

The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 1872.

NO. 43.

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

By Miss AGNES M. STEWART, author of the "World and Cloister," "A Life in the Cloister," "Grace O'Halloran," &c.

(From the *Catholic Mirror*.)

CHAPTER XXXI.—(Continued.)

Suddenly pausing the queen rose, saying: "Shall I not see him to-night, he will sleep no sounder for it, depend on it."

"No, not till the morning," replied the king, "he has been at Versailles all day, and has probably not returned. Let the child have refreshment and a night's rest, and see St. John on the morrow."

With her own hands Mary Beatrice, who had followed Florence with an attendant into the old room she had occupied years since, then helped to divest her of her travelling garb, asking in a pathetic tone when she had again seated herself, what she thought of the king's appearance.

"His Majesty," said Florence, "looks much older, but then, madam, four years have passed, those years have made an alteration in all of us." She might have added, "the king looks ill, careworn, and depressed."

The queen never left the side of her favorite that evening. Moreover, she was hurried to the royal nursery, to see the infant princess whom James had styled at her birth *La Conscience* (because, he said, "she was to console him for the evil conduct of his elder daughters"), and also the bright and blooming Prince of Wales, now a lovely boy of six years old.

It was followed, as a matter of course, that Florence spent the entire evening in the closet of the king. Not only was James and his court rejoiced to see their *protégée*, again, but she had come from the Court of William and Mary, in which she had spent the four years of her absence. And though James never knew to the day of his death, the extent of the treachery of his daughter Anne, his eyes were opened to much of family cabal to which she had become a prey, during her residence at Kensington.

Notwithstanding their disgust they were both amused by the ludicrous account Florence gave them of the boorish conduct of William to herself, at her last interview, as also at the message that most polite king sent to her the day before she left the palace. Indeed, so fond was William of Orange of appropriating to himself the monies of other persons, that there was but little doubt his dislike to Florence was increased by the fact that, after all, he had to let her and her money slip through his fingers. Doubtless, had she remained at the court long enough for the sore occasioned by the queen's death to have healed up, he would not have stood upon any great punctilio as to whether he fulfilled her request or not.

Three years later the pages of history make known to us that the queen Mary Beatrice suffered fearfully from this dishonest propensity of the king to appropriate to himself the money of others. Parliament had agreed to pay a pension of £50,000 per annum to that unfortunate queen, of which she never received a farthing. William deceived the nation, and defrauded the queen; he put the money in his own pocket. That pension might have been obtained at a later date when William and Anne had both passed away. The money

might have been reimbursed, but the royal exiles would not, and rightly, stoop to ask for it as subjects.

When Florence first awoke on the following morning, she had some difficulty in comprehending that really she was back again at St. Germain. She had to glance round the old, well-remembered room, and rouse herself thoroughly before she could satisfy herself, that it was not some pleasant dream, the illusion of which was about to be dispelled. I beg you also to bear in mind that there was a person to whom she was, in a manner, already united, and whom she was, of course, very anxious to see once again, whom during the years of their separation she had never forgotten; every moment seemed trebled in duration till she beheld him again; no formal meeting was theirs to be either. The king and queen were to have nothing whatever to do with it. She could not sleep again for very joy though it was yet early; the morning was bright and clear, there was the valley once more, how different the prospect to that of four weary years. She arose, and dressed herself, threw on a heavy furred mantle, and went out to ramble on the terrace, enjoying with the keen relish of one who had long endured a sort of honorable captivity, the cool bracing air, the lovely prospect, notwithstanding it was winter, and above all the blessed consciousness that she was with those whom she loved, and by whom she was beloved.

She paused after a while, leaned against the palisades, and a sense of quiet happiness, to which she had long been a stranger, took possession of her heart.

Absorbed in her own pleasant joyous thoughts, she heard nothing, saw nothing, regarded not the lapse of time, knew not that the fond eyes of Queen Mary Beatrice, attended by another to whom she was dearer far than life itself, were looking down upon her from a window of the chateau, and was still looking far away into the future, weaving bright dreams of wedded happiness, picturing to herself how a certain chateau, at present vacant, in the valley, might be redecored, and of all the good she with her wealth might be able to do for the poor emigrants, when the words,

"Florence, my betrothed," fell on her ear in the tones of a well-remembered voice, like a stream of music, the melody of which has never been forgotten.

The surprise was too sudden, she would have fallen but for a strong arm outstretched to support her, and then when she recovered, and he grew eloquent in praise of her constancy and truth, and forgetful of all the world beside, they talked over the days that had gone by, and conjured up fair visions of the future, of home ties and joys which Death alone should break.

