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

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(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

She sat up in her bed, and bent forward in the attitude of one who listens intently; and, at the same moment, a small Bleuheim spaniel, which always slept on her hearth rug, leaped on the bed, howling piteously.

"Ah, gracious heaven," she said to herself, "I am right; that noise is the crackling of wood, and the sagacious little animal warns me of danger."

The next moment, Florence had leaped from her bed, the air was already hot, the oaken flooring on which she stood felt warm, and had, doubtless, alarmed the instinct of the dog.

She hastily threw on a dressing-gown, put her feet in her slippers, snatched some valuable trinkets which lay on the table, and rushed from her room, closely followed by her dog.

Her chamber was on the same side of the palace as the queen's apartments; she had no thought but to save her life. A thrilling shriek burst from her lips, for she was aware now she was in the gallery, that the next suite of apartments was in flames, and with the speed of an affrighted fawn, she fled to the queen's chamber.

"Awake, madam, awake, shrieked the affrighted girl. "Here, lean on me," she added, dragging the queen, still half asleep, from her bed. "Hasten for your life, we may not yet be in time, for we must go back the way I came."

The queen, still scarcely conscious, was thus half through the gallery, before a knot of ladies and servants had found their way to her chamber, and the fire had made such progress that it was with difficulty they escaped with their lives.

In her night dress only, the queen was hurried into St. James' Park, still leaning heavily on the arm of her young maid of honor, the whole Park lighted up by the bright red glare from the burning palace.

Accompanied by the ladies attached to her person, the distressed queen made her way hastily along in the direction of St. James' Palace in this pitiable condition. But she was doomed to suffer still more mortification on this memorable night.

An immense throng of persons had, by this time, assembled, and a cry of "The queen, the queen," was raised, as Mary crossed the Park on her way to the Palace of St. James.

Amongst these persons were two gentlemen, Sir John Feurick and Colonel Ogglethorpe; they were both warmly attached to the interests of her father.

The bright red glow from the burning palace revealed to them the pale features of her Majesty, who was speechless with fear, and the soddenness with which she had been dragged from her bed. For naturally a very heavy sleeper, she had not been aroused by the shrieks of Florence, or the speedy alarm that had followed them. Indeed, she was, so to speak, but half asleep when hurried out of her chamber.

Sir John and the Colonel followed her through the Park, on her way to the Palace; it was too good an opportunity for these steady adherents of her father to let slip by without telling the queen the truth. Accordingly they reviled her with many hard words; they bade her remember that her filial sins would come home to her, sooner or later "and notoriously insulted her," says another manuscript authority.*

Doubtless, her savagely unfeeling conduct when she took possession of this very palace, the principal portion of which was consumed on that night, was still fresh in their minds, together with her shameful refusal to let her father have his personal wardrobe, or to restore to her unfortunate step-mother, the cabinet of silver filigree which she had asked for.

The long gallery was burnt, together with most of the royal apartments, with those of the king's officers and servants, and many invaluable portraits and treasures.

At length, overcome with terror, shame, and vexation, the queen reached the palace, and rooms were immediately prepared for her and her ladies, but to think of sleep again, during that terrible night, was out of the question.

The reproaches levelled at her in the Park, in the presence of others, were the more painful on account of their truthfulness. She was much dismayed, too, by the loss occasioned by this disastrous fire, as well as really ill from fright and exposure to the night air.

On the following day she kept her room.—The next morning she sent for Florence. "I have very much to say to you, Florence," said the queen, in a cold, frigid tone of voice. "I will commence by observing that you are too young, methinks, to take so much upon your-

self, as you have done; there are many now in the Tower, and there are some who have been condemned to death for far less than you have been guilty of. Nay, do not start and turn pale, child, but hear me out. It has come to my knowledge that you have presumed to mix yourself up with the conspiracy, for which Mr. Ashton has, this morning, suffered the extreme penalty of the law. Nay, even whilst you have been about our person, and enjoying our patronage, you took the opportunity of a visit to your aged uncle, to disguise yourself, and seek Ashton in his prison but two days before his execution. I would ask if you have come here to help, by your puny efforts, those malecontents whom I am resolved to crush by the strong arm of the law; if so, why should I not do by you as I do by others."

The tone of contempt, assumed by the queen, stung Florence to the quick; but she was wholly in the queen's power, and she replied:

"Gracious madam, I knew the unfortunate Ashton well. I crave your forgiveness for my stolen visit to him, but though I was aware I incurred the risk of your displeasure, I could not resist the desire I felt, once again, to visit him, before he suffered a violent death."

