

In the Confessional

By Amelia B. Edwards

The things of which I write befell—let me see, some fifteen or eighteen years ago. I was not young then; I am not old now. Perhaps I was about thirty-two; but I do not know my age very exactly, and I cannot be certain to a year or two one way or the other.

My manner of life at that time was desultory and unsettled. I had a sorrow—no matter of what kind—and I took to rambling about Europe; not certainly in the hope of forgetting it, for I had no wish to forget, but because of the restlessness that made one place after another *triste* and intolerable to me.

It was change of place, however, and not excitement, that I sought. I kept almost entirely aloof from great cities, Spas, and beaten tracks, and preferred for the most part to explore districts where travellers and foreigners rarely penetrated.

Such a district at that time was the Upper Rhine. I was traversing it that particular Summer for the first time, and on foot; and I had set myself to trace the course of the river from its source in the great Rhine glacier to its fall at Schaffhatsen. Having done this, however, I was unwilling to part company with the noble river; so I decided to follow it yet a few miles farther—perhaps as far as Mayence, but at all events as far as Basle.

And now began, if not the finest, certainly not the least charming part of my journey. Here, it is true, were neither Alps, nor glaciers, nor ruined castles perched on inaccessible crags; but my way lay through a smiling country, studded with picturesque hamlets, and beside a bright river, hurrying along over swirling rapids, and under the dark arches of antique covered bridges, and between hill-sides garlanded with vines.

It was towards the middle of a long day's walk among such scenes as these that I came to Rheinfelden, a small place on the left bank of the river, about fourteen miles above Basle.

As I came down the white road in the blinding sunshine, with the vines on either hand, I saw the town lying low on the opposite bank of the Rhine. It was an old walled town, enclosed on the land side and open to the river, the houses going sheer down to the water's edge, with flights of slimy steps worn smooth by the wash of the current, and overhanging eaves, and little built-out rooms with pent-house roofs, supported from below by jutting piles black with age and tapestried with water-weeds. The stunted towers of a couple of churches stood up from amid the brown and tawny roofs within the walls.

Beyond the town, height above height, stretched a distance of wooded hills. The old covered bridge, divided by a bit of rocky island in the middle of the stream, led from bank to bank—from Germany to Switzerland. The town was in Switzerland; I, looking towards it from the road, stood on Baden territory; the river ran sparkling and foaming between.

I crossed, and found the place all alive in anticipation of a Kermess, or fair, that was to be held there the next day but one. The townsfolk were all out in the streets or standing about their doors; and there were carpenters hard at work knocking up rows of wooden stands and stalls the whole length of the principal thoroughfare. Shop-signs in open-work of wrought iron hung over the doors. A runlet of sparkling water babbled down a stone channel in the middle of the street. At almost every other house (to judge by the rows of tarnished watches hanging in the dingy parlour windows), there lived a watchmaker; and presently I came to a fountain—a regular Swiss

fountain, spouting water from four ornamental pipes, and surmounted by the usual armed knight in old grey stone.

As I rambled on thus (looking for an inn, but seeing none), I suddenly found that I had reached the end of the street, and with it the limit of the town on this side. Before me rose a lofty, picturesque old gate-tower, with a tiled roof and a little window over the archway; and there was a peep of green grass and golden sunshine beyond. The town walls (sixty or seventy feet in height, and curiously roofed with a sort of projecting shed on the inner side) curved away to right and left, unchanged since the Middle Ages. A rude wain, laden with clover and drawn by mild-eyed, cream-coloured oxen, stood close by in the shade.

I passed out through the gloom of the archway into the sunny space beyond. The moat outside the walls was bridged over and filled in—a green ravine of grasses and wild-flowers. A stork had built its nest on the roof of the gate-tower. The cicadas shrilled in the grass. The shadows lay sleeping under the trees, and a family of cocks and hens went plodding inquisitively to and fro among the cabbages in the adjacent field. Just beyond the moat, with only this field between, stood a little solitary church—a church with a wooden porch, and a quaint, bright-red steeple, and a churchyard like a rose-garden, full of colour and perfume, and scattered over with iron crosses wreathed with immortelles.