In the midst of her new found happiness Florence had not forgotten Grace, the friend to whom she owed so very much, in whose character flourished, by the grace of repentance, those same virtues inherent in the queen.

The packet containing the story of her life, Florence had a year since forwarded to the queen, had of itself been sufficient to introduce her to her notice.

Not very long, you may be sure, were the nuptials of Florence and Sir Reginald delayed. In the Chapel Royal of St. Germain that ceremony which completed their betrothal was soon celebrated, being fixed to take place immediately after the Easter festivities.

In the middle of the week following Low Sunday, there was a great gathering at the Chapel of St. Germain. The fond hands of Grace, who looked on Florence as her own child, had dressed the bride's hair, had twined amongst the golden tresses the delicate orange blossom, and arranged the veil, and had decked her in as costly a robe as that which Mary of England had presented her with two years since; it was the gift of Louis of France.

Eight young ladies, chosen from the most distinguished Jacobite families resident at St. Germain, acted as bridesmaids, and King James gave the bride away. The French King was also present with Madame de Maintenon and many of the nobles of his court. Without doubt, those who gathered within the Chapel Royal were right in saying there could not be found in the whole realm of France, a lovelier or more virtuous bride, or a braver knight than Florence O'Neill and Sir Reginald St. John.

SEVEN YEARS AFTER.

"Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us, consider and behold our reproach." This verse of the Lamentations was sung in the choir of the Chapel Royal at St. Germain, seven years after the marriage of Florence O'Neill.

The words I have quoted touched a chord in the heart of King James, he sank back in the arms of the queen in a swoon.

Many months of weakness and infirmity had brought him to the brink of the grave, the hour so dreaded by Mary Beatrice had at length arrived.

The children of his old age now stand around his bed, before the king receives the rites of the Church; he wishes to counsel and bid them farewell.

The prince first drew nigh, and embracing

him with passionate earnestness James spoke to him in these words:

"I am now leaving the world which has been to me a sea of storms and tempests, it being the will of Almighty God to wean me from it by many and great afflictions. Serve Him with all your strength and never put the crown of England in competition with your eternal salvation. There is no slavery like sin, no liberty like His service. If He in His providence shall see fit to place you on the throne of your royal ancestors, govern your people with justice and clemency. Remember, kings are not made for themselves but for the good of their people. Set before their eyes in your own actions a pattern of all manner of virtues, consider them as your own children. You are the child of vows and prayers, behave yourself accordingly. Honor your mother that your days may be long; and be always a kind brother to your dear sister that you may reap the blessings of concord and unity." The prince gave way to a passionate burst of grief. The little Princess Louisa was then brought, bathed in tears, to her dying father's bedside. She was one of the loveliest of children, and young as she was the intelligent child understood the sorrow that impended over her.

"Adieu, my dear child," said the king after he had embraced and blessed her, "adieu. *Serve your Creator in the days of your youth, consider virtue as the brightest ornament of your sex. Follow closely in the steps of that great pattern of virtue, your mother, who has been, no less than myself overburdened with calamity, but Time, the mother of Truth, will, I hope, at last, make her virtues as bright as the sun."

Then the dying king exhorted his servants to lead holy and Christian lives, and after he had received the last Sacraments, he told the Cure that he wished to be buried privately in his parish church, with no other inscription than these words, "Here lies James, King of Great Britain."

He died in perfect charity with all the world, and especially named his son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, and the Princess Anne of Denmark, his daughter.

All this while, the poor queen had sunk down on the ground by his bedside. The king said all he could to comfort her, pointing out it was the will of God in this as in all other trials.

The following day Louis of France arrived, alighting at the iron gates lest the noise of the coach driving into the court should disturb the king. James received him as composedly as if nothing were the matter. The sight of the queen's grief was the only thing that disturbed the calmness with which he was passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death; bade those who were near him lead her to her chamber, and then requested that the prayers for a soul departing should be read. The queen, worn out by grief and watching, went softly round by the back stairs, and knelt in a closet behind the alcove of the bed, where she could hear every word and sigh uttered by the dear object of a love which for twenty-seven years had been the absorbing principle of her existence. The king at last sank into a sort of lethargy, giving, for several days, little consciousness of life, except when prayers were read to him, when, by the expression of his countenance and motion of his lips, it was plain that he prayed also.

The sands of life were ebbing fast when King Louis next entered the chamber of the dying James; for when the former enquired after his health he neither saw nor heard him, and on being roused from his dreary stupor, and told the King of France was there, he opened his eyes with a painful effort, saying, "Where is he?"

