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THE LIMERICK VETERAN; OR, THE FOSTER SISTERS. BY THE AUTHOR OF "FLORENCE O'NEILL."

(From the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

It was very late at night when Emilie arrived at the Hotel of the English Embassy. She requested to be introduced without delay to the Earl of Stair.

"His Lordship could be seen in the morning; this is a very late hour," was the reply to her hasty demand.

"My business with the Earl admits of no delay," she said, with a haughty gesture; "I must see him at once." Then suddenly remembering that her disguise, coupled with the lateness of the hour, and she alone, and on foot, might of itself tend to make the man refuse compliance with her request, she adopted the safe plan of slipping a twenty franc piece into his hand, in doing which she displayed a costly diamond ring on one of her fingers.

The bribe had the desired effect. The next moment she was in the private apartment of one of the Chevalier's greatest enemies, the Earl of Stair.

Her manner was impetuous and hurried. "Persons attached to the British Embassy have for some days been on the watch to apprehend the Chevalier de St. George. I am correct, am I not? You have demanded in the name of your sovereign, King George, that he shall not be allowed to pass through France?" "Exactly so, and to what may this preamble tend, my unknown informant?"

The Earl's question was parried with another. Instead of his receiving a direct reply to his own, probably the lady wished to satisfy him that she knew as much, or more, of the movements of the unfortunate Chevalier than he did himself.

"And as the regent to whom you have addressed yourself, my lord, has failed in having him arrested and re-conducted to Lorraine, you have yourself sent your men out in all directions, but he is so well disguised that hitherto all your efforts have failed, have they not, my lord?"

Lord Stair gave vent to an angry exclamation. "Who are you, madam," he said, "and with what intention have you addressed yourself to me? If you can make me cognizant of the movements of the Pretender, I pray you, speak out. At present, all you have said has made me aware that you know as much as I do myself; hence, I assume that you know much more if you choose to disclose it."

"The Chevalier de St. George is in Paris. He sets out to-morrow for Chateau Thierry on his way to Bretagne, and he will change horses at the village of Normancourt."

The Earl listened with unqualified amazement. "Accept my best thanks for your information, madam. I beg the honor of being made acquainted with your name."

"I have fulfilled my errand, Lord Stair, and choose to preserve my incognito."

hurred from the room, descended the staircase, and a few moments later threaded, with a rapid step, the spacious streets which lay between the British Embassy and her brother's mansion.

She had been absent exactly an hour from the gay assembly in the salon. She re-entered her own chamber unnoticed by any one, and speedily arrayed herself in the costly robe she had laid aside ere she started on her cruel mission, and she was startled at the ghastly reflection of her face presented to her by her mirror. After a moment's thought, she said to herself:

"It is well. I can plead illness as the cause of my absence. My disordered looks will bear me out, even if I do not send a message to my mother to say that I am ill, which, perhaps, would be the better course."

Thus she stood for a few moments hesitating, till the reflection of her own handsome face, ill though she looked, turned her thoughts in another direction, and her eyes flashed with indignation at the thought of the persons, to separate whom she had committed so dire a wrong on the Chevalier.

"No, no," she said, "I must return to the salon, if it be only to have the gratification of seeing him, and remembering what his probable penalty will be for being in the Chevalier's company. And she, poor, miserable thing, for whom he coolly put me aside, I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing I have made her suffer."

With a weary step, for Emilie's temper and the evil dispositions of her heart had not been raised without her frame bearing evidence of the storm of passionate fury which had swept over her soul, beneath the influence of which she could have crushed under foot every tie, however sacred, she now returned to the salon from which she had so long been absent. Her departure had attracted the attention of her own immediate family, also of Angelique.

To all inquiries she had but one reply, and her pale face corroborated the apparent truthfulness of the assertion, that she was ill.

"I felt very ill, and retired to my own room. I feel better now," she added, and a flash of triumph lighted up her eye as she gazed around the room in search of Angelique and Lord Keith, whom she at length discerned seemingly wholly absorbed in each other.

Jealousy and hatred again filled her heart. With the generality of impulsive and hasty dispositions, she had not the art of imposing a constraint upon her feelings, and suddenly breaking from the little throng, including her niece and others, who expressed sorrow at her indisposition, she swept hastily on to the spot in which Lord Keith and Angelique were keeping up an animated conversation.

A bright red spot glowed on her cheek, and it was with difficulty she commanded her voice, as she exclaimed:

"Why, my Lord Keith, are you turning traitor to your king, toying still with my child cousin, and forgetting your liege lord?"