The churchyard gate and the church door stood open. I went in. All was clean, and simple, and very poor. The walls were whitewashed; the floor was laid with red bricks; the roof raftered. A tiny confessional like a sentry-box stood in one corner; the font was covered with a lid like a wooden steeple; and over the altar, upon which stood a pair of battered brass candlesticks and two vases of artificial flowers, hung a daub of the Holy Family, in oils.

All here was so cool, so quiet, that I sat down for a few moments and rested. Presently an old peasant woman trudged up the church-path with a basket of vegetables on her head. Having set this down in the porch, she came in, knelt before the altar, said her simple prayers, and went her way.

Was it not time for me also to go my way? I looked at my watch. It was past four o'clock, and I had not yet found a lodging for the night.

I got up, somewhat unwillingly; but, attracted by a tablet near the altar, crossed over to look at it before leaving the church. It was a very small slab, and bore a very brief German inscription to this effect:—

To The Sacred Memory
Of
THE REVEREND PERE CHESSEZ,
For twenty years the beloved Pastor of this Parish.
Died April 16th, 1825. Aged 44.
HE LIVED A SAINT; HE DIED A MARTYR.

I read it over twice, wondering idly what story was wrapped up in the concluding line. Then, prompted by a childish curiosity, I went up to examine the confessional.

It was, as I have said, about the size of a sentry-box, and was painted to imitate old dark oak. On the one side was a narrow door with a black handle, on the other a little opening like a ticket-taker's window, closed on the inside by a faded green curtain.

I know not what foolish fancy possessed me, but, almost without considering what I was doing, I turned the handle and opened the door. Opened it—peeped in—found the priest sitting in his place—started back as if I had been shot—and stammered an unintelligible apology.

“I—I beg a thousand pardons,” I exclaimed. “I had no idea— seeing the church empty—”

He was sitting with averted face, and clasped hands lying idly in his lap—a tall, gaunt man, dressed in a black soutane. When I paused, and not till then, he slowly, very slowly, turned his head, and looked me in the face.

The light inside the confessional was so dim that I could not see his features very plainly. I only observed that his eyes were large, and bright, and wild-looking, like the eyes of some fierce animal, and that his face, with the reflection of the green curtain upon it, looked lividly pale.

For a moment we remained thus, gazing at each other, as if fascinated. Then, finding that he made no reply, but only stared at me with those strange eyes, I stepped hastily back, shut the door without another word, and hurried out of the church.

I was very much disturbed by this little incident; more disturbed, in truth, than seemed reasonable, for my nerves for the moment were shaken. Never, I told myself, never while I lived could I forget that fixed attitude and stony face, or the glare of those terrible eyes. What was the man’s history? Of what secret despair, of what life-long remorse, of what wild unsatisfied longings was he the victim? I felt I could not rest till I had learned something of his past life.

Full of these thoughts, I went on quickly into the town, half running across the field, and never looking back. Once past the gateway and inside the walls, I breathed more freely. The wain was still standing in the shade, but the oxen were gone now, and two men were busy forking out the clover into a little yard close by. Having inquired of one of these regarding an inn, and being directed to the Krone, “over against the Frauenkirche,” I made my way to the upper part of the town, and there, at one corner of a forlorn, weed-grown market-place, I found my hostelry.

The landlord, a sedate, bald man in spectacles, who, as I presently discovered, was not only an inn-keeper but a clock-maker, came out from an inner room to receive me. His wife, a plump, pleasant body, took my orders for dinner. His pretty daughter showed me to my room. It was a large, low, whitewashed room, with two lattice windows overlooking the market-place, two little beds, covered with puffy red eiderdowns at the farther end, and an army of clocks and ornamental timepieces arranged along every shelf, table, and chest of drawers in the room. Being left here to my meditations, I sat down and counted these companions of my solitude.