"Nor could you resist, young mistress, the wish to combine with those who have but suffered their just deserts. You have been within an ace of committing to the Tower; and know you why you are pardoned? I will tell you," continued the queen, "because you risked your own life to save mine on the night of the fire. On that night when I dismissed you, I had resolved to sign a warrant for your commitment to the Tower on the morrow. Moreover, by your acts you have laid yourself open to the loss of the estates you will inherit from your uncle, and from Miss O'Neill. But my pardon is full and entire: in any other person's case, within the whole of our kingdom, their lands would be forfeited to the crown, for far less contumacious behavior than your own. I forgive you, Mistress Florence, in memory of the night on which you periled your life to save my own."

It was as a part of the creed of Florence, to feel aversion for the princess who had usurped her father's throne. Nevertheless, she felt, at that moment, an attraction to the queen such as she had never before experienced; for well she knew, from the recent execution of Ashton, how unsparingly she had inflicted death itself on those who had presumed to aid her hapless father towards the restoration of his rights. At that moment, too, the expression which had so often reminded Florence of the unfortunate king, fitted across his once beloved daughter's face. For a brief period, she felt drawn towards the queen, whilst she expressed her gratitude for the full pardon she had received, and her happiness that it had been in her power to aid her.

"And now I expect, Mistress Florence, that you will make yourself contented in my Court, and mix yourself up with no affairs of State in future, for rest assured, whatever you may think of the matter, you are no strong-minded heroine, but a very timid one, imprudent and rash withal; and whilst you can do no possible good to those you love, may do very much mischief to yourself. As things now are, Mary of England cannot be unmindful of one to whom she doubtless owes her life, but had there been no fire at Whitehall, your own would have been in danger; or, let us say your liberty," she added, as though half sorry she had intimated the word "life," for a warm flush had mantled the cheek of Florence, as she thought of the peril she had so narrowly escaped.

Many conflicting feelings agitated her mind when she found herself in the solitude of her chamber. That Mary had had much to pardon in her conduct was no doubt, any more than the fact that the breaking out of the fire had been a providential thing for her; for well she knew the queen would have made good her threat. Then again came the question, how had Mary found out that Florence had mixed herself up with the plot, for which Ashton suffered; and, at last, she did not like to think that he had been so craven-hearted as needlessly to mention her name. She could not help cringing Lord Preston, and her suspicion was a correct one, and she came also to the not unlikely conclusion that emissaries of the government were actively employed in tracing out the movements of all those who were known to be of the Jacobite party; and that Mary's suspicious once excited, it was no very difficult matter to discover how she had spent her time on the day in which she left the palace avowedly only to visit her uncle.

That the young lady's pride and self-love was deeply wounded by the almost pitying and contemptuous language the queen had chosen to use, there was little cause for wonder, but she was compelled to own to herself that she was no match for Mary, and that it were wise to submit with a good grace, seeing that the queen had full power to do with her as best pleased herself.

Well was it for her that the confusion on the morning following the fire had put out of her head poor Ashton's execution.

The scene with his wife and children on the previous evening had been heart-rending, but

he died with courage and magnanimity.* He gave a paper to the Sheriff, in which he owned his attachment to King James, witnessed to the birth of the Prince of Wales, denied that he knew the contents of the papers that had been found upon him, complained of the hard treatment he had met with from the judges and declared that he forgave them before heaven.

CHAPTER XXI.—THORNS IN THE DIADEM.

Was Mary of England a happy woman after she had wrested the crown from her father's brows?

Alas, no; the path of wrong-doing and usurpation never can bring contentment, even apart from the aggravation of filial ingratitude and treachery to one who, be his faults what they may, was boundless in his indulgence to his children. From her first accession to the throne her path had not been strewn with roses, though she is reported to have made a smart repartee to her sister, who pitied her for the fatigue she suffered on the day of her coronation, replied:

"A crown, sister, is not so heavy as it appears."

The frenzied state of mind of the English people regarding religion proved Mary and William's sheet-anchor. But for the fanaticism and intolerance which then reigned supreme, the partisans of the sailor-king were so numerous and influential that Mary never could have gained her unrighteous ends.

Even as it was throughout the whole of her short reign, her mind was always in a state of agitation on account of the numerous risings all over the country in favor of the hapless king she had dethroned.

