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FLORENCE O'NEILL,
THE ROSE OF ST. GERMAINS,
OR,
THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.

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(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Continued.)

Florence stood as one bewildered, as, uttering these words, the queen—her majestic, portly figure erect as a dart, and her countenance expressive of anger—left the room.

"Was ever any one in this world mere tormented," sighed she as, entering her own apartment, she sat down, and thought over the events of the last few hours. "Wish no friend or relative in London but the dear old man, who will not, I fear, linger long, as the queen coldly reminded me, and unable to get over to France, what step can I take to guard myself against this new tyranny?"

Then she sat still for a time, but her tears fell fast. She might seem to be looking out, as she sat at the open window, on the prospect in the distance, for the last rays of the sun were setting, and the tops of the tall trees and the stately mansions in the distance were lighted up by its golden beams, the clouds tipped with the brightest hues of the ruby and amethyst.

"I am rich, and what does my wealth do for me," sighed the girl. "Better be the daughter of a poor cottager on my uncle's estate, or of some humble peasant woman in *la belle France*, than suffer as I do. What is the use of wealth, I wonder," she rambled on, "when one cannot do as one pleases? I would do much good if I could but be left alone, and try to put to good account what God has given me, yes I am sure, I am sure I would. Riches I would make a passport to heaven, unless my nature changes; but, will they ever make me happy, I wonder, this wealth that people covet so; I shall have in abundance, but deprived of my liberty. I am worse off than the poorest woman in England."

She was silent for a little while, then suddenly a perplexing thought filled her; she rose and walked about the room, then sat her down and rambled on again.

"Well, if this be the case, then, indeed, I am undone," she said. "I heard the Lady Marlborough say, that the queen was so angry that the Princess Anne got the pension from the government, because she wanted the money to help the king with his continental wars.—Von Arnheim is one of his foreign subjects and a favorite; is it possible, that from interested motives they are trying to force me into a marriage with this man. If so, the deaths of the only two relations from whom my wealth is derived, at this particular juncture, is favorable to any scheme they may have formed. Shall they have their way then, shall the queen force me into compliance? No, not while Reginald lives, or even if I am to have the pang of hearing of his death, she shall shut me up in the gloomy old Tower first."

The more Florence suffered her mind to dwell on this new idea, the more convinced she became that an ulterior motive was at the bottom of the marriage they were evidently about to coerce her into making, and the more terrified she became, at the near prospect there evidently was of her uncle's death. The queen, early in the first year of her regal power, dismissed all Catholics from the vicinity of the metropolis, and Florence was at no loss to guess why her invalid uncle was suffered to dwell at Kensington, or she herself in the palace, and could no longer shut her eyes to the fact that she would ere long be subjected to some cruel tyranny, unless some fortuitous chance occurred in her favor.

Warned at last by a sudden chillness seizing her whole frame, she closed the open window near which she had been seated.

The moon had sunk beneath a cloud, and the sky now looked wild and stormy, a wind had arisen, and a few rain drops, pattering against the window, betokened an approaching storm.

"Dark as is my own fate, oh, my God support me," sighed the girl, whilst her eyes filled with bitter tears; but even as she turned away, one bright star shone out in the canopy of heaven, whilst all around was black and gloomy. Call it imagination, call it enthusiasm or what you will, that bright star appeared to her as a presage that all would yet be well, an answer to the aspiration she had uttered, the almost wild cry which, in the agony of her heart, she had sent up to heaven for help. Turning from the casement, she fell upon her knees, and with uplifted hands prayed long and earnestly for guidance and assistance, and then soothed and comforted, and sustained by the providence of the God in whom she placed an unwavering trust, she slept in the midst of the dangers that beset her path, the calm, peaceful sleep of an infant cradled by the protecting arm of its mother.

On the morrow when she sought the queen, she observed that her manner was cold and restrained to herself, but more than usually free and pleasant with the other ladies, and it was relief to Florence when business on matters

of State summoned the queen to her cabinet, and left her free to visit her uncle.