Taking little and big together, Dutch clocks, cuckoo clocks, *châlet* clocks, skeleton clocks, and *pendules* in ormolu, bronze, marble, ebony, and alabaster cases, there were exactly thirty-two. Twenty-eight were going merrily. As no two among them were of the same opinion as regarded the time, and as several struck the quarters as well as the hours, the consequence was that one or other gave tongue about every five minutes. Now, for a light and nervous sleeper such as I was at that time, here was a lively prospect for the night!

Going downstairs presently with the hope of getting my landlady to assign me a quieter room, I passed two eight-day clocks on the landing, and a third at the foot of the stairs. The public room was equally well-stocked. It literally bristled with clocks, one of which played a spasmodic version of Gentle Zitella with variations every quarter of an hour. Here I found a little table prepared by the open window, and a dish of trout and a flask of country wine awaiting me. The pretty daughter waited upon me; her mother bustled to and fro with the dishes; the landlord stood by, and beamed upon me through his spectacles.

“The trout were caught this morning, about two miles from here,” he said, complacently.

“They are excellent,” I replied, filling him out a glass of wine, and helping myself to another. “Your health, Herr Wirth.”

“Thanks, mein Herr—yours.”

Just at this moment two clocks struck at opposite ends of the room—one twelve, and the other seven. I ventured to suggest that mine host was tolerably well reminded of the flight of time; whereupon he explained that his work lay chiefly in the repairing and regulating line, and that at that present moment he had no less than one hundred and eighteen clocks of various sorts and sizes on the premises.

“Perhaps the Herr Englander is a light sleeper,” said his quick-witted wife, detecting my dismay. “If so, we can get him a bedroom elsewhere. Not, perhaps, in the town, for I know no place where he would be as comfortable as with ourselves; but just outside the Friedrich’s Thor, not five minutes’ walk from our door.”

I accepted the offer gratefully.

“So long,” I said, “as I ensure cleanliness and quiet, I do not care how homely my lodgings may be.”

“Ah, you’ll have both, mein Herr, if you go where my wife is thinking of,” said the landlord. “It is at the house of our pastor—the Père Chessez.”

“The Père Chessez!” I exclaimed. “What, the pastor of the little church out yonder?”

“The same, mein Herr.”

“But—but surely the Père Chessez is dead! I saw a tablet to his memory in the chancel.”

“Nay, that was our pastor’s elder brother,” replied the landlord, looking grave. “He has been gone these thirty years and more. His was a tragical ending.”

But I was thinking too much of the younger brother just then to feel any curiosity about the elder; and I told myself that I would put up with the companionship of any number of clocks, rather than sleep under the same roof with that terrible face and those unearthly eyes.

“I saw your pastor just now in the church,” I said, with apparent indifference. “He is a singular-looking man.”

“He is too good for this world,” said the landlady.

“He is a saint upon earth!” added the pretty Fräulein.

“He is one of the best of men,” said, more soberly, the husband and father. “I only wish he was less of a saint. He fasts, and prays, and works beyond his strength. A little more beef and a little less devotion would be all the better for him.”

“I should like to hear something more about the life of so good a man,” said I, having by this time come to the end of my simple dinner. “Come, Herr Wirth, let us have a bottle of your best, and then sit down and tell me your pastor’s history!”

The landlord sent his daughter for a bottle of the “green seal,” and, taking a chair, said:—

“Ach Himmel! mein Herr, there is no history to tell. The good father has lived here all his life. He is one of us. His father, Johann Chessez, was a native of Rheinfelden and kept this very inn. He was a wealthy farmer and vine-grower. He had only those two sons—Nicholas, who took to the church and became pastor of Feldkirche; and this one, Matthias, who was intended to inherit the business; but who also entered religion after the death of his elder brother, and is now pastor of the same parish.”

“But why did he ‘enter religion?’ ” I asked. “Was he in any way to blame for the accident (if it was an accident) that caused the death of his elder brother?”

“Ah Heavens! no!” exclaimed the landlady, leaning on the back of her husband’s chair. “It was the shock—the shock that told so terribly upon his poor nerves! He was but a lad at that time, and as sensitive as a girl—but the Herr Englander does not know the story. Go on, my husband.”

