

The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 1872.

NO. 31.

FLORENCE O'NEILL,
THE ROSE OF ST. GERMAINS.

OR,
THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.

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(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER VI.—SARSFIELD, LORD LUCAN.

The clocks in the good city of Limerick had proclaimed the first hour of a new day, and saw the occasional bark of a dog, or the patter of the rain, mingled with the faint sighing of the breeze, all was hushed in profound silence.

Yet there were two watchers in one of the upper chambers of a house just without the walls, and they appeared to be buried in profound meditation. The room was simply, nay, scantily furnished; in fact, it contained nothing save two or three chairs, a mean looking bedstead, on which was a mattress and a few blankets, a table, bearing the remains of a humble repast, and a chest of walnut-wood drawers at the farther end of the room, on which were placed a sword, belt, cap, and other accoutrements, declaring the profession of the inmate of that humble room to be that of arms.

Pacing the room, with a disturbed air, was a lady, whose age it were, perhaps, not easy to guess, for, to a certain freshness of complexion, and with hair whose rich brown reeked not of one silvery thread, there was that unmistakable maturity of form which may belong to a woman of some forty or forty-five years of age, together with those unmistakable lines on the brow which we call furrows, placed on the smooth forehead of woman by care and anxiety if not by the hand of time.

Seated beside the fire sits a man in the military undress of an officer, and with one hand shading his eyes from the bright glare of the lamp, he holds with the other an open letter, which he peruses with care and attention.

"This man was no other than Ireland's hero, the brave and gallant veteran, Sarsfield, Lord Lucan."

"Take heart, Catherine," he exclaimed, addressing the lady, "you may, perhaps, be indulging unnecessary fear. Madcap as she is, I think Florence has yet enough prudence to take care of herself. I do not like, any more than you do, this meditated encounter with Mary, but you have owned that this man, Layton, who has introduced himself to you, is an entire stranger, so that I do not see why you should place such implicit faith in his word."

"I cannot doubt the truth of what he has said," said Miss O'Neill; "he has shown himself too well acquainted with the affairs of my family to permit of my doing so. He evidently knows Sir Charles personally, spoke of Father Lawson, described the old Grange in Gloucestershire, where he had met the good Father, in company with that Sir Reginald, to whom Florence was long since betrothed. He also said that she had been seen in company with Ashton, one of the gentlemen attached to the household of Mary Beatrice, who, it is known, has but recently come from France, and is striving hard to return thither."

"Well, the story, certainly, is a strange one," answered the General, musingly; "so strange that really I should like to see the man. If anything be amiss I may be able to detect it. At all events I shall not return to my quarters till to-morrow night, and as you say he intends to call on you to-morrow, I will take care to see him, but we must still remember that Florence is possessed of more judgment and penetration than many of her sex. Depend on it, she will not involve herself without due precaution in the intended rising. For myself, I much like the news contained in the letter now before me," continued Sarsfield; "it gives me to understand that we may expect Tyrconnell early next month, when our poor soldiers will again have an opportunity to show their intrepidity. And now," he added, "I think you and myself had best betake ourselves to rest, and do not make yourself uneasy about Florence. Rest assured all is right as far as she is concerned. I believe her far too prudent to tempt danger."

Silent, though far from feeling convinced, Catherine O'Neill, the paternal aunt of Florence, retired to her room, not to sleep, but to muse over the fortunes of her orphan niece, and the perturbed state of public affairs, which at that time invested the city of Limerick with so much interest, and has since claimed for it and its gallant defenders so great an amount of prestige through succeeding ages.

Early in the morning the General met his cousin, Miss O'Neill, at breakfast. He had for a few days become her visitor on one condition alone, viz: that all ceremony should be foregone, and the poorest and simplest room in the house fitted up for his use, with a mattress for his bed and plain diet for his table; and his mind was intent on the contents of the letter he had received the night before, when a servant, entering the room, announced the arrival of Mr. Layton.