"Sire, I am here," said Louis; "I am come to see how you do."

"I am going," said James, "to pay that debt which must be paid by kings as well as by my meanest subjects. I give your Majesty my dying thanks for all your kindness to me and my afflicted family, and do not doubt of its continuance, having always found you good and generous." He then expressed his thanks for the king's kindness during his sickness.

"That is, indeed, a small matter said Louis; "but I have something to acquaint you with of more importance."

As the king spoke thus the attendants began to retire.

"Let nobody withdraw," said Louis. "I am come, sire, to tell you that whenever it shall please God to call you out of this, I will take your family under my protection, and will recognize your son, the Prince of Wales, as the heir of your three realms."

As the king spoke these words all present threw themselves at his feet. He was the sole hope of the sorrowful court at St. Germain.

Louis mingled his tears with those which were shed by all around him.

James feebly strove to raise his arms to embrace his royal friend, and strove to speak, but nothing could be heard beyond these words:

"I thank God I die with a perfect resigna-

tion, and forgive all the world, particularly the emperor and the Prince of Orange."

"I beg as a last favor," said James, "that no funeral pomp may be used at my obsequies."

"That is the only favor I cannot grant," replied Louis.

"I entreat you, sire," said the dying king, "rather to employ any money you may feel disposed to expend for that purpose for the relief of my destitute followers. I recommend them to your compassionate care, and I beg you, sire, no longer to remain in this melancholy place."

The queen had sent for the prince. She brought him herself through the little bed-chamber into that of his dying father, that he might return thanks to his protector. The young prince knelt down and expressed his gratitude for his majesty.

Louis raised and embraced him, promising to supply his father's place.

Never, says his son, the Duke of Berwick, was there seen more tranquility, patience, and even joy, than in the feelings with which he contemplated the approach of death.

*With much firmness he then took his leave of the queen, bidding her restrain her tears. "Reflect," he said, "I am going to be happy, and forever." Then he bade her write, when he should be no more, to the Princess Anne, to assure her of his forgiveness, and to charge her, on his blessing, to atone to her brother for the injury she had done him.

The end was nigh, his hands began to shake with a convulsive motion, the pangs of death came visibly upon him.

"I beg your Majesty to withdraw," said the Bishop of Autun to the queen; "I am about to pray for a soul in its agony. The sight of your anguish will disturb the serenity God has shed upon the heart of the king."

She consented to tear herself away, but when she kissed his hands for the last time, her sobs roused the king from the lethargy into which nature had sunk.

"Why is this?" said he tenderly. "Are you not flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone? Are you not part of myself? Now is it, then, that one part of me should feel so differently to the other; I in joy, and you in despair? My hope is in the hope I feel that God in His mercy will forgive me my sins and receive me into His beatitude, and you are affected for it. I have long sighed for this happy moment, and you know it. Well, cease then to lament for me; I will pray for you. Farewell!"

It was yet twenty-four hours ere the king died. The queen was forbidden again to enter the chamber, though he asked for her each time he awoke; and, informed of this, she implored so passionately once again to see him, promising not to say anything to agitate him, that they allowed her to approach the bed.

She struggled to assume a feigned composure, but though the film of death was on the eyes of the king, and his ear becoming dead to outward sounds, he perceived the grief of her soul.

"Do you suffer?" she enquired.

"Yes, because you suffer," he replied. "I should be well content if you were less afflicted, or could take some share in my happiness."

"Beg of God," she said, "to give me the grace of love and perfect resignation to His will."

They compelled her to withdraw; not even her best loved friend might approach. She passed the awful interval in fasting, watching, and prayer.

At last the tried and purified spirit of the king had passed away, but none durst venture to break the truth to the queen except her confessor, and even he shrunk from telling her so in direct words, but requested her to join with him in prayer for the king. He began with the words:

"Subvenite sancti Dei."

"O, my God, is it then over," she exclaimed, throwing herself on the ground in an agony of grief, for she knew that these words commenced the office for a soul departed.

"I exhort you, madam," said Father Keega, "to resign yourself to the will of God, and in token that you do so, say *Fiat voluntas tua*."

"Fiat," said the unhappy queen, in obedience to her spiritual director. The blow was very hard to bear, for she had till the last moment clung to the hope that the king would recover.

A smile was on the dead face of the king; the bitterness of death had long been passed. He had requested that his chamber door should be left open, that all who wished might freely enter; and a flock of French and English, of all ranks and stations, crowded forward.

