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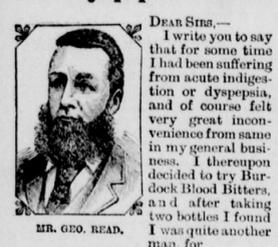
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FLORENCE O'NEILL.

The Rose of St. Germain; OR, THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.

BY AGNES M. STEWART. Author of "Life in the Convent," "Grace O'Halloran," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.—CONTINUED.

This day I have for the last time looked on the dead face of my dear uncle. I have collected all his valuables and papers; to-morrow his remains will be removed to Morville for interment.

How much would I like to go thither for awhile, and then return to my beloved Mrs. Whitley.

December, '91. The king is at Kensington, and has brought with him the Count Von Arnheim. I am persecuted on all sides.

I am asked to give a reason why I dislike him; he is in favor with the king (we were in the favor of two kings my aversion would be the same).

January 28th. The queen continues very cold and harsh, and her exasperation with the Princess Anne—for she persists in keeping the Marlboroughs about her—makes her worse.

January 29th. This afternoon I received a summons to attend the king in his closet; the queen was not there; my heart beat violently.

Let me try and remember how His Majesty opened the attack. I was so surprised that I have to think before I can clearly recollect all that passed.

His spare little person was seized with a fit of asthmatic coughing at the moment I reached his chair. His manners are always more or less disgusting, so that he did not heed at all the nature of his cough.

At last the king laid aside his handkerchief, and fixing his sparkling eyes on my face, his countenance more grave than usual, he said:

"I wish to know why you refuse to marry one who is a faithful friend of mine. Now, reply in three or four words."

"Your Majesty, I cannot marry Count Von Arnheim," I said. "It is a woman's nonsense; you shall be his wife before we return to Holland."

"But, sire, it cannot, must not be," and silly woman that I am, the tears rushed to my eyes, and sobs choked my utterance.

"Enough, I have said you shall, you understand; now you may go." "But, your Majesty, I will not marry him," said I, heedless of the power of the person whom I addressed.

The king rarely got in such a passion as on this occasion. He rose from his chair, seized me roughly by the arm, asked me how I dared set up my will against his, and in his rage, flung his handkerchiefs on the ground.

His violence brought on another fit of coughing. I again picked up his handkerchiefs, and humbly asked should I remain.

"Go, Madam, go; I have told you you shall submit," was the rough reply, and I hurried to my bedroom, and when there, dear Mrs. Whitley, I fell on my knees and had a good long cry.

How can I keep my troth as I wish and marry Von Arnheim? Then, again, you know it will not do for both contracting parties to be poor; for, although I know I ought to be very rich when I am twenty-one, sometimes I fear whether a reason will not be found why I should be made poor if I continue obstinate in my refusal, as I mean to do.

who has pursued me as you have done." "Their Majesties—" he began. I interrupted him at once.

"In this matter their Majesties have no right to control me, nor will I be so influenced. I again repeat, I will not be forced to become your wife."

"Madam," he replied, "I forgive you, because you are evidently a young lady of high spirit, who, doubtless, grieves for having said unjust things as soon as she has uttered them; and as I am quite satisfied in the fact that the king and queen can bend you to compliance, I can afford for the present to be silent beneath your hard language."

"And would you be content with my hand unwillingly bestowed," said I, with flashing eyes, and scarcely able to articulate, in what I might almost term my righteous anger.

"Most certainly; the affection of the first unwilling bride will follow, as a matter of course, after she has become my wife. Farewell, Madam," he added, rising, "I shall have the pleasure of visiting you to-morrow in the presence of the queen."

I knew well that all I that night suffered arose from a want of full and entire trust in the power of Him who alone can help us. I forgot all the calm and peace I had experienced earlier in the day, when I committed this matter and my whole being into the hands of God.

And so it happened that for some time after Von Arnheim had left me, I remained overwhelmed by the shock I had received. The weather was extremely cold, and I sat for a long time heedless that the fire had almost burnt itself out, and dreading even the coming of my maid.

At length, feeling the necessity of exertion, I aroused myself, and made up my mind to throw myself at the queen's feet in the morning, and make a last effort to excite her pity.

You may well imagine, dear Mrs. Whitley, that I passed an indifferent night. Alas, I had little to expect from the pity of Queen Mary.

It was not left to me to put myself in Her Majesty's way, for she sent me a message desiring me to come to her half an hour before the usual time.

Of course I well knew that this was meant for a private conversation before her ladies gathered round her. When I entered her closet she was working, and without raising her head, or vouchsafing me a single glance, she began by saying:

"I understood perfectly well the cause of your illness last night. A glance at your tearful, swollen eyes is sufficient. I have sent for you in order to tell you that I shall put an end to such scenes very quickly. Your marriage will take place a fortnight earlier than I had intended. Instead of the middle of next month, it shall be solemnized the end of this."