At the same moment the sound of many

voices, as of persons clamoring for admission, broke upon their ears, accompanied by the footsteps of a large concourse of people, then a peal of deafening knocks sounded at the door, and tumultuous cries of *Bring out the Stron spy!* Down with the traitor! reverberated on the air. Scarcely one moment had elapsed between the entrance of the servant announcing the arrival of Layton and the utterance of the shouts and cries which now met their astonished ears, and the acute General immediately divined that in some way their stranger visitant had to do with the fearful disturbance without.

Accordingly he bent a searching gaze on the man who stood before him trembling with fear, scarcely able to speak from excessive agitation, his light grey eyes sinking beneath the eagle glance of Sarsfield, who seemed to be asking himself where he had met the person whose features he perfectly well remembered, but whose identity was rendered difficult to establish, in consequence of the man of well nigh four score years having adopted the disguise of forty; for our old friend Benson stands face to face with Sarsfield no longer with his own silvery locks, combed straight over his forehead, and in the sober suit of dark cloth it was his custom to wear, but with his head adorned with a brown wig, his garments of the newest cut and fashion, and gay material to boot, and the whole man so strangely metamorphosed that no wonder the brave General failed to recognize Benson in him, the fanatic Benson whom he had known in earlier days, and sincerely regretted that the training of the youth St. John had been entrusted to his care.

But two ringleaders of the mob without clamored loudly for admittance. Their voices were recognized by the General, and, acting on a sudden impulse, he gave orders that the door should be opened, and these persons admitted.

But Sarsfield, as he passed through the hall, had been seen at the open door; it was no longer a question of admission of two persons, for, pushing forcibly by the affrighted servant, a tumultuous crowd rushed in, shrieking out:

"Och, and is it yourself, General dear? Give us up the cowardly spalpeen, the black devil of a Saxon; let us have the bluid of the traitor sure, and is it from the camp of the intiny he comes?" were a few of the string of epithets which rung in the ears of the General and his cousin.

"Silence, silence, my friends," exclaimed Sarsfield, and he gesticulated with all his force to secure the attention of the infuriated mob, for the greater part of the inhabitants of the city of Limerick seemed to be thronging to the quarter in which his cousin's house was situated; and having taken care to commit Benson to the custody of two stout serving men, he said:

"We must be just, and, before we punish, see in what the prisoner is guilty. Now then, speak: how has this man offended?" he added, in a loud voice, addressing the ringleaders of the unruly mob.

Denis McCarthy, a tall, muscular man, attired as a private soldier, now stepped forward, saying:

"Arrah, yer honor, thin the rale fact is this. Yonder spalpeen has just come from Derry, where he has a dale of friends 'im afther boin' tould. My brother Barney knew him in London, yer honor, and sure that is why we know him, for a traitor it's thure that he is, thin. General dear, make him take off his wig, and a white headed old fellow ye'll see."

Sarsfield found it no very easy matter to make himself heard in reply to this not very clear speech of McCarthy's, for more than twenty voices at once exclaimed:

"Whisht, yer honor, sure and he's afther mischief, the false Saxon that he is, faix. He knows a power of things, and that a good priest from England is in this house. The spalpeen and spy, dog that he is, is afther seeing the Father, and thin sure and it's aisy to know what he'd be afther doing later, and afther he's done mischief for the Father, thin he can still do a mighty purty business of his own respecting a relation of Miss O'Neill's herself."

"What have you to say, villainous spy," said the General, darting on him a look of mingled indignation and contempt. "What have you to say in your defence, you wretched spy? What reason can you give why we shouldn't hang you up like a dog, as you are, on the Limerick gallows before the sun has set? How dare you presume to come here to carry on your treasonable practices? Hark ye, boys," he continued, addressing Denis and another, who appeared to have acted the part of ringleaders, "I will hear what punishment you each deserve, and then decide which he shall undergo."

"Arrah, thin, General dear," said Denis, who, by the way, I should have said, was the General's servant when in his quarters, "sure and I'm afther asking yer honor to let me do him one little service before we are afther punishing him."

"With all my heart, Denis, I put him entirely in your hands," said Sarsfield, while a low groan escaped the lips of the terrified wretch before him. With a yell of joy, Denis

bounded forward, and the next moment, amidst loud and deafening huzzas, the curly brown peruke was thrown high over the heads of the assembled crowd.