In compliance with the ceremonial their respective positions exacted, the royal widow went to offer her homage to her boy. "Sir," she said, "I acknowledge you for my king, but I hope you will not forget you are my son." Then, overpowered by grief, she was carried in a chair from the apartment, and from thence to a carriage, which was to convey her to the Convent of Chaillot, in the retirement of which place she designed to pass the first days of her widowhood. One hour after her husband's

death attended by four ladies only, the queen left St. Germain for Chaillot.

The Church of the convent was hung with black, and as soon as she neared the convent the bells tolled, and the abbess and the community received her at the convent gate. In silence Mary Beatrice entered the convent, her hood drawn over her face, followed by her ladies, and overwhelmed with grief. The nuns gathered round her, no one spoke, but the abbess kissed the hem of her robe. Some of the sisters embraced her knees, and others kissed her hand, but no one uttered a single word; their tears expressed their affliction.

Without a sigh or a tear, the queen walked into the choir, and continued in this stupefaction of grief till one of the sisters approached, and, kissing her hand, said, in a tone of admiration, in the words of the royal Psalmist:

"My soul, will you not be subject to God?"

"Fiat voluntas tua," replied the queen, in a voice broken by sighs. Then advancing towards the choir, she said:

"Help me, my sisters, to thank my God for His mercies to that blessed spirit who is, I believe, rejoicing in His beatitude. Yes, I feel certain of it, in the depth of my grief." She then knelt before the altar, and remained a long while in prayer.

The poor queen had taken no food since the previous night, and the abbess, apprehending she would faint, begged her to be carried in a chair, but she chose to walk, saying:

"My blessed Saviour was not carried up the painful ascent to Mount Calvary, but walked to the consummation of His adorable sacrifice, bearing the burden of His cross for our sins, and shall I not imitate His holy example?"

The abbess and two or three of the nuns followed her to her chamber, and begged her to suffer herself to be addressed and go to bed; but she insisted on listening to more prayers. She could weep no more; the fountain of her tears was dried up, and its solace denied her.

She sighed often, writes the nun of Chaillot who preserved the record of this visit of Mary Beatrice, and was seized with fits of dying faintness, but listened with great devotion to the abbess, who knelt at her feet, and read to her appropriate passages from the Holy Scriptures for her consolation. Then she begged the community to pray for the soul of her husband, saying:

"A soul ought to be very pure that has to appear in the presence of God, and we, alas, sometimes fancy that persons are in heaven, when they are suffering the pains of purgatory." At this thought the sealed up fountain of her grief was opened, and she shed floods of tears. Much she wept and much she prayed, but was at last prevailed on to take a little nourishment and go to bed, while the nuns returned to the choir and sang the Vespers for the Dead. When the Prayers for the Dead were repeated in her chamber, in which she joined, repeating the verses of every psalm, for she knew them all by heart; and begged that a prayer for the conversion of England might be added, observing that for the last twelve years she had been at St. Germain she had never omitted that petition in her devotions.

At seven the queen sent for her almoner, and after she and her ladies had joined in their usual prayers, she begged the writer of this record to remain with her, for she saw that her ladies in waiting and her *femme de chambre* were worn out with fatigue and watching, and made them go to bed.

The nun's record goes on to say that, without pomp or noise, for fear of agitating the royal widow, the king's will was brought to the convent. When the king's will was opened it was found that he had directed his body to be buried in Westminster Abbey. It was to await the restoration in the Church of the Benedictines at Paris, whither it was conveyed the Saturday after his death in a hearse, followed by two coaches, in which were the officers of the king's household, his chaplains, and the prior of St. Germain; and the king's obsequies being duly performed in the convent church, the body was left under the hearse, covered with a pall, in one of the chapels. One after another the hopes of his race faded away, and still the bones of James II. awaited burial.

On the third the queen put on the habit of a widow, and while they were thus arraying, writes the nun of Chaillot, her Majesty observed that for the rest of her life she should never wear anything but black; she had long since renounced all vanities, and worn nothing but what was absolutely necessary; "and God knows," she added, "I did not put on decorations except when obliged to do so, or in early youth."

When her melancholy toilet was ended the ladies were permitted to enter to offer their homage, but not a word was spoken; she sat still and motionless, her eyes fixed on vacancy. I had the boldness to place the Crucifix where her regards were absent directly, and soon her attention was centred on that model of patience. After a quarter of an hour I told her the carriage had come. She rose, and said, "I have a visit to make before I go," and bursting into a passion of tears, she said, "I will go and pay my duty to it. I feel it is

* Life of James from the Stuart Papers.

† Life of James II., from Stuart Papers.

* Duke of Berwick's Memoirs.

* Memoirs of the Duke of Berwick.