

A Daring Little Sixteenth Century Heroine

(Benziger's Magazine.)

It was an old escriptorio, black with age, the four corners brass tipped, and the top transparent with many polishing...

The house to which this treasure belonged bore a certain resemblance to the escriptorio, inasmuch as it preserved the same dignified front to the inroads of time...

To the lonely child lying amid the long grasses at the river brink, the old house was a veritable palace of dreams...

It was in this ancient house that I, Eithne, daughter of the O'More, one of the gallant eleven who held the bridge at Athlone, first saw the light...

Then she explained to me that with the coming of Anne to the throne, the Penal laws were again in full force, that it were treason to harbor a priest...

It was now my turn to cry, and I sobbed as if my heart would break. It was my first glimpse of sorrow, for, shielded by mother and Peggie, my life had been all sunshine...

After the signing of the treaty of Limerick we returned to the old home where we lived in the strictest retirement. In those days my education would have been sadly neglected had it not been for my mother and Peggie...

I called her ma bonnie; indeed, with her huge white crimped cap, underneath which her face shone like a crows pippin, she looked not unlike a French nurse...

From mother I learned the harpichord, and how to dance a minuet. I could flirt my fan and twist my small person in ludicrous imitation of the court beauties...

These accomplishments I greatly liked, but abhorred my pot-hook lesson. To escape it, I would quietly hide me to the river where my curragh was always at hand...

After a time, there being no hue and cry, and lulled by his apparent security, we resumed our usual occupations. One of the tasks I loved was polishing the old escriptorio...

light, past the great black thicket where the ogre lurked waiting to devour perverse young maids who would not hearken to their mother's advice...

One day we were seated at the great south window which overlooked the river. Peggie was teaching me my sampler stitch, and mother was sitting at the harpichord playing her favorite air, "The Coulin..."

In a second I had my arms around her and was trying in my childish way to soothe her.

"Eithne, child, I had had news this morning. Your Uncle John is on his way from Spain and may arrive when we least expect..."

Peggie looked grim. Was it possible that her lip was quivering and that there was a suspicious moisture in her eyes...

"Eithne, darling," said my mother, "Uncle John would be in great danger were he to visit us now. I am only afraid that he will be arrested on his way to Limerick..."

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would be in danger. I dared not dwell on that. I clenched my teeth in agony, and prayed inwardly for help. The answer came in a flash...

"Eithne, thou art early at thy pranks," she murmured fondly. "But what makes thee so pale? Has aught disturbed thee?"

I tried to tell her, but my tongue clave to my palate, and I could only point dumbly toward the window. She followed my glance, but the man was gone...

At that moment Peggie came hurriedly into the room. The ruddy color had left her face, she looked white and scared. "Madam," she cried, "the soldiers! They are almost at the door..."

Mother, with great presence of mind quietly replaced the manual. Again I tried to warn her, but the words refused to come.

"Thou hast naught to fear, my Eithne. Be brave. Remember thy father. I must away to warn thy uncle..."

My head swam, there was a buzzing in my ears when I found myself alone. I was nigh to swooning. Suddenly my mother's words came to my mind...

The soldiers were in the hall, and Peggy was parleying with the commanding officer, a goodly-looking man with a kind face...

"What means this unseemly intrusion?" It was the voice of my mother, clear and bell-like. Her face was pale, but there was no sign of fear in her calm steadfast eyes...

"We come in search of one John O'More, a Jesuit priest, who, contrary to the law, has returned to Ireland..."

"Lead the way, Larmour," he said, turning to a man who had hitherto escaped my notice. I immediately recognized him as the same who had so terrified me at the window...

"My book!" I screamed, darting forward. "That is my book. Give it to me!"

A burst of laughter from the men was the only response. The spy had fled through the half-open window, but unfortunately for his escape, his doublet had caught in a great hook hidden amid the ivy...

"Madam," said the commanding officer, courteously to my mother, "if the rest of our search bears as much fruit, I shall have to ask pardon for our unseemly intrusion..."

My mother bowed a mute assent. She was simply incapable of speech. After a few moments' search, they left, the clank of their sautes echoing through the house...

The reaction was too much for mother. She fell in a dead faint and we had great work to bring her to.

When she recovered, I danced round the room like a wild thing. "Look, look!" I cried, holding the manual aloft. Then I told my story...

My mother's answer was to entold me in her arms. "Thy father's daughter," she murmured softly. And Finn, not to be outdone, rested his great head in my lap.

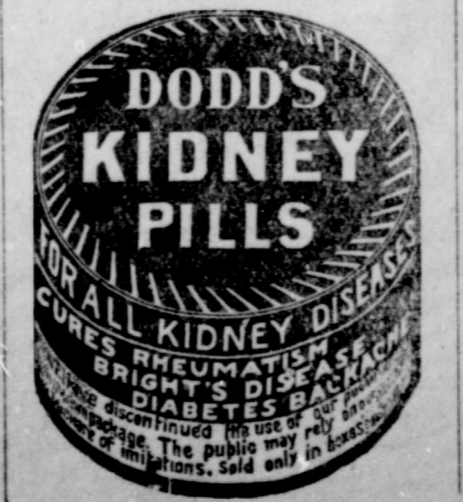
"Deo Gratias!" cried Peggie. "All is well that ends well."—Sheila Mahon.

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