The baronet was propped up by pillows, and she observed with a shudder, that a change had taken place since she was with him the previous evening. She had never stood face to face with death, had never before been present when the spirit was passing away from its earthly tenement, consequently, she was not aware that the grey shadow which seemed to rest upon his countenance, was the shadow that betokens speedy dissolution; and had she been conscious of this she would not have distracted his mind with the narration of the tyranny of the queen on the previous evening.

She had dismissed the nurse immediately on her entrance, and seated herself by his bedside, her hand resting in his.

"Does he not feel for my wretchedness?" thought she, when she had concluded. "He seems as if he did not heed what I have said."

She was mistaken, however, but the sands of life were running quickly out, though at last he gathered strength to speak.

"My child, be firm and courageous, whatever you suffer; I charge you with my dying breath, do not marry the king's favorite, be true to yourself, as I was not when I came to London. Remember my words, the day will come, sooner or later, in which, impossible as it now appears, you will return to France. Now draw up the blinds and let the glorious sunlight fall upon my room, the next rising of which mine eyes will not behold, and then give ear to what I am about to say."

A spasm shot across her heart, as drawing aside the heavy curtains of crimson satin, she suffered the soft beams of the October sun to enter the room, and, at the same time, beheld more vividly the dusky shadow over the face of the dying man, more painfully vivid by the clear light of day, than when she had first entered the darkened room.

"Dearest uncle, my beloved and only friend," said she, "do you really believe that you are dying?"

"I know it, my child, now do not take on so; now listen to me, I am about to ask a question. Know you that Father Lawson is in London?"

Florence shook her head, her emotion was too great to allow her to speak.

"Well then, he is stopping at a house in Soho, the direction of which I can give you. The servants can be trusted, they are all from Morville, and without one exception, are good Catholics; the nurse must be got out of the way, she being a Protestant. In the dead hour of the night, my child, Father Lawson must come hither and sustain a dying man with the life-giving Sacraments he so sorely needs."

"I will write to the queen," said Florence, "and shall ask leave to be absent some days from the Palace. I will take the nurse's place at night, and send her to bed."

"Ring the bell then, and tell the servant who answers it to send the house steward to me immediately."

Florence delivered her uncle's message and a few moments later, Onslow, a white-headed man, who had grown up from early youth in the baronet's service, as dependents were wont to do in old times, made his appearance.

The poor fellow was much moved when he approached the baronet. The simple, unaffected manner of the old gentleman, who was one of the best type of the school of country squires, had attached his servants and his tenantry strongly to his person. He had been a good master, an indulgent landlord, and a faithful friend.

"My dear Sir Charles," said Onslow, but he could say no more, grief choked his utterance.

"Onslow, my good fellow, give me your hand," said the dying baronet; "you are witness for me that I have never been a hard master, nor a grasping landlord; that I have ever made it a rule to allow every man as much or more than his due; that I have led a moral life, bringing shame and trouble to no man's household; that I have opened my purse and fed those that were hungry; that no poor person was ever suffered to pass the gates of Morville Grange unrelieved; that I have been called a good man, and held by my neighbors in respect, as one who lived in good accord and fellowship with others; and yet, Onslow, now that I come to die, I see sins where of old I saw not anything; now, I see cause for repentance in many things, which in past days seemed of no account."

"My dear, dear master, would that when I myself die, my conscience may reproach me with nothing more of weightier import than that which is on yours," said Onslow.

"Sufficient for every is his own burden, and mine seemeth very heavy now; so Onslow, I warn you by our common faith, hasten to Soho, in Bolton Street, at the sign of the Blue Boar. You will find, on asking for him, and presenting this ring, one Mr. Allen; wait, if he be not within; when you see him you will recognize mine own saintly chaplain, Father Lawson, forced by the perils of these dangerous times, to abide in places scarce seemly for a priest of our holy Church to dwell in. When you give him the ring it will be a sign to him that my hour has come: tell him not to fail to

be here as soon as the shades of night have fallen, for that his old friend may see the setting of the sun, but will never look on its rising."

