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THE LIMERICK VETERAN; OR, THE FOSTER SISTERS. BY THE AUTHOR OF "FLORENCE O'NEILL." (From the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.) PART SECOND. CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

After a moment passed in the open air, Maurice re-entered the hut. "Beyond the terrible doubt which, I am quite aware, must have existed on the minds of all," resumed the stranger, "as to the purity of Isabel Fitzgerald, she must also, to a certain extent, have appeared to be mixed up with a matter which involved a very heavy loss to Lady Florence St. John, a rather extensive robbery having been perpetrated about the same time, whilst your family were absent from the chateau."
At this point of the stranger's recital, Maurice could restrain himself no longer. "Who are you, sir?" he exclaimed; "disclose to me your name. Good Heavens! my poor love, my Isabel, how bitterly have you been made to suffer!"
A deep groan burst from the lips of the dying man. "Listen; I am making the only reparation in my power," said he, "God is merciful to forgive, Colonel St. John; I am the wretched, unworthy brother of this unfortunate Isabel."
"Can it be possible?"
"The words I utter are as true, as that before yonder sun shall set, I shall stand in the presence of my Maker; attend to what I say. The father of Isabel was twice married. He had a child, a boy of some seven years of age, living under the care of a maiden aunt at the time of the Rebellion of 1715, a short time before which he had married again. His son now lies before you, Colonel St. John, mortally wounded by one of your wild mountaineers.
"As I advanced to manhood, I became extravagant and dissolute. My aunt's death placed me in possession of a handsome fortune, the greater portion of which was lost at the gaming table, and the remainder squandered in Paris amongst the gay and profligate nobility who flocked about the French court.
"A bitter feud existed between myself and de Foix, arising out of what may be termed an affaire de coeur. It was in no fairly fought duel, alas! that my rival fell; one word begot another, mutual recrimination followed, and in a fit of jealous rage I stabbed him to the heart.
"I dreaded the anger of the King, de Foix being one of his most favored friends. I knew my life would pay the forfeit of my crime were I discovered, and my aunt having told me of the relationship that existed between myself and the young lady whom the Marshal and his Lady had adopted in her infancy, I resolved, under the cover of night, to escape to St. Germain's and introduce myself to her, with the hope that she might be able to supply me with funds wherewith to make my way to England, intending to enter the service of the King."
"Of the Elector, you mean, George of Hanover?"
"Exactly so; it mattered not to me whether Guelph or Stuart sat on the throne; all I

wanted was to get out of that infernal France; that was all I cared about."
" And to compass your ends, was it you, then, who induced that unfortunate, timid girl to seal her lips with a vow of secrecy? Oh, my God! Thy ways are indeed inscrutable; how has every hope of her life been blasted."
" I beseech you, sir, spare me these comments on the shortcomings of my past life. I am quite aware it was all very wrong," said the dying wretch, in a tone rather leaning to the ludicrous than otherwise; "wait a while, at least, and say out your say when my tale is ended."
" I did induce her to take an oath of secrecy. I told her that yourself and de Foix were bosom friends. Through the medium of my man Jacques, I once laid perdu in the old palace of St. Germain's for some weeks; whilst there she brought me articles of value belonging to herself in the way of jewelry; these I promised not to sell, but was to raise money on for my use and return them later. She also conveyed to me her little stock of money."
" Time passed on. I was taken alarmingly ill, the blood-hounds of the law were on my track, and I endeavored to convince her that such help as she could afford was useless, that painful as it might be to her feelings to adopt means such as she might perhaps deem dishonorable, she should not hesitate when the safety of her own brother was at stake (I had concealed from her that our relationship was only half blood). I urged her to resort to any expedient rather than place me in peril, and trust to me to set things right later."
At this point, the words, "My poor, unhappy Isabel," burst from the Colonel's lips.
" Oh, she took every care of herself, I assure you. She would not yield an inch where honor and virtue and all those fine sentiments were concerned, and the myriads of the law would have had me in their toils, no doubt, had I been half so scrupulous; but, recognizing the principle that self-preservation is the first law of nature, I adopted a plan, sufficient repugnant to the feelings of a gentleman, but, at the same time, my only resource."
There was a moment's pause, and the Colonel exclaimed:
" Gracious Heavens! sir, was it you who committed the burglary at the chateau?"