So the landlord, after a sip of the “green seal,” continued:—

“At the time my wife alludes to, mein Herr, Johann Chessez was still living. Nicholas, the elder son, was in holy orders and established in the parish of Feldkirche, outside the walls; and Matthias, the younger, was a lad of about fourteen years old, and lived with his father. He was an amiable good boy—pious and thoughtful—fonder of his books than of the business. The neighbour-folk used to say even then that Matthias was cut out for a priest, like his elder brother. As for Nicholas, he was neither more nor less than a saint. Well, mein Herr, at this time there lived on the other side of Rheinfelden, about a mile beyond the Basel Thor, a farmer named Caspar Rufenacht and his wife Margaret. Now Caspar Rufenacht was a jealous, quarrelsome fellow; and the Frau Margaret was pretty; and he led her a devil of a life. It was said that he used to beat her when he had been drinking, and that sometimes, when he went to fair or market, he would lock her up for the whole day in a room at the top of the house. Well, this poor, ill-used Frau Margaret—”

“Tut, tut, my man,” interrupted the landlady. “The Frau Margaret was a light one!”

“Peace, wife! Shall we speak hard words of the dead? The Frau Margaret was young and pretty, and a flirt; and she had a bad husband, who left her too much alone.”

The landlady pursed up her lips and shook her head, as the best of Women will do when the character of another woman is under discussion. The inn-keeper went on.

“Well, mein Herr, to cut a long story short, after having been jealous first of one and then of another, Caspar Rufenacht became furious about a certain German, a Badener named Schmidt, living on the opposite bank of the Rhine. I remember the man quite well—a handsome, merry fellow, and no saint; just the sort to make mischief between man and wife. Well, Caspar Rufenacht swore a great oath that, cost what it might, he would come at the truth about his wife and Schmidt; so he laid all manner of plots to surprise them—waylaid the Frau Margaret in her walks; followed her at a distance when she went to church; came home at unexpected hours; and played the spy as if he had been brought up to the trade. But his spying was all in vain. Either the Frau Margaret was too clever for him, or there was really nothing to discover; but still he was not satisfied. So he cast about for some way to attain his end, and, by the help of the Evil One, he found it.”

Here the innkeeper’s wife and daughter, who had doubtless heard the story a hundred times over, drew near and listened breathlessly.

“What, think you,” continued the landlord, “does this black-souled Caspar do? Does he punish the poor woman within an inch of her life, till she confesses? No. Does he charge Schmidt with having tempted her from her duty, and fight it out with him like a man? No. What else then? I will tell you. He waits till the vigil of St. Margaret—her saint’s day—when he knows the poor sinful soul is going to confession; and he marches straight to the house of the Père Chessez—the very house where our own Père Chessez is now living—and he finds the good priest at his devotions in his little study, and he says to him:

“ ‘Father Chessez, my wife is coming to the church this afternoon to make her confession to you.’

“ ‘She is,’ replies the priest.

“ ‘I want you to tell me all she tells you,’ says Caspar; and I will wait here till you come back from the church, that I may hear it. Will you do so?’

“ ‘Certainly not,’ replies the Père Chessez. ‘You must surely know, Caspar, that we priests are forbidden to reveal the secrets of the confessional.’

“ ‘That is nothing to me,’ says Caspar, with an oath. ‘I am resolved to know whether my wife is guilty or innocent; and know it I will, by fair means or foul.’

“ ‘You shall never know it from me, Caspar,’ says the Père Chessez, very quietly.

“ ‘Then, by Heavens!’ says Caspar, ‘I’ll learn it for myself.’ And with that he pulls out a heavy horse-pistol from his pocket, and with the butt end of it deals the Père Chessez a tremendous blow upon the head, and then another, and another, till the poor young man lay senseless at his feet. Then Caspar, thinking he had quite killed him, dressed himself in the priest’s own soutane and hat; locked the door; put the key in his pocket; and stealing round the back way into the church, shut himself up in the confessional.”

