

**ALVIRA, THE HEROINE OF VESUVIUS. A
REMARKABLE SENSATION OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. FOUNDED ON
FACTS RECORDED IN THE ACTS OF
CANONIZATION OF ST. FRANCIS OF
JEROME**

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Alvira, the heroine of Vesuvius. A remarkable sensation of the seventeenth century. Founded on facts recorded in the acts of canonization of St. Francis of Jerome by A. J. O'Reilly

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A. J. O'REILLY

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*A REMARKABLE SENSATION OF THE
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FOUNDED ON FACTS RECORDED IN THE ACTS OF CANONIZATION
OF ST. FRANCIS OF JEROME.

BY REV. A. J. O'REILLY, D.D.,

Author of the "Martyrs of the Coliseum," "Victims of the Mamertine,"
"The Double Triumph," etc.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE PENITENT SAINTS.

THE interesting and instructive character of this sensational narrative, which we cull from the traditions of a past generation, must cover the shortcomings of the pen that has labored to present it in an English dress.

We are aware that the propriety of drawing from the oblivion of forgotten literature such a story will be questioned. The decay of the chivalrous spirit of the middle ages, and the prudish, puritanical code of morality that has superseded the simple manners of our forefathers, render it hazardous to cast into the hands of the present generation the thrilling records of sin and repentance such as they were seen and recorded in days gone by. Yet in the midst of a literature professedly false, and which paints in fascinating colors the various phases of unrepented vice and crime, without the redeeming shadows of honor and Christian morality, our little volume must fall a welcome sunbeam. The strange career of our heroine constitutes a sensational biography charming and beautiful in the moral it presents.

The evils of mixed marriages, of secret societies, of intemperance, and the indulgence of self-love in ar-

dent and enthusiastic youth, find here the record of their fatal influence on social life, reflected through the medium of historical facts. Therefore we present to the young a chapter of warning—a tale of the past with a deep moral for the present.

The circumstances of our tale are extraordinary. A young girl dresses in male attire, murders her father, becomes an officer in the army, goes through the horrors of a battle, and dies a *saint*.

Truly we have here matter sensational enough for the most exacting novelist; but we disclaim all effort to play upon the passions, or add another work of fiction to the mass of irreligious trash so powerful in the employ of the evil one for the seduction of youth. In the varied scenes of life there are many actions influenced by secret motives known only to the heart that harbors them. Not all are dishonorable. It takes a great deal of guilt to make a person as black as he is painted by his enemies. Many a brave heart has, under the garb of an impropriety, accomplished heroic acts of self-denial.

History is teeming with instances where the love of creatures, and even the holier and more sublime love of the Creator, have, in moments of enthusiasm, induced tender females to forget the weakness of their sex and successfully fulfil the spheres of manhood. These scenes, so censurable, are extraordinary more from the rarity of their occurrence than from the motives that inspire them, and thus our tale draws much of its thrilling interest from the unique character of its details.

“But what a saint!” we fancy we hear whispered by the fastidious and scrupulous into whose hands our little work may fall.

Inadvertently the thought will find a similar expression from the superficial reader; but if we consider a little, our heroine presents a career not more extraordinary than those that excite our surprise in the lives of the penitent saints venerated on the altars of the Church. Sanctity is not to be judged by antecedents. The soul crimsoned with guilt may, in the crucible of repentance, become white like the crystal snow before it touches the earth. This consoling thought is not a mere assertion, but a matter of faith confirmed by fact. There are as great names among the penitent saints of the Church as amongst the few brilliant stars whose baptismal innocence was never dimmed by any cloud.

Advance the rule that the early excesses of the penitent saints must debar them from the esteem their heroic repentance has won; then we must tear to pieces the consoling volumes of hagiology, we must drag down Paul, Peter, Augustine, Jerome, Magdalen, and a host of illustrious penitents from their thrones amidst the galaxy of the elect, and cast the thrilling records of their repentance into the oblivion their early career would seem to merit. If we are to have no saints but those of whom it is testified they never did a wrong act, then the catalogue of sanctity will be reduced to baptized infants who died before coming to the use of reason, and a few favored adults who could be counted on the fingers.

Is it not rather the spirit and practice of the Church to propose to her erring children the heroic example of souls who passed through the storms and trials of life, who had the same weaknesses to contend with, the same enemies to combat, as they have, whose triumph is her glory and her crown? The Catholic Church,

which has so successfully promoted the civilization of society and the moral regeneration of nations, achieved her triumph by the conversion of those she first drew from darkness. Placed as lights on the rocks of eternity, and shining on us who are yet tossed about on the stormy sea of time, the penitent saints serve us as saving beacons to guide our course during the tempest. Many a feeble soul would have suffered shipwreck had it not taken refuge near those tutelary towers where are suspended the memorial deeds of the sainted heroes whose armor was sackcloth, whose watchword the sigh of repentance poured out in the lonely midnight.

While Augustine was struggling with the attractions of the world which had seduced his warm African heart, whose gilded chains seemed once so light, he animated himself to Christian courage by the examples of virtue which he had seen crowned in the Church triumphant.

"Canst thou not do," he said to himself, "what these have done? Timid youths and tender maidens have abandoned the deceitful joys of time for the imperishable goods of eternity; canst thou not do likewise? Were these lions, and art thou a timid deer?" Thus this illustrious penitent, who was one of the brightest lights of Christianity, has made known to us the triumph he gained in his internal struggles by the examples of his predecessors in the brave band of penitents who shed a luminous ray on the pitchy darkness of his path.

The life of St. Anthony, written by St. Athanasius, produced such a sensation in the Christian world that the desolate caverns of Thebais were not able to receive all who wished to imitate that holy solitary

Roman matrons were then seen to create for themselves a solitude in the heart of their luxurious capital; offices of the palace, bedizened in purple and gold, deserted the court, amid the rejoicings of a festival, for the date-tree and brackish rivulets of Upper Egypt!

Where, then, our error in drawing from the archives of the past another beautiful and thrilling tale of repentance which may fall with cheerful rays of encouragement on the soul engaged in the fierce combat with self?

To us the simple, touching story of Alvira has brought a charm and a balm. Seeking to impart to others its interest, its amusement, and its moral, we cast it afloat on the sea of literature, to meet, probably, a premature grave in this age of irreligion and presumptuous denial of the necessities of penance.