"No, madam," said Keith, with a low bow, "I can pay my homage at the shrine of youth and beauty, and still be a faithful servant to my Prince."

"Well, well, we will hope so," said Emilie, still striving to keep up the tone of badinage with which she addressed him; "but remember, if any harm should befall King James during his journey, I for one can attest that the incomparable Lord Keith was exchanging honeyed words with girls fresh from the school-room, instead of helping his master with his advice."

As Emilie spoke these words, she glided hastily away, leaving the nobleman in a state unenviable perplexity. Pleased with the nature of Angelique, he had, it is true, fooled away in her company some two or three hours, when it would have better become him to have made one of the small council assembled with the Prince in the Baron's Cabinet; whilst Angelique, with the inconsiderate vanity and self-conceit of a very young girl, felt no small pleasure at the consciousness she possessed that she had made a conquest of the English nobleman, and had caused mortification to her cousin. Fully alive though, at the same time, to the knowledge that Emilie had sufficient influence in her family to be the means of expelling herself for the future, as she was merely a visitor at the house of the Baron.

Lord Keith gazed for a moment after the retreating form of Emilie. Lost in thought, he knew not why, for the idea of treachery in the family of a de Breteuil never for a moment entered his mind; yet he felt annoyed and vexed with himself that he had allowed the serious business that had brought him thither that evening to be driven from his mind by the fascination of a pair of bright eyes and a pretty face.

Angelique too was disquieted. With the heedless conceit so common to her age, she was delighted at the thought that she possessed an influence over Lord Keith, and pleased to see

Emilie provoked. But the evident discomposure of the former awakened her fears, and she resolved to try and propitiate Emilie on the first opportunity.

Suddenly Keith recovered himself, and saying: "I have, perhaps, tarried too long, so I bid you adieu, fair Angelique. I will to the king without further delay," he hurried from the salon.

CHAPTER III.—THE ESPOUSALS.

The dawn of another day had clearly broken over the city of Paris ere the Chevalier had ended his long conference with the Baron and the few councillors who had attended him. From the hotel he repaired straightway to Chaillot, whither he was anxiously expected by the queen-mother, and it was pre-arranged that when he should leave her twenty-four hours later one of the Baron's own carriages should be in waiting, with attendants, wearing the livery of the latter, to conduct him on his way to Chateau Thierry.

The excitement, consequent on the arrival and departure of the Chevalier at an end, the next day was devoted to festive preparations for the marriage of the Baron's daughter with the son of the Marshal and Lady St. John, which was to take place on the following morning at the church of Notre Dame, in presence of a large concourse of titled and influential personages, comprising many of the old noblesse, friends, or relations of the Baron de Breteuil, as also several of the Jacobite families still resident at St. Germain, and last, though not least, by that of the queen-mother, who for this day left her retirement at Chaillot to witness the espousals of the son of one whom she had loved so dearly as the Lady St. John.

The bridal robe of Cecile de Breteuil was of cloth of silver, her veil of Brussels lace was bound with a bandeau of diamonds, intermixed with orange blossoms, and her train was borne by the young girls, the power of whose charms, combined with a degree of foolish pleasure, all giving rise to jealous emotions in the breast of Emilie, had caused, in its result, a deadly act of mischief.

The bridegroom inherited the handsome features of his parents, but his handsome and well-formed head was disfigured by the full-bottomed periwig of the period. He was attired in black velvet, banded with pearls and with rigolettes of the same.

Then, in the splendid salons of the de Breteuil palace, great festivities were held to celebrate the marriage, but under all the outward show of gaiety and pomp there was a feeling of anxiety on the part of the Baron and his friends as to the success of the Chevalier's descent into Scotland, the plotting and mischievous Emilie being the only exception.

CHAPTER IV.—THE POST-HOUSE AT NORMANCOURT.

On a misty morning in November, 1715, the Chevalier de St. George, after bidding a sorrowful farewell to the queen-mother, started on his way to Chateau Thierry, his men, as I have already said, wearing the Baron's liveries.

The last tie that bound the queen-mother to the world, he had parted from her with much sorrow and depression.

A drizzling rain was falling, and it was scarce daybreak when he quitted Paris, but long ere he reached Normancourt it had ceased and given way to a fog or mist through which the Chevalier could but dimly discern the cottages of the peasantry as he emerged into the open country, little dreaming danger was so near, in spite of the caution which had accompanied his movements since he left Lorraine.

