

The Confessor

A Sanctified Tale

By Mrs. Mary Robinson

When SUPERSTITION rul'd the land
And Priestcraft shackled Reason,
At Godstow dwelt a goodly band,
Grey monks they were, and but to say
They were not always giv'n to pray,
 Would have been construed Treason.
Yet some did scoff, and some believ'd
That sinners were themselves deceiv'd;
And taking Monks for more than men
They prov'd themselves, nine out of ten,
Mere dupes of these Old Fathers hoary;
 But read—and mark the story.
Near, in a little Farm, there liv'd
A buxom Dame of twenty three;
And by the neighbours 'twas believ'd
 A very Saint was She!
Yet, ev'ry week, for some transgression,
She went to sigh devout confession.
For ev'ry trifle seem'd to make
Her self-reproving Conscience ache;
And Conscience, waken'd, 'tis well known,
Will never let the Soul alone.

At Godstow, 'mid the holy band,
Old FATHER PETER held command.
And lusty was the pious man,
As any of his crafty clan:
And rosy was his cheek, and sly
The wand'rings of his keen grey eye;
Yet all the Farmers wives confest
The wond'rous pow'r this Monk possess'd;
Pow'r to rub out the score of sin,
 Which SATAN chalk'd upon his Tally;
To give fresh licence to begin,—
 And for new scenes of frolic, rally.
For abstinence was not his way—
He lov'd to live—as well as pray;
To prove his gratitude to Heav'n
 By taking freely all its favors,—
And keeping his account still even,

Still mark'd his best endeavours
That is to say, He took pure Ore
For benedictions,—and was known,
While Reason op'd her golden store,—
Not to unlock his own.—
And often to his cell went he
With the gay Dame of twenty-three:
His Cell was sacred, and the fair
Well knew, that none could enter there,
Who, (such was PETER'S sage decree,)
To Paradise ne'er *bought a key*.

It happen'd that this Farmer's wife
(Call MISTRES TWYFORD—alias BRIDGET,)
Led her poor spouse a weary life—
Keeping him, in an endless fidget!
Yet ev'ry week she sought the cell
Where Holy FATHER PETER stay'd,
And there did ev'ry secret tell,—
And there, at Sun-rise, knelt and pray'd.
For near, there liv'd a civil friend,
Than FARMER TWYFORD somewhat stouter,
And he would oft his counsel lend,
And pass the wintry hours away
In harmless play;
But MISTRESS BRIDGET was so chaste,
So much with pious manners grac'd,
That none could doubt her!

One night, or rather morn, 'tis said
The wily neighbour chose to roam,
And (FARMER TWYFORD far from home)
He thought he might supply his place;
And, void of ev'ry spark of grace,
Upon HIS pillow, rest his head.
The night was cold, and FATHER PETER,
Sent his young neighbour to entreat her,
That she would make confession free—
To Him,—his saintly deputy.
Now, so it happen'd, to annoy
The merry pair, a little boy
The only Son of lovely Bridget,
And, like his *daddy*, giv'n to fidget,
Enquir'd who this same neighbour was
That took the place his father left—
A most unworthy, shameless theft,—

A sacrilege on marriage laws!

The dame was somewhat disconcerted—
For, all that she could say or do,—
The boy his question would renew,
Nor from his purpose be diverted.
At length, the matter to decide,
“’Tis FATHER PETER” she replied.
“He’s come to pray.” The child gave o’er,
When a loud thumping at the door
Proclaim’d the Husband coming! Lo!
Where could the wily neighbour go?
Where hide his recreant, guilty head—
But underneath the Farmer’s bed?—

Now MASTER TWYFORD kiss’d his child;
And straight the cunning urchin smil’d:
“Hush father! hush! ’tis break of day—
“And FATHER PETER’S come to pray!
“You must not speak,” the infant cries—
“For underneath the bed he lies.”

Now MISTRESS TWYFORD shriek’d, and fainted,
And the sly neighbour found, too late,
The FARMER, than his wife less sainted,
For with his cudgel he repaid—
The kindness of his faithless mate,
And fiercely on his blows he laid,
’Till her young lover, vanquish’d, swore
He’d play THE CONFESSOR no more!

Tho’ *fraud* is ever sure to find
Its scorpion in the guilty mind:
Yet, PIOUS FRAUD, the DEVIL’S treasure,
Is always paid, in TENFOLD MEASURE.