understand——"

"What is the use of vows? They are not what binds people. If you feel in a certain way about a thing, that binds you to it; if you don't feel that way, nothing else can bind you."

"Do you mean, then, that this thing—this—

feeling is quite irrevocable? Arthur, have you thought what you are saying?"

Arthur turned round and looked straight into Montanelli's eyes.

"Padre, you asked me if I could trust you. Can you not trust me, too? Indeed, if there were anything to tell, I would tell it to you; but there is no use in talking about these things. I have not forgotten what you said to me that night; I shall never forget it. But I must go my way and follow the light that I see."

Montanelli picked a rose from the bush, pulled off the petals one by one, and tossed them into the water.

"You are right, carino. Yes, we will say no more about these things; it seems there is indeed no help in many words—— Well, well, let us go in."

### CHAPTER III.

THE autumn and winter passed uneventfully. Arthur was reading hard and had little spare time. He contrived to get a glimpse of Montanelli once or oftener in every week, if only for a few minutes. From time to time he would come in to ask for help with some difficult book; but on these occasions the subject of study was strictly adhered to. Montanelli, feeling, rather than observing, the slight, impalpable barrier that had come between them, shrank from everything which might seem like an attempt to retain the old close relationship. Arthur's visits now caused him more distress than pleasure, so trying was the constant effort to appear at ease and to behave as