" Pray, Colonel St. John, do not shock me by using such a word in connection with any act of mine," said the miserable wretch; "at the same time, I thank you very much for having spared me from entering into details which, really, to a gentleman like myself, of refined and cultivated mind, are particularly painful. It was even so; I did, uninvited, visit your paternal home, under the cover of night, and appropriate to my own use, as a loan, certain sums of money and articles of jewelry, which I have never become rich enough to return, fortune being against me, by the way, all my life. I have now to pay the debt of nature to that inexorable tyrant, death, who you well know will take no denial from any of us; but take my word, sir, that thief of a Jew money-lender, Isaac Levy, of Algate, is quite as hard a creditor. Year after year I have considered it a point of honor to pay his exorbitant rate of interest for money advanced on those jewels I borrowed of Lady Florence and my sister, and not one farthing of the original loan, wherewith to redeem them, have I been able to scratch together; however, I will give you the documents."
It was not without many pauses that the dying spendthrift had delivered himself of this long narration; and now he signed to the old man to extricate, from around his waist, a belt which he wore over his shirt, within which a small packet had been carefully stitched.
" With these documents, Colonel, the jewels may be redeemed," he continued, "and I hope my escapade at St. Germain's will not in the end injure the lady with whom I can claim kindred. She loved me, I really believe; also, I think she did all in her power to help me, consistently, with her very exalted ideas of right and wrong."
" She did more, far more, than she ought to have done, sir," said the Colonel, in tones of deep disgust, "in allowing her lips to be bound by a solemn oath, and in meeting you at the risk of incurring a slur on her own spotless fame, but, God help me, I forget I am speaking to a man wrestling in the arms of death," he added, observing a dark shadow pass over the unhappy man's features.
" I have been a sad scamp, Colonel, reckless and heartless; repentance has come too late."
" Repentance is never too late, Fitzgerald," said the subdued and softened Colonel. "We are in the midst of blood and desolation; would that I had it in my power to bring you some worthy priest, but, alas! I cannot. I, too, am but a rough soldier; but I beg you to turn your heart to God."
" And Isabel, poor Isabel. I did not care for the sister whom I had never known; I used her for my own selfish purposes. How

stared it with her? I never thought she would consider herself bound to keep that vow after I had gone."
" Stung at the undeserved coldness of persons not of my own immediate family, she, of herself, broke the engagement that subsisted between us, and when, after the lapse of two years, she never heard from you, she left her home clandestinely and sought refuge in a convent. As soon as I can leave this place for France I shall hasten to her with what purpose you may well conceive."
" God be praised! allow me to clasp your hand within my own. Say that you forgive me."
" Ten years of our lives we have known happiness but by name," was the reply. "I have felt myself a moody, disappointed man; she has never ceased to pray that the cloud might be removed that had fallen upon her spotless innocence. Gladly would I have wedded her, firm in my belief in her virtue, but she ever persistently refused. But brighter days may be yet in store for my poor, heart-broken love, and I forgive you, Fitzgerald, as I hope to be forgiven."
And then he who had scarce ever prayed since his happy boyhood strove to pray now. A dissolute spendthrift, a vain, conceited, heartless, selfish, unprincipled, all this indeed he was, but still there were holy recollections garnered up in his memory. Again he was a little child, lisping out his prayers at the knee of the faithful woman who had supplied a mother's place, prayers which for more than twenty years his lips had never uttered, but the remembrance of which came back to his mind in disjointed phrases, like a broken strain of music heard in far off years, the melody of which we still remember. This he rambled on of old times, still recurring to the subject matter of his late confession. Now he was on the hillside at St. Germain's, then holding a violent discussion with the Jew of Algate, then fighting valorously on the field of Preston Pans, and urging Sir John to wear the white cockade, and thus escape unharmed, as the odds of the day were against them.
Then there came a dead pause, the pale face assumed a grayish tinge, and a faintful convulsion shook the whole frame. At that moment Dugald entered the hut.
" Cot help us," he murmured, "tat is fat herself maun come to. Put it is an tuc awfu' sight. Puir shentelman! he'll nae doubt be dying. Fat a dismal noise in his thrapple, Colonel."
That terrible sound in the throat termed the "rattles" was what Dugald alluded to. The closing scene was at hand. "Will he die and make no sign?" thought the Colonel, who had offered up fervent aspirations for his conversion. Even at that moment the words "Lord have mercy upon me a sinner," burst forth, accompanied by a loud wailing cry, the cry of a penitent heart. Then there was a long gasp, and all was over.
" In the glorious light of God's boundless mercy may he stand forgiven!" said the Colonel, as he walked out into the clear bright sunshine.
\* \* \* \* \*
And before that sun had set, honest Dugald, of the Clan MacGregor, had with his own hands dug a grave near the field of Gladsmuir, and, with the help of the old man to whom the hut belonged, had deposited within it the remains of George Fitzgerald. The Colonel liberally recompensed them, and then hastened to seek the Marshal, in order to acquaint him with the events of the morning.