Onslow, much moved, took the ring and hastened to execute his errand, and a short time after, the physician, calling to see his patient, the fears of Florence and the conviction of Sir Charles that he was near his end, were confirmed by him.

The only difficulty was in the disposal of the nurse in such a way as not to give rise to suspicion; it was managed by Florence herself. Her eyes, swollen by her tears, testified to her affection, and sending for the woman she said to her,

"I am going to take upon myself a portion of the task of nursing my uncle, therefore, during the early portion of the night alone, should your services be required, should you be wanted I shall have you called."

The woman, who had for several nights been deprived of her rest, was nothing loth to hear that she could have her place supplied, and thus procure comfortable sleep; and as Florence took care to arrange that the room provided for her use should be quite at the other side of the house, there was no fear of molestation or intrusion from her.

In the early part of the night, then, Florence, in compliance with the wishes of her dying uncle, took a few hours' rest. At midnight she was again seated by his side, the woman having been conducted to the room destined for her use. The door communicating with her uncle's suite of apartments she ordered to be carefully locked, lest curiosity or any other cause should lead the nurse to leave her room in the night and wander to any other part of the house.

Between the hours of twelve and one, disguised as a farmer, Father Lawson was ushered into the sick chamber. The metamorphosis was complete, as far as outward appearances went. He looked like some one of the stout, honest, and somewhat rough mannered men whose character he had assumed for the time being.

After the confession of the baronet had been heard, the servants were summoned (none but the Protestant nurse went to bed that night), and the little party, kneeling around the bed, joined in prayer whilst the last rites of the Church were administered and the Bread of Life broken to the dying man.

The ceremonies were over, but still Father Lawson lingered, wishing to see the last of the friend to whom he had for many years been chaplain, in the quiet solitude of Morville.

The end drew very near; the dull, glazed eye, the heavy death dews, the restlessness, all betokened approaching dissolution.

Present to him now are the times forever past; he rambles, and his speech is thick and incoherent; secular amusement and religious persecution are all mixed up together.

"A fine morning for the hunt, gentlemen, Sir Thomas, I shall come and see your pack. Hallo—to horse—bring out the hounds—rare sport shall we have to day—"

There was a pause. The eyes of the dying man are closed, the breath suspended; will he speak again?

"Hark! hark how the knaves beat against the door. Never mind, let them in; Morville boasts a secret hiding-place and outlet for her priests which none have yet discovered."

Florence trembled and turned pale as these words fell upon her ear. There was no "priest's hiding hole" at Kensington should the visit of Father Lawson be known to any but themselves.

Other thoughts, and holier ones, now fill the mind of the dying man. "Florence, my child," he says, "God protect and bless you. Nay, do not take on so much, my loving niece, because the old man's life is near the end.—Rather be glad the aids of religion have sustained him, aids which many cannot have in times like these. Father Lawson, accept my thanks for having at your peril visited me this night," and he slightly raised his hand so that the priest might clasp it in his own.

Then his voice grew more and more faint, but he begged that his servants might each press his hand, and asked their forgiveness if he had ever done them wrong.

He never spoke again, but remained perfectly quiet. His lips occasionally moving, showed he was joining in prayer with the priest.

He had been quite right in his assertion the previous day—he was not to see the rising of another sun.

The grey of the early morning had, however, dawned before all was over. In pity to him, Florence strove to suppress the hysterical sobs which ever and again broke forth in spite of herself. She at last succeeded, and the deep voice of Father Lawson reciting the prayers for a soul in its agony alone interrupted the silence of the death chamber.

A deep sigh at length broke the stillness, the cold fingers which had been entwined in those of the niece he so dearly loved relaxed their hold. They looked upon the features of the dead, the spirit of Sir Charles had fled from its mortal tenement.

These were the times of persecution, when a price was set upon the priest who durst venture

to labor in England for the salvation of souls.