“Then the priest died!” I exclaimed, remembering the epitaph upon the tablet.

“Ay, mein Herr—the Père Chessez died; but not before he had told the story of his assassination, and identified his murderer.”

“And Caspar Rufenacht, I hope, was hanged?”

“Wait a bit, mein Herr, we have not come to that yet. We left Caspar in the confessional, waiting for his wife.”

“And she came?”

“Yes, poor soul! she came.”

“And made her confession?”

“And made her confession, mein Herr.”

“What did she confess?”

The innkeeper shook his head.

“That no one ever knew, save the good God and her murderer.”

“Her murderer!” I exclaimed.

“Ay, just that. Whatever it was that she confessed, she paid for it with her life. He heard her out, at all events, without discovering himself, and let her go home believing that she had received absolution for her sins. Those who met her that afternoon said she seemed unusually bright and happy. As she passed through the town, she went into the shop in the Mongarten Strasse, and bought some ribbons. About half an hour later, my own father met her outside the Basel Thor, walking briskly homewards. He was the last who saw her alive.

“That evening (it was in October, and the days were short), some travellers coming that way into the town heard shrill cries, as of a woman screaming, in the direction of Caspar’s farm. But the night was very dark, and the house lay back a little way from the road; so they told themselves it was only some drunken peasant quarrelling with his wife, and passed on. Next morning Caspar Rufenacht came to Rheinfelden, walked very quietly into the Polizei, and gave himself up to justice.

“ ‘I have killed my wife,’ said he. ‘I, have killed the Père Chessez. And I have committed sacrilege.’

“And so, indeed, it was. As for the Frau Margaret, they found her body in an upper chamber, well-nigh hacked to pieces, and the hatchet with which the murder was committed lying beside her on the floor. He had pursued her, apparently, from room to room; for there were pools of blood and handfuls of long light hair, and marks of bloody hands along the walls, all the way from the kitchen to the spot where she lay dead.”

“And so he was hanged?” said I, coming back to my original question.

“Yes, yes,” replied the innkeeper and his womankind in chorus. “He was hanged—of course he was hanged.”

“And it was the shock of this double tragedy that drove the younger Chessez into the church?”

“Just so, mein Herr.”

“Well, he carries it in his face. He looks like a most unhappy man.”

“Nay, he is not that, mein Herr!” exclaimed the landlady. “He is melancholy, but not unhappy.”

“Well, then, austere.”

“Nor is he austere, except towards himself.”

“True, wife,” said the innkeeper; “but, as I said, he carries that sort of thing too far. You understand, mein Herr,” he added, touching his forehead with his forefinger, “the good pastor has let his mind dwell too much upon the past. He is nervous—too nervous, and too low.”

I saw it all now. That terrible light in his eyes was the light of insanity. That stony look in his face was the fixed, hopeless melancholy of a mind diseased.

“Does he know that he is mad?” I asked, as the landlord rose to go.

He shrugged his shoulders and looked doubtful.

“I have not said that the Père Chessez is *mad*, mein Herr,” he replied. “He has strange fancies sometimes, and takes his fancies for facts—that is all. But I am quite sure that he does not believe himself to be less sane than his neighbours.”

So the innkeeper left me, and I (my head full of the story I had just heard) put on my hat, went out into the marketplace, asked my way to the Basel Thor, and set off to explore the scene of the Frau Margaret’s murder.

I found it without difficulty—a long, low-fronted, beetle-browed farm-house, lying back a meadow’s length from the road. There were children playing upon the threshold, a flock of turkeys gobbling about the barn-door, and a big dog sleeping outside his kennel close by. The chimneys, too, were smoking merrily. Seeing these signs of life and cheerfulness, I abandoned all idea of asking to go over the house. I felt that I had no right to carry my morbid curiosity into this peaceful home; so I turned away, and retraced my steps towards Rheinfelden.

It was not yet seven, and the sun had still an hour’s course to run. I re-entered the town, strolled back through the Street, and presently came again to the Friedrich’s Thor and the path leading to the church. An irresistible impulse seemed to drag me back to the place.

