

MARYLAND GAZETTE,

Containing the freshest Advices, Foreign and Domestic.

WEDNESDAY, February 28, 1750.

GLASGOW, September 4.

A Letter from a Gentleman at Port-Mahon, giving an Account of the Escape and Marriage of three Nuns of the Order of St. Clare.

INCE I was favoured with your obliging letter, nothing remarkable has happened here, but a very comical adventure, of which I shall give you an account, as it may divert you a little, and afford some entertainment to our good friends.

Among the religious houses in this island, there are two nunneries, into which parents put their daughters when they have no prospect of getting husbands for them, or when they are so poor as not to have fortunes to give them.

They are sent to these nunneries when very young, and have no hopes of getting free but by death. — At the age of 17, they take a vow of chastity, of obedience to the mother abbess, and of retirement from the world. To enforce the first part of their vow, they have no access to see those of our sex (the holy priests excepted), but through an iron grate; and there they have the liberty of conversing with them.

Two officers of O'Farrell's regiment, happening to go, out of curiosity, to see and converse with the nuns of St. Clare, saw two of them whom they admired very much, and in short fell desperately in love with them: They declared their passion for the girls, whose heads being stuffed with nothing but romances, which they had read in the convent, look'd upon them as two adventurous knights come to deliver them from their enchanted prison, and gave them all the encouragement they could wish for. The gentlemen declared themselves upon honour, and that they would marry them whenever they got them out.

Many were the schemes they formed to evade the vigilance of the old maids, their keepers, to pick the locks and get over the walls; and, as love surmounts all difficulties, they got a false key made to the garden door, and having given the slip in the dark to the nun who locks them up when they go to bed (for they all sleep in one room), they got down into the garden about 12 at night, where they found the two gentlemen ready to receive them, who, by means of ladders, had got over a wall 20 feet high to come at them, and by the same way conveyed the ladies out: But how surprized were the gentlemen, when instead of only the two they expected, they found a third, who was a volunteer. This was the confidant of the other two; and, tho' she knew of nobody that would give her protection, yet was resolv'd at all events to get free from her prison; thinking nothing could happen to her so bad, as to be kept in the nunnery for life. This bold adventurer was the chief promoter of the others making their escape on purpose that she might have an opportunity of coming out along with them. — Tho' the nunnery is in the middle of the town, and every way surrounded with houses, and tho' it was clear moon shine, Providence had so ordered it, that nobody observed them scaling the walls; otherwise the consequences might have proved very fatal: For the gentlemen had gone well armed, and resolv'd, at any rate, to carry off their prizes.

Next morning, upon missing of the nuns, the whole convent was in an uproar; — the town took the alarm, — and all was in confusion, not knowing where they were; but concluding they were amongst the English, none else being so wicked as to harbour them: For the people here considering the carrying them off as the greatest height of impiety; as they were persons who had dedicated themselves to the service of God.

The gentlemen immediately applied to Mr. —, an English clergyman, to marry them; who acquainted them, that if the ladies were resolv'd to continue Roman Catholics, he would not take upon him to marry them: For, tho' he did

not look upon the vow of chastity, which they had taken, to be lawful in itself; yet, as long as these ladies continu'd of that persuasion, it would be impossible for them to think so, and that they might look upon any future engagements they enter'd into with them not to be binding, as they were contrary to their prior vow: And therefore, when he waited on the ladies, he asked them, if they did not look upon the vow which they had taken, of renouncing the world, and of chastity, to be binding upon them? To which they replied, that they did not; for that they looked upon it as unlawful in itself, and that it was so contrary to the dictates of their own natures, that they could not believe it was enjoined them by the God of nature; which made them have some doubts of that religion which imposed such cruelties and hardships upon them; and that therefore they were desirous to be instructed in the Protestant religion. They added, that the vow was extorted from them by force; for when they were 17 years old, the age that they came under those engagements, they inform'd their father confessor of their aversion to that religious sort of life, and their resolution of not taking that vow; who told them if they refused the vow, and came out of the nunnery, that their relations would put them to death; and upon his acquainting the mother abbess with it, she shut them up in a oak dungeon, and fed them only with a little bread and water, and whip'd them every day with a cat of nine tails, till she forced them into a compliance. This is the way they take to fill up their religious houses, and without it they would be quite empty: For what the ladies further observ'd, is doubtless true, that there is hardly a nun there, under 40, but would come out if she could.

Mr. — was 3 or 6 days employed in instructing them in the principles of the Protestant religion, and shewing them the difference between that and the Roman Catholic; all which time the Romish clergy had, by the general's orders, free access to them, that if they could prevail upon them to continue Roman Catholics, or return to their convent, they should be left entirely to the freedom of their own will. But love turn'd the scale in Mr. — favour; and what he said, had more influence upon them than that of six priests, who were all the time thundering damnation against them, if they became Protestants: for, amidst all their surrounding anathemas, they made a formal renunciation of the errors of the Roman Catholic religion, and declar'd themselves Protestants.

The priests press'd upon them to return back to their convent, from the obligation they lay under from their vow; and as for any thoughts they might have of marriage, that it was impossible, they being already married to Jesus Christ. However, when the priests found that the ladies were desirous of being instructed in the Protestant religion, they offer'd, if they would continue Roman Catholics, to give them immediately a dispensation from their vows, without waiting for one from Rome (which by the bye was not in their power to do) and to marry them to whom they pleas'd. But Mr. — took upon him the power of being Pope for once, giving the two ladies a dispensation from their vows; and married them the day after they had declar'd themselves Protestants. —

From the time of their escape, till they were married, they continued in the lodgings of their two lovers; — but the doors and windows of the room where they lay, were seal'd up every night, before the priests, and opened before them in the morning, in order to satisfy their relations that these gentlemen had no communications with them; when their marriage put an end to this ceremony, dreadful was the out cry, for their relations thought there was more occasion for shut doors than ever; and they never will look upon them in the light of these gentlemen's wives. — The unmarried lady was put in the master of — house, under the care of his lady, where she immediately got a crowd of admirers, and was married in a month.