On that eventful day, however, it was almost impossible to be a moment to themselves. He found the young Chevalier standing amidst his friends, habited in the simplest manner, his dress being neither more nor less than a coarse plaid; on his head he wore a blue bonnet, around which was a piece of plain gold lace; his boots and his knees, by the way, were very far from clean.
A few hours later, attended by several officers, he rode to the mansion of the Marquis of Tweedale, where they were to pass the night, and at length Maurice, finding himself alone with the Marshal, hastened to relate the confession of Fitzgerald, adding, "that he should repair to France as soon as possible, and claim Isabel as his affianced bride."
" But that day is yet far off, my poor Maurice," said the Marshal. "We are now engaged in sharing the fortunes of war. It is impossible for you to leave Scotland at present."
Recognizing the unwelcome truth of the Marshal's words, Maurice contented himself with inscribing a long epistle to the much-tried Isabel, with a full recital of his interview with her half-brother, together with another for the joint perusal of the ladies at St. Germain's. Little did he think when he penned those letters that nearly another year would elapse before his dreams of happiness would be realized, or that his happiness would meet with ally by

the death of those whose hearts would have rejoiced to witness it.
Early on the following morning the clans marched into Edinburgh, parading the city to the Jacobite air, "The King shall enjoy his ain again." Their picturesque garb and wild appearance, their prisoners, the spoils of artillery and the baggage which followed in the rear, together with the banners and standards of the various clans, as also those which they had seized, rendered the sight exhilarating and imposing, and contributed to raise the hopes of the adherents of the Stuart race.
CHAPTER V.—THE SŒUR MADELEINE.
" Hark! is it she, or only the Sister of Charity? Has the summons come too late? Oh! that I could clasp her in my loving arms once more, my poor, innocent Isabel."
Thus spoke the aged Lady Florence, now suffering under mortal malady, and she listens attentively, as the pausing of the gust she again fancies she hears the wheels of a vehicle coming up the avenue.
The bleak wind of a January evening, in the year 1746, blew keenly around the old chateau in the valley; it shook the latticed casements in their frames, and threatened destruction to the quaint old place itself. It was a dark night; not a glimpse of moonlight; but occasionally a few stars might be seen, ever and again obscured by the passing clouds which swept over them.
Lady Florence's sense of hearing had not deceived her; in the pauses of the gust she had really distinguished the sound of the wheels of a vehicle approaching the chateau.
In a moment the clang of the great bell resounded through the house, and a little later a waiting-maid entered the chamber to apprise the lady that the Sœur de la Charite had arrived.
A spacious old-fashioned room was that in which the Lady Florence sat, or rather reclined on a couch. There were three windows in the chamber, with latticed panes, placed within deep recesses, sufficiently wide to form a somewhat spacious and pleasant seat in the summer days, when these casements were garlanded by the starry flowers of the jasmine; but now, with every gust of wind, the leafless tendrils of the creeping plant beat against the glass, ever and again mingled with the driving sleet.
The antique and cumbrous furniture of the room accorded well with its oaken wainscot, diamond shaped casements, and its huge bed with its heavy hangings of dark green satin; a rich Turkey carpet was on the floor; but the bright wood fire that burned in the ample stove, and the lighted wax candles on the table beside the now aged lady, failed to dispel its obscurity; its remote nooks and corners remaining in almost total darkness.
A rosary of oriental pearl with links of gold lay beside her, also an open book from which she had been reading, but her thoughts had wandered by to the past, to her youth, then to the early days of her wedded life; she thought of the old times when the chateau had wrung with the merry voices of her own children, of her adopted daughters, of her grandsons, and clasping her hands together, she sighed forth the words; "Reginald, my husband, shall we ever meet again?"
As she spoke, the door was opened by the waiting-maid, who ushered in a Sister of Charity.
That most unattractive head-gear worn by the daughters of St. Vincent de Paul failed to disguise the loveliness of the countenance beneath, as did the dress of coarse black serge the demeanor and elegance of the wearer.
" I am glad to see you, my good Sister," said Lady Florence, "but I could have wished you had deferred your coming hither till the morning; a tempestuous night indeed hath this been for a journey from your convent."
" Ah! Madam, a Sister of Charity, if her whole heart be in her holy calling, does not head such trifles. I have traveled part of the road in a coach, too. Moreover, I am used, with all my Sisters, to brave the inclemencies of the weather."