"See, see, the spalpeen, and sure isn't it a shame," shouted Denis, "that ye should be afther disgracing an old man's white locks in such a way? And now what'll we do, General, with this thraitorous spy? I'm afther thinking it would do him a dale of good to tie him on a donkey's back, and give him a rope's end all through the streets of Limerick; but first, yer honor, we'll have a bit o' sport, and be afther shaving his head, seeing that thin he'll have thru and rale reason to wear a wig."

"Well said, Denis," replied Sarsfield.—"And now, Pat, let me hear what punishment you devise, and then I can choose between the two."

Pat lifted his cap to the General, and then said:

"Thin if the thruth may be tould, General, I'm afther thinking frind Denis too gentle by half. Whisht, yer honor," he added, with a finger on his lips, "wouldn't it be a purtier thing to hang him up and let him die the thraitor's death?"

"Hurra! hurra!" shouted the mob, the cry taken up by the multitude in the distance; "let him die the thraitor's death. If ye spares him, General, it's sara and afther mischief he'll be goin' agin."

"What say you, traitorous spy," shouted Sarsfield, "why shouldn't you die the death you so richly deserve, as these men so justly deserve?"

"Spare me, oh, spare me," cried the miserable wretch, "and I promise you I'll never, never, set foot in Ireland agin. Here, here," he exclaimed, putting his hands in his pockets, and with frantic eagerness, pulling out sundry rolls of paper, "I had these from King William's favorite page, and give them to you instead of to those for whom they were intended. Pardon me, and I will."

"Give him to us, General dear, give him to us, and we'll make the spalpeen answer for some of his tricks," exclaimed the voices of men raised to such a pitch of fury that but for the presence of a leader as popular as Sarsfield, it had been certain the career of this dangerous fanatic had been immediately cut short.

As it was, however, Sarsfield again commanded silence, and recommended him to mercy on account of his old age. Then, turning to Denis, he said:

"I think I shall leave this wretched creature to your merciful treatment, Denis, you undertaking, however, to see that he embarks for London as soon as the punishment shall have been inflicted."

"Och, thin, General, sure and I think out of consideration to his white hairs, barring the rale fact that he doesn't care one bit about thin himself, we'll be afther letting him off a little more aisy than I thought of doing; so, yer honor," added Denis, in one of his most persuasive tones, "suppose we give him only fifty lashes. Sure and I have the hould of him, and will see that he is fairly banished from the Emerald Isle forever."

The General bowed his assent, and aware that he might safely commit this discomfited villain into the hands of Denis, he delivered him up to his safe custody, the former carrying him off in triumph, amidst the yells and groans of the mob.

Poor Denis! Benson escaped much more mercifully than he deserved, for he chose to give him the lashes himself, and laid them on as lightly as his own merciful nature prompted, to every roar the wretch uttered answering, "Hould yer tongue, ye spalpeen, or I'll give the lash to some one who will be afther laying it on a dale heavier than I do."

Indeed Benson was mercifully spared, seeing that he had no right to expect to get off with his life. The lash hurt him but little. The matter of shaving his head, which Denis scrupulously exacted, and which occasioned him and his fellows no small degree of merriment, was, in fact, the most bitter part of his punishment, as will be seen later.

No sooner had the mob dispersed than Sarsfield, quietly seated with Miss O'Neill, proceeded to examine the papers. They proved to be a packet of letters that had passed between himself and William's favorite page, Harding, from which it appeared that not only was Benson contriving to break off all prospect of a union between Florence and Sir Reginald, but had also offered himself as a spy on the movements of the General in Limerick, and unless fortunately recognized by the brother of Denis, should very probably have caused much mischief to good Father Lawson, now an inmate, for the time being, in the house of Catherine O'Neill.

CHAPTER VII.—THE BARONET'S PRESENTATION.

"Your candid opinion now, my dear uncle, of William of Orange?" said Florence, watching with whimsical curiosity certain minute preparations Sir Charles was making for presenting himself at Kensington the evening after his first introduction to the king.

