

47
5
H
E
A
N

HD WIDENER



HU NNX4 3

497.9.5

(1)

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY



FROM THE FUND OF
CHARLES MINOT
CLASS OF 1828

THE ITALIAN.

ITALIAN

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

AND

BY ANTHONY

THE ITALIAN

NEW EDITION

WITH NOTES

LONDON

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

①

THE

ITALIAN;

OR, THE

CONFESSIONAL OF THE BLACK PENITENTS.

A ROMANCE.

Hors (Ward)
BY ANN RADCLIFFE,

AUTHOR OF THE "ROMANCE OF THE FOREST," "SICILIAN
ROMANCE," "MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO," "CASTLES OF
ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE," &c.

He, wrapt in clouds of mystery and silence,
Broods o'er his passions, bodies them in deeds,
And sends them forth on wings of Fate to others:
Like the invisible Will, that guides us,
Unheard, unknown, unsearchable!

NEW EDITION.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR A. K. NEWMAN AND CO.

1828.

18497.9.5

#



Minot fund

(1-4)

NEW EDITION

VOL. I.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR A. R. NEWMAN AND CO.

Bury St. Edmund's:

Printed by T. C. Newby, Angel Hill.

37-211
41

THE
ITALIAN;

OR, THE

CONFESSIONAL OF THE BLACK PENITENTS.

ABOUT the year 1764, some English travellers in Italy, during one of their excursions in the environs of Naples, happened to stop before the portico of the Santa Maria del Pianto, a church belonging to a very ancient convent of the order of the Black Penitents. The magnificence of this portico, though impaired by time, excited so much admiration, that the travellers were curious to survey the structure to which it belonged, and with this intention they ascended the marble steps that led to it.

Within the shade of the portico, a person with folded arms, and eyes di-

rected towards the ground, was pacing behind the pillars the whole extent of the pavement, and was apparently so engaged by his own thoughts, as not to observe that strangers were approaching. He turned, however, suddenly, as if startled by the sound of steps, and then, without further pausing, glided to a door that opened into the church, and disappeared.

There was something too extraordinary in the figure of this man, and too singular in his conduct to pass unnoticed by the visitors. He was of a tall thin figure, bending forward from the shoulders; of a sallow complexion, and harsh features, and had an eye, which, as it looked up from the cloak that muffled the lower part of his countenance, was expressive of uncommon ferocity.

The travellers, on entering the church, looked round for the stranger, who had passed thither before them, but he was no where to be seen, and, through all the shade of the long aisles, only one other person appeared. This was a

friar of the adjoining convent, who sometimes pointed out to strangers the objects in the church, which were most worthy of attention, and who now, with this design, approached the party that had just entered.

The interior of this edifice had nothing of the shewy ornament and general splendor, which distinguishes the churches of Italy, and particularly those of Naples; it exhibited a simplicity and grandeur of design, considerably more interesting to persons of taste, and a solemnity of light and shade much more suitable to promote the sublime elevation of devotion.

When the party had viewed the different shrines and whatever had been judged worthy of observation, and were returning through an obscure aisle towards the portico, they perceived the person, who had appeared upon the steps, passing towards a confessional on the left, and, as he entered it, one of the party pointed him out to the friar, and inquired who he was; the friar,

turning to look after him, did not immediately reply, but, on the question being repeated, he inclined his head, as in a kind of obeisance, and calmly replied,—he is an assassin.

An assassin! exclaimed one of the Englishmen; an assassin, and at liberty!

An Italian gentleman, who was of the party, smiled at the astonishment of his friend.

He has sought sanctuary here, replied the friar; within these walls he may not be hurt.

Do your altars, then, protect a murderer? said the Englishman.

He could find shelter no where else, answered the friar meekly.

This is astonishing! said the Englishman; of what avail are your laws, if the most atrocious criminal may thus find shelter from them? But how does he contrive to exist here! He is, at least, in danger of being starved?

Pardon me, replied the friar; there are always people willing to assist those

who cannot assist themselves; and, as the criminal may not leave the church in search of food, they bring it to him here!

Is this possible! said the Englishman, turning to his Italian friend.

Why, the poor wretch must not starve, replied the friend; which he inevitably would do, if food were not brought to him! but have you never, since your arrival in Italy, happened to see a person in the situation of this man? It is by no means an uncommon one.

Never! answered the Englishman, and I can scarcely credit what I see now!

Why, my friend, observed the Italian, if we were to shew no mercy to such unfortunate persons, assassinations are so frequent, that our cities would be half depopulated.

In notice of this profound remark, the Englishman could only gravely bow.

But observe yonder confessional, added the Italian, that beyond the pil-

lars on the left of the aisle, below a painted window. Have you discovered it? The colours of the glass throw, instead of light, a shade over that part of the church, which, perhaps, prevents your distinguishing what I mean?

The Englishman looked whither his friend pointed, and observed a confessional of oak, or some very dark wood, adjoining the wall, and remarked also, that it was the same which the assassin had just entered. It consisted of three compartments, covered with a black canopy. In the central division was the chair of the confessor, elevated by several steps above the pavement of the church; and on either hand was a small closet, or box, with steps leading up to a grated partition, at which the penitent might kneel, and, concealed from observation, pour into the ear of the confessor, the consciousness of crimes that lay heavy on his heart.

You observe it? said the Italian.

I do, replied the Englishman? it is the same as the assassin has passed

into; and I think it one of the most gloomy spots I ever beheld; the view of it is enough to strike a criminal with despair!

We, in Italy, are not so apt to despair, replied the Italian, smilingly.

Well, but what of this confessional? inquired the Englishman. The assassin entered it!

He has no relation with what I am about to mention, said the Italian; but I wish you to mark the place, because some very extraordinary circumstances belong to it.

What are they? said the Englishman.

It is now several years since the confession, which is connected with them, was made at that very confessional, added the Italian; the view of it, and the sight of this assassin, with your surprise at the liberty which is allowed him, led me to a recollection of the story. When you return to the hotel, I will communicate it to you, if you have no pleasanter way of engaging your time.

I have a curiosity to hear it, replied

the Englishman, cannot you relate it now?

It is much too long to be related now; that would occupy a week; I have it in writing, and will send you the volume. A young student of Padua, who happened to be at Naples soon after this horrible confession became public—

Pardon me, interrupted the Englishman, that is surely very extraordinary. I thought confessions were always held sacred by the priest to whom they were made.

Your observation is reasonable, rejoined the Italian; the faith of the priest is never broken, except by an especial command from a higher power; and the circumstances must even then be very extraordinary to justify such a departure from the law. But, when you read the narrative, your surprise on this head will cease. I was going to tell you, that it was written by a student of Padua, who, happening to be here soon after the affair became public, was so much struck with the facts, that, partly as an