" I am very glad to have you with me, Sister," said the lady after a pause. "The recent death of my beloved daughter-in-law, preceded by that of a friend, one Mistress Wilmot," and as she spoke Lady Florence glanced at the sable robe she wore, "together with the absence of my husband and grandsons, render this old chateau but a gloomy residence. One is apt when alone to ponder over the past too much, for one's memory will be busy in spite of oneself. Methinks, Sister, it is one of the greatest sorrows of old age, this beholding all we have ever loved oftentimes drop from our side, as the withered leaves of autumn from the branches of the tree."
" True, Madam, but your Ladyship knoweth as well as myself that there is a balm in Gilead for the sorrow that you name. Our loved ones are only gone a little before us; we ourselves

must surely follow; in the eye of faith, they are not dead but sleeping."
The death of Madame St. John had occurred but very recently, and a few tears rolled down the lady's face as the Sister spoke. Very pale was her countenance and marked by the traces of deep sorrow, and still there was a something inexpressibly soft and sweet in the venerable features, together with the expression of a peace not born of earth.
The presence of the Sister was of itself sure to soothe the spirits of the invalid. As to recovery of health, her malady was of such a nature that it could not be expected.
Often, in the long hours which she afterwards passed in the society of the Sister, did Lady Florence gaze admiringly at her companion. She was a beautiful woman, with a regular cast of features and lustrous eyes, but an air of cold reserve seemed to mark her character, and she asked herself the question, had any smouldering fire ever burned beneath that calm and unimpassioned exterior? was there a story in the life of the Sœur Madeleine? had she taken the veil when young and free from the world's contaminating influence, breaking with it at once, wholly and entirely because burning with the love of God? or, had she been drawn to it after having tasted, and found that its promises were deceitful, its pleasures vain? A woman lovely in form and feature, reticent very, and sparing in her speech, yet withal most kind and courteous, Lady Florence would have sorrowed much had the Sister been summoned to her convent; and still there was a something chilling and repellent at times in her demeanor which warded off every attempt to discover that very little of the past which she would have liked to know.
Meanwhile time passed on, and brought with it news that Isabel, whom Lady Florence so much desired to see, could not come to St. Germain's till she had recovered from a severe illness by which she was attacked before the letter of Maurice, which brought back to her hope and happiness, had reached her hands.
If the Sister was reticent, and indeed it would not have been consonant with the character of the state she followed to have been for ever prating of the past, Lady Florence was still the very soul of frankness, as in the days her youth, and so she would not unfrequently beguile the long, wearisome days of a portion of their tedium by stories of old times, of her girlhood in the Court of Queen Mary, of her happy wedded life in that same old chateau in which she had dwelt ever since her marriage.
The Sister, too, was a good listener, and as the invalid dwelt upon the past, she lent a not unwilling ear, sometimes even questioning, in a timid and delicate manner, when she wished for further information.
Then, with tears in her eyes, the lady told of the great grief that came upon her when she lost her son and daughter, and pressing her hand on her heart, a prayer would tremble on her lips, beseeching God to spare the husband and grandchildren, who were now the last of their race.
" If Maurice does but come back to me again, I will see that his long-deferred marriage shall take place quickly," resumed the lady. "My innocent Isabel! how I long to embrace her, and to see her at last united to my grandson."
In a half-hesitating way, said the Sister, affirming rather than questioning:
" Your grandson, then, is engaged to be married, Madam?"
" Yes, Sister, a long, protracted engagement it has been. He was betrothed eleven years since to a gentle girl whom I had adopted in her infancy. Indeed I had taken two orphan children to my arms; the one gentle and amiable, the other full of pride and passion. A wilful, headstrong damsel was that Margaret Lindsey," she added as if speaking to herself, "but God knows I loved her too, imperious and stubborn as she was, and would like much to know of her well-being, though she has long since forgotten the protectress of her youth, for never tale or tidings have I of her since she bade me farewell in Edinburgh eleven long years ago. But I was going to tell you of Isabel. I had left those girls, or young women I might call them, in this chateau, whilst I, with the rest of my family, spent a few months in the Highlands of Scotland. On my return, Sister, a terrible tale was poured into my ear by Margaret, who was but too ready to think evil of her foster-sister. However, to be brief, it was but too true that this Isabel, whom we had so loved and trusted, and about whom it were hard to believe ill, had been in the habit of meeting by the hillside in the valley some stranger unknown to all of us, had given him all her jewels and small stock of money, had tied herself to secrecy by a solemn oath, and even in some way appeared to have been cognizant of the fact of his being concerned in a daring robbery at the chateau a few nights before the day of our return home."
To be Continued.