Florence hung for a few moments in speechless grief over the corpse; then, mindful of the duties of hospitality, and of the peril of Father Lawson, she turned from the dead to the living, not forgetting either the necessity of at once dispersing the servants, and arousing the nurse, who was to be led to believe that the baronet had died suddenly, to account for not requiring her assistance.

Save a glass of hot spiced wine and a piece of dry bread, Father Lawson partook of no refreshment. He had rendered the services of his priestly ministration, and was now anxious to be gone.

"My poor Florence," he said, at parting, "I grieve to think of the dangers that beset you at the court, but bear up awhile; I have powerful friends amongst the Jacobite nobility, and though you may not be aware of it, persons will be around you who take an interest in your welfare, and who are also connected with the exiled court. But see the morning has fairly dawned, it bids me leave you. Will you not return to the palace at once?"

"Not till after the interment, certainly not," and Florence laid a stress on those last two words; "he was so good to me. The last two relations have been snatched from me so suddenly I can scarce as yet realize my position. I shall be firm in my refusal to contract an alliance in marriage; at the court, live only in hopes of returning to St. Germain, and when, a short time hence, I am able to claim the inheritance bequeathed to me, the persecuted of our Church shall have all the help it is in my power to bestow."

"May God bless your good intentions, my child, and, guiding you safely through your troubled life at Mary's court, make you ever worthy of the position in which He has placed you. Farewell, may we one day meet under less trying circumstances."

Thus, in the still silence of the morning, the disguised and persecuted priest went his way, to his obscure lodgings. Alas, for the spirit of the times, that in secrecy and silence the zealous priest was able to preserve the faith, which but for men like Father Lawson must absolutely have died out during the period when the horrible penal laws were in full force.

Florence, now a ward of the crown, was not allowed to nurse her grief in the presence of Death. The queen summoned her to the palace, ordered her mourning, treated her with all imaginable kindness, and deputed one of the officers of the royal household to give the necessary instructions for the removal of the body for interment in the family vault of the De Greys at Morville.

This arrangement Florence rebelled against in her heart, but her in the queen was perfectly right in removing her from a scene calculated only to nurse the depression of spirits to which she was gradually yielding.

Once again she was permitted to revisit the house, and gaze on the features, serene and peaceful in the slumber of the grave. The body of the deceased baronet was removed by night to the hearse which was to convey it to Morville, whither it was to be followed to the grave by his devoted tenantry, dependents, and friends, but no blood relation. The young heiress, Florence, being his only surviving relative, was at the head of that long troop of mourners.

The Grange was then left in the care of two persons, one of whom, at the express wish of Florence, was Robert Onslow.

Some three or four weeks after the death of Sir Charles the queen had decreed that Florence should look over the papers and personal matters belonging to the baronet, and the house and furniture—the terms of its occupation would then have expired—was to be delivered up to its owner.

CHAPTER XXVII.—LETTERS FOR ST. GERMAINS.

No suspense or anxiety can well exceed that of watching for the post, above all, when we are on the look-out for, perhaps, important intelligence. If this is the case in the nineteenth century, when postal arrangements are conducted with such facility, what must the tortures of suspense have been such as those suffered who were situated as were the exiles at St. Germain.

Wearily and vainly watching for news, Mary Beatrice began gradually to awaken to the painful idea that she had forever lost her favorite. It was one trial more to add to the many already suffered, and a very great one she held it to be.

A year has passed away, another and the last effort of any consequence had been made in behalf of James by the battle of La Hague, but the very winds of Heaven were against the hapless king. He had waited a month for favorable winds to cross over to England, and meanwhile the Dutch fleet, joining with that of Admiral Russell in the Downs, appeared on the coast of France. A Jacobite at heart, and a favorite of his old master, vain would Russell have avoided a collision, and if Tourville, the commander of the French fleet, would consent to pass quietly by with his squadron at night he should not be attacked.

The bravery of Tourville, however, was too

unreasonable to allow of his putting his own glory in the shade for the sake of James, and the encounter that ended in the loss of the French fleet sent James back in grief and sorrow to St. Germain, and filled with despair and mortification his adherents in England.