The baronet appeared embarrassed, and replied, testily:

"What makes you so curious? The king received me courteously enough, child. Is it not a mark of his royal favor that I spend this evening in his banqueting room? I should not be surprised, Florence, if a favor of the same kind is shown you by queen Mary, who, perhaps, is more gracious after all than you take her to be, and even, in time, make a convert of Florence O'Neill."

"Yes, truly," and Florence smiled somewhat contemptuously, "Mary would be very gracious to me if she could see into my heart; why, it positively makes me unhappy to think that my lips must press the woman's hand."

"Suppose I were to whisper a few words in the king's ear concerning your disloyalty, do you think you can trust me?"

"Yes, dearest uncle," and she affectionately kissed the forehead of the venerable old man as he prepared to depart, "I can trust you, because you love me far too well to betray me; and, moreover, understand, I have read your secret. You dislike the Dutch King, though you will not own it, perhaps even to yourself."

"Ah, you are a saucy girl," said Sir Charles, parting back the sunny tresses of his niece, "how can you read my secret thoughts? Why, I tell you, I think myself highly honored, that I, a simple baronet, have the *entree* to William's presence afforded me."

"Especially, as you feel quite convinced," replied the aggravating Florence, "that Dutch William has a keen eye to gain broad acres, and widely spread influence, *simple* baronet though you be."

Sir Charles made no reply, but anxious to close the conversation, hurried from the room, while Florence, relapsing for a few minutes attitude, drew her writing materials before her and wrote as follows:

DEAR MRS. ROBINSON:—I beg you to tell your husband that I shall certainly be with him on the morning after the arrangements now pending shall have been completed, provided you can yourself undertake to accompany me to your house. I, on my part, expect to have communications to make, which, doubtless, will be valuable to absent friends.

Yours, in all friendship,
ELIZABETH FITZGERALD.

This courteously worded epistle, signed and directed under feigned names, Florence then carefully sealed and despatched to Mrs. Ashton's house in Covent Garden, and for the next half-hour this daring young lady, without a thought as to the troubles she might be weaving for herself, by mixing herself up with this conspiracy, amused herself by thinking over the few words that had passed between herself and the baronet, which together with certain little points, clearly showed her that her uncle did not admire what he had observed in the king's character, enough to make him resigned at changing the tactics of his whole life. And though she could not get him to speak out, she was aware he was restive under the zealous spirit with which she chose to force on him, her conviction, that in spite of the honor he prated about he had seen nothing in the Dutch King to warrant his epousal of his interests.

Meanwhile, the Queen had anxiously expected the arrival of the churlish old man whom her father had never been able to lure from the seclusion and sports of his country home, and was also curious to receive the beautiful niece whom she knew had long been the favored protegee of Mary of Modena, for she was aware of her betrothal to St. John, and trusted by artfully bringing the two in close contact with each other, to be enabled to break through the barrier which had been opening up between them, prevent the return of Florence to the court of the exiled Queen, and attach her to her own person, for Mary really designed appointing Florence to the post of one of her maids of honor, with the idea that eventually all the secrets of the little court at St. Germain, and the hopes and fears of her father and his consort would be laid open to herself.

However, let us return from our digression, and accompany the baronet to the presence of William the Third. The king was always sparing of speech and singularly taciturn to those about him. When at his meals his manners were disgusting to others; and the irritable spirit of the old baronet chafed within him as he observed Lord Clarendon, who had accompanied him thither, take his stand behind the king's chair, beckoning Sir Charles to follow his example by occupying the same situation.

No word did William ever speak on occasions like the present, nor was it his custom to invite the proudest nobles in the land to sit down and eat: their master and their conqueror he deemed himself to be, and their place was behind his chair, the neglected witnesses of his meal.