I cast myself at the queen's feet, imploring her not to compel me to disobey her commands, by forcing on my marriage with the Count.

"Disobey?" exclaimed Her Majesty, in a tone of unqualified contempt. "I would advise you to think over the penalty of disobedience to your sovereign's will. It will be imprisonment in the Tower. Withdraw, and when you next enter my presence let it be without tears."

Wandering away again from Thee, O God, by the sinfulness of my nature; leaning for help upon an arm of flesh, a reed that bendeth beneath every wind. Oh, forgive me, my Almighty Father, and teach me to see that from Thee alone true help, in the hour of direct need, can come.

Strength was given to me; I obeyed the queen's behest, and wreathed my face with smiles when next I entered her presence.

But let me not forget in this Journal to allude to one to whom I owe this looking up to God, to whom I thus owe more than tongue can express. I must promise by telling you she is but a humble waiting woman appointed by the queen as my especial attendant.

On that night, after my swoon, when I was so graciously molested by the addresses of the Count, I had remained for some time after his departure, cold and tearful, when Grace Wilmot entered the room.

A strange woman I had often thought her. Plain exceedingly she was; her complexion was swarthy, with large features, ill-formed; her eyes were fine, dark, and expressive; they redeemed, in some degree, the plainness of her face.

She was a woman of, perhaps, forty years of age, singularly reticent, sparing in her speech as the king himself, but often very sorrowful and abstracted withal, so that I often felt Grace Wilmot had a story of her own, if she chose to tell it.

and her warm tears were falling in a plentiful shower on my brow. "Dear young lady, dear child, how I have wished to speak, and dared not by reason of the humbleness of my position," she said; "but now, blessed be God and His Virgin Mother, the well-springs of sympathy are open; for, oh, my lamb, it is a terrible thing to suffer, and have none to cheer us with a consoling word."

I recovered somewhat, and raised my head from her bosom. "My good Grace," I said, in much bewilderment, "you have spoken words none dare to utter here. Are you of the proscribed faith of Rome?"

"Even so, Madam, and, greatly have I drank of the chalice of human suffering; but I will show you whence I draw hope and consolation. But Grace Wilmot, the handmaid of a lady of rank such as yours, still presumes to tell her mistress how to gather strength at the same fount, in absence of the Sacraments now so long denied us. From this, Madam, I have drawn my strength."

She drew from her pocket two small and well-worn volumes. The one was a copy of the Four Gospels, the other an edition of that all but inspired book, The Imitation of Christ.

She turned over its pages, and pointed to one chapter, headed: "De l'amour de Jesus sur toutes choses."

It was a French copy of A Kempis, by which I understood my maid to be an educated woman.

"That one chapter, Madam," said she, "is often on my lips, and I hope ever in my heart. At a time of grievous suffering an aged priest bid me study it well. Since then I have realized more clearly the fact contained therein, that one must not trust nor rely on a windy reed; for all flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof shall fade like the flower of the grass. Have an implicit confidence in God, Madam. He will even work miracles rather than abandon those who put their trust in Him."

"But, my good Grace," said I, wanting, verily, the simple, unquestioning faith of my handmaiden, whom I was fast learning to regard with respect, "this marriage is resolved on by those who have me in their power; imprisonment and the confiscation of my property will be the alternative."

Grace sorrowfully shook her head, seeing that, as yet, I had so much to learn before I could get in the right way, and her plain countenance seemed for the time marvellously beautiful by reason of the superhuman expression by which it was animated, as she said, with her splendid eyes lifted up to heaven:

"There is a King above all earthly kings, before whom the greatest of earthly monarchs is but as the dust of the earth. Bear up, Madam, this marriage will not, shall not be."

I felt touched, and in spite of myself it seemed as if the spirit of prophecy which animated those of old had descended on this extraordinary being, in whom, though about my person ever since I had come to the palace, I had discerned nothing beyond the most rigorous punctuality in the discharge of her duties; respect, without the slightest tinge of subserviency; humility, without any approach to abjection, and so careful a performance of her employments that it would have been impossible for the most exacting person to discover neglect. If Grace was required at a certain time, there she was; if she was wanted to execute a certain task, it was done without delay. In short, I recognized in the exact fidelity of my handmaiden that which, until now, I had not observed.

I noticed in the lights in which I now regarded them. She had all the qualities of one who studies to embody into her life the holy maxims of the Gospel, reduced to that practical performance which lead to perfection and which constitute sanctity.

All proud reserve between Grace and myself was now crushed beneath my feet. I had yearned for sympathy ever since the day my feet had first crossed the threshold of the queen's court. I now possessed it. I had met a kindred mind, in a quarter in which one would least have expected to find it. Moreover that mind was intelligent and cultivated; above all else, it was educated in the highest sense of the word, in what Father Lawson termed the science of the saints, and had held forward to me as the most useful knowledge first to be gained, without which all else was vain and hurtful.