Down-spirited, the poor king had lingered three sad weeks in Normandy ere he could make up his mind to return to St. Germain, whither he had at last returned, won over by his sorrowing and anxious queen.

At fitful and uncertain intervals only came news from England. In the previous year they had been prostrated with grief by the news of Ashton's execution. Then when, after the famous Treaty of Limerick had been signed, and Lord Lucan came over to St. Germain, bringing with him Sir Reginald and a troop of devoted followers, a multitude of letters at the same time reached the hands of the king and queen. On a fine summer morning, about the end of July, in the year 1693, after several weeks' weary watching, came news from London.

The window of the king's favorite closet were formed in a large bay, and jutting boldly forward, they presented a fine view of the valley beneath, as also of the surrounding country. It was in this room that the queen had held an interview with the unfortunate John Ashton at the beginning of our tale.

Down in the valley he recognizes, making his way to the chateau, an old sea commander of his own, a man of large proportions, stout, and tall, his features hard and weather-beaten, and his hair, whitened by the hand of time, blowing about in the summer breeze.

"Why, surely, yonder is my brave old friend and mate, Davy Lloyd," said the king, watching the man beneath ascend with some difficulty the ascent leading to the chateau. "Had I known he was at St. Germain, a carriage should have been sent for him. Time begins to leave its traces on him now; how old he looks."

How prone we are to notice its trace on others, and forget ourselves. James looked old and care-worn beyond what he imagined. Time and trouble had plowed deep furrows in his face.

Heartily the king welcomed his old sea commander, and not long had he been seated before he informed the king, with a significant glance, that he had letters from England, which he had promised to deliver with his own hands.

"I met and recognized the Earl of Lucan and Sir Reginald St. John, of our Majesty's Guards. 'Sdeath, how the young rascal's eyes sparkled when I gave him a letter from his lady-love, the fair Mistress O'Neill. She also sent one for Lord Lucan; and I must crave our Majesty's pardon for giving to any one before yourself," said Lloyd to the queen, "but I thought I might not meet with them again, as my time here will be but short. Here, madam, the letter," and the old sailor presented it to the queen, whose eyes sparkled with delight, for she recognized the handwriting of her favorite Florence; "and here, sire, are two of the greatest consequence, and you see they are presented last, which ought to have been the first. Do you know the handwriting, sire?"

Poor fond father! A flush of pleasure lighted up his face as the king recognized the handwriting on one of the letters. He remembered the other also, but laid it aside till he had perused the first. It ran as follow:

December, 1691.

I have been very desirous of some safe opportunity to make you a sincere and humble offer of my duty and submission, and for you to be assured that I am both truly concerned for the misfortune of your condition, and sensible, as I ought to be, of my own unhappiness. As to what you may think I have contributed to it, if wishes could recall what is past, I had long since redeemed my fault. I am sensible it would have been a great relief to me if I could have found means to have acquainted you earlier with my repentant thoughts, but I hope they may find the advantage of coming late—of being less suspected of insincerity than perhaps, they would have been at any time before.

It will be a great addition to the ease I propose to my own mind by this plain confession, if I am so happy as to find that it brings any real satisfaction to yours, and that you are so indulgent and as easy to receive my humble submission as I am to make it, in a free, disinterested acknowledgment of my fault, for no other end but to deserve and receive your pardon. I have a great mind to beg you to make one compliment for me; but fearing the expressions which would be most proper for me to make use of might be, perhaps, the least convenient for a letter, I must content myself at present with hoping the bearer will make a compliment for me to the queen.

The king laid it aside, and took up Marlborough's letter. The queen meanwhile had vanished, and was busily employed with the perusal of her old favorite's epistle in her own cabinet. Lord Marlborough wrote, avowing that he could neither eat nor sleep for his remembrance of the crimes he had committed against his king. "I make your Majesty," he added, "offers of unlimited service, and I assure you I will bring back the Princess Anne to her duty if I receive the least word of encouragement."

(To be Continued.)

Men willingly believe what they wish to be true.