He had gradually shaken off the depression attendant on the parting with his mother, and was cheerfully conversing with his companions when, to his unspeakable alarm, the vehicle suddenly stopped, and the next moment he heard a female voice begging the driver not to proceed.

His momentary fear was now changed to surprise as a woman of not unpleasing countenance, dressed in the garb of a well-to-do person of the humbler class, placing her foot on the step of the carriage, thus addressed him: "If it be true that you are the King of England, I warn you not to go to the post-house. You will be lost if you do, for several villains are waiting there to murder you."

The unfortunate Chevalier was gifted with great presence of mind, and without betraying the emotion he felt, he said:

"Tell me your name, my good woman, as also how you became possessed of such information as this?"

"My name is L'Hopital; I am a single woman and the mistress of the post-house at Normancourt, which I beg you not to go near; three Englishmen are still there drinking," she continued, "whose conversation I have listened to; they are arranging with some desperate characters living in this neighborhood as to how they mean to set upon and waylay a traveler who was to change horses at Normancourt."

* Strickland's Lives, &c.

court on his way to Chateau Thierry. If you are the King, are you not expected there on your way to England?"

For a moment the Chevalier faltered. Such words as those which fell from this honest woman's lips were indeed enough to dismay the stoutest heart, with the knowledge previously that his fierce enemy, Lord Stair, had his spies abroad, and that the British Government had set a price of £100,000 upon his head.

His hesitation lasted but a moment. The good woman's manner was too earnest for him to doubt her.

"I am indeed he whom you seek," he replied, regardless of the warning glances of Keith and his friend William Erskine, both of whom lacked the Chevalier's reliance on the woman's sincerity, "and confiding in your truth, I will at once return to Paris."

"There is no need to take such a step," she replied. "I have given the villains such an abundance of wine and spirituous liquors that they are thoroughly intoxicated; then I locked them in the room, satisfied that for the present they are too drunk to do any harm, and then stole on to apprise you of the danger you are in, and if you feel that you can confide in my good intentions, I will at once take you to the house of our good Cure, where you will be perfectly safe."

Lord Keith played nervously with the hilt of his sword as the good woman spoke. His apprehensions of two nights since were revived; again the words of Emilie, unmeaning but for the flash of her eye and the evident useless attempt to suppress her indignation at his foolish flirtation with her cousin rushed to his remembrance, and he inwardly cursed the hour when, by his own imprudence, he felt he was perhaps the means of having drawn the Chevalier into danger. He had seen enough during his visit at the Hotel to know that the sister of its lord was a woman to be feared if offended. With the unsuspecting frankness of his race, the Chevalier at once said:

"My best thanks are due to you, my good woman. I and my attendants will follow wherever you may lead us;" and descending from the carriage, he accompanied the worthy woman down a lane and across a somewhat unfrequented field, which led by a circuitous route to the village church of Normancourt.

It was an unpretending little building, and beside it stood the cottage of the Cure, a man well stricken in years, whose calm, placid countenance bespoke a well-spent life. Monsieur le Cure was in fact the idol of his people, and one of the foremost amongst his parishioners in helping him in every good work he knew to be the honest woman who now entered the garden leading to his house, accompanied by two gentlemen.

"Monsieur le Cure," she said, dropping a courtesy as the venerable pastor came forward to meet her, "I bring you no less a person than the King of England, whom some persons are lying in wait for at my house to waylay and murder."

The Cure's calm countenance was at once lighted up with an expression of delight.

"Ah, Monsieur le Prince, accept the hospitality of my house, I pray you, till we can concert means to ensure your safety," he said, leading the way to his own apartment, proud and happy to have it in his power to yield a shelter to the Chevalier, whom he immediately recognized as having met at Chaillot when on a visit to the queen-mother. Then, after lending an attentive ear to his worthy friend, Madame L'Hopital, he advised her to proceed at once to the magistrate, Monsieur D'Argenson, and beg of him to accompany her, with two or three gens d'armes, and take the men at the post-house into custody.

Winter though it was, the worthy woman hastened with such speed to the abode of the magistrate that drops of perspiration stood on her comely face, and she was so out of breath that it was some time before she could make known her errand.

The magistrate, to whom she was well known, was even then hearing several cases, but as she was a person of some importance in the village and universally respected, the man to whom she spoke took her at once to D'Argenson.