With feelings of intense disgust, Sir Charles regarded the King, inwardly cursing the folly which had brought him thither, for in vain had he awaited the honor of a word; but no—not one had escaped the lips of William of Orange. The old gentleman stood long a disgusted witness of the scene before him, and during the time occupied in the dignified employment assigned to himself, he mentally exclaimed:

"Marry, but it just serves me right, I am but justly met with, what business had I to be here at all, instead of making merry with

friends and tenants at Mervillo Grange? Or if at nearly four score years of age, I must needs be fool enough to meddle with politics, then why not devote my fortune and the remainder of my life in the service of the rightful King. Well, well, a few weeks more and I will see if I cannot make my escape—aye, even if I foign an attack of my old enemy the gout, and shut myself up a voluntary prisoner in my own house. Anything sooner than thus crouch before this Dutchman's rule. And—"

But the thread of his meditations was here cut short by William rising from his seat, and graciously vouchsafing a few words to himself and Lord Clarendon, with some three or four noblemen who stood around. On this day, Queen Mary had dined alone in her own apartment, on account of some trifling indisposition.

As William was about to retire, as if struck by a sudden thought, he turned to the baronet, saying:

"You have a niece living with you at present Sir Charles, she is betrothed, we understand, to Sir Reginald St. John in whose welfare both the queen and myself are warmly interested. Her Majesty, you have already been informed will grant her an audience on the morrow. See that you do not neglect to bring her to the queen."

Then awaiting no reply, William passed on, followed by two or three of the most intimate of his Dutch friends amongst whom was his favorite gentleman, Walter Harding.

Comfortably ensconced in his own private closet, the king now reclined at his ease in a luxurious, richly carved chair, covered with crimson velvet.

English magnates were no longer present, and with his Dutch friends and the favored Englishman, Harding, William could at last relax and deem it allowable to discard the restraints of royalty, and quaffing off his favorite liquor, Holland gin, which the English nobles lately in his presence would scorn to touch, passed what wore, no doubt, the pleasantest hours of the day.

But on this occasion it was with one particular person that William had to do; and beckoning the favorite to his side, his grave countenance wearing a most gracious smile, William exclaimed, eagerly rubbing his hands together:

"Now, then, Harding, what have you to tell me about the vagaries of that fool Benson? Speak out at once, man. I should not be surprised to hear that the wretch has come to evil by putting himself in the lion's den, if your information was correct, that Sarsfield really had him in his power, but out upon the fool, why did he take on himself to play the spy, if he was so dull witted that he could not act his part better?"

"Ah, your Majesty, I beg you to spare him," replied Harding, "his wits would have saved him well enough, but a cruel mishap prevented him from serving his royal master as he could have wished. I will bring him to your presence a little later; he has been waiting in one of my apartments for several hours, in order to beg your Majesty's pardon for the awkward way in which he executed his mission; but, indeed, he has undergone the roughest treatment, and narrowly escaped with his life."

"A good thing had he lost it," was the ill-tempered reply, "if he could not do his work better. Make no excuses, but tell me the contents of the papers which I hear have fallen into Sarsfield's hands."

For a moment Harding hesitated as though afraid to excite the wrath of William, but the keen eyes of the king were fixed steadily upon him as he quaffed off another glass of Holland. Somewhat intimidated, Harding answered truthfully from fear less Benson, when questioned by the king, should betray him.

"I pray your Majesty's forgiveness if I have done amiss, but out of pure affection for my friend St. John, Benson has been zealously endeavoring to break off the proposed union between him and the Lady Florence O'Neill. She cares not to become Lady St. John, your Majesty, for he tells me she has quarrelled with him for his loyalty to your gracious self. And might I aspire so high," added Harding, "I doubt not but that I could have the wit and the power, too, to win the lady's love, and make her, disloyal as she is, one of the most loyal in your Majesty's dominions."

"You are an impudent knave and full of conceit," said William, "and fancy great things of your handsome person to think you may look so high, but remember the lady is of high birth, and proud of her descent, if all that is said of her be true. Moreover, I have heard you say you are under obligations to Sir Reginald, and yet, under the rose, you are trying to rob him of the lady. But enough," he continued, languidly, "she is not to be won by you. Finish quickly; what more of Benson?"

"Ah, your Majesty, I have the worst to tell yet. He had papers on his person when the brutal mob got hold of him, one of whom formerly knew him in London as a persecutor of the Papists, and, unfortunately, recognized him in Limerick, and these papers, from various hands, your Majesty," added he, for the king's eyes rested on his countenance, as if he doubted the truth of his words, "these papers alluded,