Shudderingly, and with a sort of dread that was half longing, I pushed open the churchyard gate and went in. The doors were closed; a goat was browsing among the graves; and the rushing of the Rhine, some three hundred yards away, was distinctly audible in the silence. I looked round for the priest’s house—the scene of the first murder; but from this side, at all events, no house was visible. Going round, however, to the back of the church, I saw a gate, a box-bordered path, and, peeping through some trees, a chimney and the roof of a little brown-tiled house.

This, then, was the path along which Caspar Rufenacht, with the priest’s blood upon his hands and the priest’s gown upon his shoulders, had taken his guilty way to the confessional! How quiet it all looked in the golden evening light! How like the church-path of an English parsonage!

I wished I could have seen something more of the house than that bit of roof and that one chimney. There must, I told myself, be some other entrance—some way round by the road! Musing and lingering thus, I was startled by a quiet voice close against my shoulder, saying:—

“A pleasant evening, mein Herr!”

I turned, and found the priest at my elbow. He had come noiselessly across the grass, and was standing between me and the sunset, like a shadow.

“I—I beg your pardon,” I stammered, moving away from the gate. “I was looking—”

I stopped in some surprise, and indeed with some sense of relief, for it was not the same priest that I had seen in the morning. No two, indeed, could well be more unlike, for this man was small, white-haired, gentle-looking, with a soft, sad smile inexpressibly sweet and winning.

“You were looking at my arbutus?” he said.

I had scarcely observed the arbutus till now, but I bowed and said something to the effect that it was an unusually fine tree.

“Yes,” he replied; “but I have a rhododendron round at the front that is still finer. Will you come in and see it?”

I said I should be pleased to do so. He led the way, and I followed.

“I hope you like this part of our Rhine-country?” he said, as we took the path through the shrubbery.

“I like it so well,” I replied, “that if I were to live anywhere on the banks of the Rhine, I should certainly choose some spot on the Upper Rhine between Schaffhausen and Basle.”

“And you would be right,” he said.

“Nowhere is the river so beautiful. Nearer the glaciers it is milky and turbid—beyond Basle it soon becomes muddy. Here we have it blue as the sky—sparkling as champagne. Here is my rhododendron. It stands twelve feet high, and measures as many in diameter. I had more than two hundred blooms upon it last Spring.”

When I had duly admired this giant shrub, he took me to a little arbour on a bit of steep green bank overlooking the river, where he invited me to sit down and rest. From hence I could see the porch and part of the front of his little house; but it was all so closely planted round with trees and shrubs that no clear view of it seemed obtainable in any direction. Here we sat for some time chatting about the weather, the approaching vintage, and so forth, and watching the sunset. Then I rose to take my leave.

“I heard of you this evening at the Krone, mein Herr,” he said. “You were out, or I should have called upon you. I am glad that chance has made us acquainted. Do you remain over tomorrow?”

“No; I must go on tomorrow to Basle,” I answered. And then, hesitating a little, I added:—“you heard of me, also, I fear, in the church.”

“In the church?” he repeated.

“Seeing the door open, I went in—from curiosity—as a traveller; just to look round for a moment and rest.”

“Naturally.”

“I—I had no idea, however, that I was not alone there. I would not for the world have intruded—”

“I do not understand,” he said, seeing me hesitate. “The church stands open all day long. It is free to every one.”

“Ah! I see he has not told you!”

The priest smiled but looked puzzled.

“He? Whom do you mean?”

“The other priest, mon père—your colleague. I regret to have broken in upon his meditations; but I had been so long in the church, and it was all so still and quiet, that it never occurred to me that there might be some one in the confessional.”

The priest looked at me in a strange, startled way.

“In the confessional!” he repeated, with a catching of his breath. “You saw some one—in the confessional?”

“I am ashamed to say that, having thoughtlessly opened the door—”

“You saw—what did you see?”

“A priest, mon père.”

“A priest! Can you describe him? Should you know him again? Was he pale, and tall, and gaunt, with long black hair?”

“The same, undoubtedly.”