It was with some difficulty, however, that he could be made to comprehend what was really the matter, so extreme was the agitation of the generally calm post-mistress; but when he at length understood her errand, he rose hastily, dismissed the cases that were being tried till the following day, and summoned half a dozen well armed men, complimenting Madame meanwhile for her courage and discretion, he proceeded at once to the post-house.

Her heart beating with joy at the success of her stratagem, Madame took the key out of her pocket. The three Englishmen whom she had locked up were still sleeping off the effects of the liquor with which she had so well plied them; the fourth of the party proved to be a baron well known to D'Argenson as a villainous spy in the employment of crafty Lord Stair.

With some little difficulty the Englishmen were aroused; at first they stared with a half-tipsy defiant look at the gens d'armes; then, as they gradually recovered themselves and were made to understand the charge Madame preferred against them, they produced Lord Stair's passports.

He who was evidently the superior of the party proved to be Colonel Douglas, son of Sir William Douglas, an *attache* of the Embassy, who, with an air of great bravado, boldly confronted and attempted to prevent D'Argenson from the exercise of his duty.

"I will not be interfered with," said he, assuming a menacing attitude. "Understand, I and my companions are doing our duty. We are all engaged in the service of the British Ambassador."

D'Argenson surveyed the doughty colonel with a look of unqualified contempt.

"Put up your sword, sir," said he. "You and your companions are all my prisoners. No ambassador would dare to avow such villainous actions as that in which you have been engaged to-day. Officers," he added, "take these persons into custody. I commit them for trial."

Gnashing his teeth with rage, the little red-faced colonel, scarce yet quite sober, shook his fist in the direction of the inner room to which he imagined Madame had withdrawn, and inwardly cursed the folly which had led him, by indulging too freely in the use of the bottle, to speak aloud of the business in which he was engaged.

"Eleven o'clock," he said to himself, as with a furious gesture he followed his companions under the escort of the gens d'armes. "Two hours since he must have arrived at Normancourt. One hundred thousand pounds at stake, and lost by a babbling tongue and a wine bottle."

Swelling with impotent rage, the whole party were after a time duly consigned to prison, after which the clear-headed magistrate penned a letter to Lord Stair, acquainting that discomfited personage with the event of the morning, and carefully avowing his belief that his Excellency was in no way aware of the attempt about to be made on the persons of undefended travelers.

Meanwhile Madame had hastened to dispatch one of her couriers to Chateau Thierry with a true statement of what had occurred; then, having provided herself with a dress which she procured from a friend in the village, she hastened to the house of the Cure.

The calm countenance of the Chevalier betrayed no trace of the feelings which were working within his soul. His first act was one of thanksgiving to God for his miraculous escape; his next a return of heartfelt thanks to the worthy soul to whom, under God, he owed his preservation.

Panting and breathless, Madame had thrown herself on the chair the Cure had placed for her, pressing one hand on her heart she produced with the other from beneath the folds of her large cloak the disguise she had brought with her for the Chevalier.

"The villains are all in prison, Monsieur le Cure," she said, "and I have here a dress for the King, should he like another disguise. Hark! let him lose no time. There are the wheels of one of my own voiture; a fresh relay of horses will be ready for him when he is some way on his journey."

As the good woman spoke, a smart-looking voiture rumbled up to the garden gate, and the Chevalier, who, not having been seen by any one leaving, thought it a loss of time to alter his present disguise, would have again paused to reiterate his thanks to his preserver and the good Cure, but the latter urged his departure, bidding him remember that danger might yet lurk in his path, and recommending himself warmly to the prayers of his whilom venerable friend, the persecuted, proscribed heir of three kingdoms entered Madame's voiture, accompanied by his two attendants, and reaching Nantes in safety, found a vessel in readiness to convey him to St. Malo.

Meanwhile Lord Stair's indignation knew no bounds at the failure of his villainous scheme, which he attributed solely to the strong drinks of which he found Colonel Douglas and his men had taken such large quantities.

D'Argenson, partly in a spirit of mischief, had exposed both them and the villainous La Motte, and was eloquent in praise of the excellent Madame L'Hopital, whose energy and discretion, he said, had alone averted a dreadful catastrophe.

"My evil stars are against me," said the Earl to Sir William Douglas, to whom he had narrated, "as clearly as his gust of passion would allow, the failure of the undertaking of his son. 'The Regent plays us false; for when I demanded, in the name of King George, that the Pretender should not be allowed to pass through France,' he replied, 'he would have him taken back to Lorraine, if I could tell him where he was, and that he was not to be obliged to be spy or gaoler for King George.' Then he sent for the Major of the Guard, and before