We knelt together in prayer; above all else we prayed for resignation to the inevitable. Then when I had lain down, Grace, as usual, came to draw around my bed the heavy, satin curtains, and wished me her customary "good night."

Impelled by a sudden impulse, I threw aside the curtain and called her back. I arose, and drawing her reluctant face to mine, I kissed her brow, saying:

"Grace, dear Grace, be my friend."

She bent down and kissed the hand which still rested on the curtain. Her humility humbled me, and her answer was worthy of herself.

"Grace, Madam, feels honored by the friendship of her mistress, and it shall not cause her to forget the lowliness of her own position."

I laid my head upon the pillow resigned, I might almost say happy, such is the influence of a virtuous example.

I resolved before many days were over to ask Grace to tell me the story of her life. Outwardly there was no change in our respective positions. We each seemed, without saying a word about the matter, instinctively

to understand that there must be no alteration. Indeed, when together, but very little passed between us, and yet her influence bore upon every word and action of my present life.

The queen must have observed the change, and doubtless attributed it to the fear of her threat of incarceration; and, acting upon the change, gave me to understand that my marriage would not take place till the time she had first stated, and would be solemnized in the Chapel at Windsor Castle, the king intending to recruit his health in the country for a few weeks before his visit to Holland. Of course the Count's visits were frequent, and his odious attentions became daily more and more obtrusive. He naturally gave himself more latitude on account of the passiveness with which I received them.

January 27, 1692. Last night I was more particularly molested by the Count than has hitherto been the case. I entered my own chamber with the old weary feeling of depression at my heart. Perhaps it was increased by the terror I felt when the queen described to me the bridal robe she had ordered to be sent to Windsor for my wedding day.

Of course, Grace observed my languid look, enforced by spirits out of tone. It is only at times like these that she steps, as it were, prominently forward to bear me up, as a mother extends her hand to save her child from falling when making his steps.

"Madame, you are forgetting the lesson you have been trying to learn; that is why you are sorrowful to-night," said she, as she unfastened the bandeau of pearls which bound back my hair.

"My bridal dress is ordered, Grace; we leave for Windsor early in the week," I said, half vexed just now, that there had been no look of sympathy in the expression of those hard, grim features of hers.

"Well, Madam, and what then?" "And what then," said I, reiterating her words. "Do you forget that the queen means this for the beginning of the end?"

There was displeasure in the tones of my voice; I knew it, I had spoken half in anger.

"Only in so far as God wills to let His creatures have their way for some inscrutable purpose of His own; if so, vain is your rebellion to His will. I have told you you have nothing to do but to pray, and be patient and resigned, leaning on God alone. Madam, you have but very little faith."

The proud spirit within me was chafing as I sat beneath the hands of Grace, at the plainness of her words, conveying, as they did, a sharp rebuke. I changed color I knew, for I felt the warm blood tingling in my cheeks, but I held my peace. She saw the flushed temples, too, but spoke no word. I inwardly admired her courage.

Dear Mrs. Whitley was present to my remembrance. When had I ever heard her murmur? I have no doubt Grace knows the amount of influence she now exercises over me; for my good she uses it unsparingly. Perfect passiveness and resignation, these are the weapons she would have me use; nothing short of this contents her.

I made an exertion to shake off my depression during her temporary absence on some little duty for me. When she returned I was in better spirits.

"Grace," I said, "I am going to ask a favor of you." "I will do whatever you wish, Madam."

"I want you to tell me the story of your life." A painful expression fitted across her hard, rugged features, tears filled her eyes, she made me no reply.

"Does my request give you pain, Grace? I long to know how it is you are here attending upon me, filling so humble a position; how you became acquainted with my dear, dead uncle's friend, Father Lawson, and—in fact, I want to know all about you, Grace."

"I cannot refuse you any request, Madam; it is my duty to obey you." "I felt annoyed, and answered: "But I do not want you to make a duty of what I ask as a favor, Grace; simply forget that I ever asked the question."

"No, Madam; the lady who has sufficient virtue to listen to the admonitions of her servant, and allow her to become her mistress, surely should not find her inferior too proud to narrate her painful story."

"I do not attend the queen to-night," I replied; "we have several hours before us to be seated, Grace." She pushed away the chair opposite to my own, which I had motioned for her to use, and placing an ottoman at my feet, seated herself thereon. Thus her face was partly in the shadow, still the fire-light revealed to me that she was moved by some strong emotion; her usually pale countenance was flushed, and I observed tears trickle slowly down her cheeks.

TO BE CONTINUED. Blood-purifiers, though gradual, are radical in their effect. Ayer's Sarsaparilla is intended as a medicine only and not a stimulant, excitant, or beverage. Immediate results may not always follow its use; but after a reasonable time, permanent benefit is certain to be realized.

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