“And his eyes—did you observe anything particular about his eyes?”

“Yes; they were large, wild-looking, dark eyes, with a look in them—a look I cannot describe.”

“A look of terror!” cried the pastor, now greatly agitated. “A look of terror—of remorse—of despair!”

“Yes, it was a look that might mean all that,” I replied, my astonishment increasing at every word. “You seem troubled. Who is he?”

“But instead of answering my question, the pastor took off his hat, looked up with a radiant, awe-struck face, and said:—

“All-merciful God, I thank Thee! I thank Thee that I am not mad, and that Thou hast sent this stranger to be my assurance and my comfort!”

Having said these words, he bowed his head, and his lips moved in silent prayer. When he looked up again, his eyes were full of tears.

“My son,” he said, laying his trembling hand upon my arm, “I owe you an explanation; but I cannot give it to you now. It must wait till I can speak more calmly—till to-morrow, when I must see you again. It involves a terrible story—a story peculiarly painful to myself—enough now if I tell you that I have seen the Thing you describe—seen It many times; and yet, because It has been visible to my eyes alone, I have doubted the evidence of my senses. The good people here believe that much sorrow and meditation have touched my brain. I have half believed it myself till now. But you—you have proved to me that I am the victim of no illusion.”

“But in Heaven’s name,” I exclaimed, “what do you suppose I saw in the confessional?”

“You saw the likeness of one who, guilty also of a double murder, committed the deadly sin of sacrilege in that very spot, more than thirty years ago,” replied the Père Chessez, solemnly.

“Caspar Rufenacht!”

“Ah! you have heard the story? Then I am spared the pain of telling it to you. That is well.”

I bent my head in silence. We walked together without another word to the wicket, and thence round to the church-yard gate. It was now twilight, and the first stars were out.

“Good-night, my son,” said the pastor, giving me his hand. “Peace be with you.”

As he spoke the words, his grasp tightened—his eyes dilated—his whole countenance became rigid.

“Look!” he whispered. “Look where it goes!”

I followed the direction of his eyes, and there, with a freezing horror which I have no words to describe, I saw—distinctly saw through the deepening gloom—a tall, dark figure in a priest’s soutane and broad-brimmed hat, moving slowly across the path leading from the parsonage to the church. For a moment it seemed to pause—then passed on to the deeper shade, and disappeared.

“You saw it?” said the pastor.

“Yes—plainly.”

He drew a deep breath; crossed himself devoutly; and leaned upon the gate, as if exhausted.

“This is the third time I have seen it this year,” he said. “Again I thank God for the certainty that I see a visible thing, and that His great gift of reason is mine unimpaired. But I would that

He were graciously pleased to release me from the sight—the horror of it is sometimes more than I know how to bear. Good night.”

With this he again touched my hand; and so, seeing that he wished to be alone, I silently left him. At the Friedrich’s Thor I turned and looked back. He was still standing by the churchyard gate, just visible through the gloom of the fast deepening twilight.

I never saw the Père Chessez again. Save his own old servant, I was the last who spoke with him in this world. He died that night—died in his bed, where he was found next morning with his hands crossed upon his breast, and with a placid smile upon his lips, as if he had fallen asleep in the act of prayer.

As the news spread from house to house, the whole town rang with lamentations. The church-bells tolled; the carpenters left their work in the streets; the children, dismissed from school, went home weeping.

“’Twill be the saddest Kermess in Rheinfelden tomorrow, mein Herr!” said my good host of the Krone, as I shook hands with him at parting. “We have lost the best of pastors and of friends. He was a saint. If you had come but one day later, you would not have seen him!”

And with this he brushed his sleeve across his eyes, and turned away.

Every shutter was up, every blind down, every door closed, as I passed along the Friedrich’s Strasse about midday on my way to Basle; and the few townsfolk I met looked grave and downcast. Then I crossed the bridge and, having shown my passport to the German sentry on the Baden side, I took one long, last farewell look at the little walled town as it lay sleeping in the sunshine by the river—knowing that I should see it no more.