There can be little doubt in the minds of those who look impartially on the events which took place at the epoch of which we write, that the unfortunate Stuart race were in advance of the times in which they lived. After all, blame him as you may, James the Second asked but for that toleration of the downtrodden Catholics of these kingdoms which has been granted them in more tolerant and enlightened times.†

The greatest offence, too, was taken at his admitting Catholics into the army, for it was a breach of the Test Act, by which, besides taking the oaths, they were obliged, under the penalty of forfeiting five hundred pounds, to receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England within six months of their admission into any employment, civil or military.

For this, his most just and equitable attempt to relieve his Catholic subjects, as also for the Declaration of Liberty of Conscience, which he commanded the bishops to read in the churches, he has been most severely blamed; but the latter had been published a whole year before, so that it was no new thing. There was time enough to consider the matter, and, since many of them had complied with his wish, he most unfortunately grew obstinate, and thought himself justified in punishing with imprisonment zealous and worthy men like Sancroft, Kerr, and others who did not.

And even with regard to this Declaration, what was it that was so outrageous in the attempt of the king? Neither more nor less, we reply, than the heinous crime of trying to place the long suffering, persecuted, trodden-down Catholic Church on a par with the Church of England. As we write these lines we have but one feeling, and that is of profound astonishment that men so good and upright and conscientious as those bishops undoubtedly were (their conduct later with regard to James, who had thrust them into the Tower, alone proves this) should have allowed their minds to be so swayed by the intolerance of the times as to have denied the liberty of conscience to their Catholic brethren which they so prized themselves.

The uncompromising Sancroft was a sore thorn in Mary's side. When she sent for his blessing he sent back word to her "to ask her father's blessing first, without which his would be useless." He refused to crown her and her husband, as also to allow them to be prayed for as sovereigns, and with some four or five others, forsook their livings rather than violate their consciences.

Alas, for Queen Mary, the crown, despite all her ambition and love of power, must have been a weary weight oftentimes, during the short six years God permitted her to wear it.

On the day of her coronation she received it laden with her father's malediction, and to retain it she and her sister Anne spread the vilest reports as to the spurious birth of the Prince of Wales, then made religion, or rather the fanaticism of the times, the stepping-stone for the usurpation. She celebrated as a glorious victory the disastrous battle of the Boyne, and had the standards and other spoils taken from her father borne in triumphant procession, and then hung up in St. James' Chapel.

The irritation such actions as these produced amongst the adherents of her father may be better imagined than described.

Florence was now behind the scenes, and would have liked marvellously well to be en-

* Vide Smollett's History.
† Rev. James Stanier Clarke's Life of James the Second.

abled to transmit to the court at St. Germain faithful accounts as to how matters went on in the royal household, but no earthly being was near in whom she could confide, and her uncle was too aged, and, in fact, becoming too much of an invalid, to trust with any dangerous correspondence.

Jealousies, too, long brooding between the queen and her sister, had at length burst out into a flame. It is somewhat amusing to note, in looking over the records of the past, how these two royal ladies conducted themselves after they had played into each other's hands as far as their father was concerned.

Behind the scenes; yes, it is quite true, the truth cannot be concealed from dependents, whether our state be cast in the palace or the cottage, in public or in private life. I know not how it should be so, but that extremes oftentimes meet. Perhaps the difference in the disposition of her *protégée* to her own made Mary, in time, rather begin to like her than otherwise, as much as she could like any one beyond her husband. She must have known, too, that there was an aching void in the girl's heart, caused by herself, and of her own making, and so endeavored to make some small atonement for the tyrannical restraint she put upon her, by a meagre show of sympathy and kindness.

Any way, Florence was more frequently with her than any of her other maids of honor, and, consequently, she was privy to many a sorrow that the outer world recked little of.

Submissive wife! how well your Dutch lord rewarded you is no new matter.

"That property—whose was it, indeed, but the private fortune of my father, inherited from the Earldoms of Ulster and Clare—I asked him to give it for the endowments of public schools; and, oh, how bitter, Elizabeth Villiers, my rival in his affections, is to have it all; it is very, very hard," and as she spoke, a low, anguished sob from the queen burst forth, betraying the deep misery of her heart.

Unheard, unnoticed, Florence had entered the boudoir, an unwilling witness of Queen Mary's grief. She coughed aloud in order to attract her attention. In her own mind she thought it no great loss that the Irish, so grievously afflicted during the reign of William, had lost the benefit of the schools Mary would have endowed to pervert them from their faith; but of the infamy of the use the king had put the property to there could be no doubt.

But the joy expressed in her countenance whenever William of Orange honored Kensington with his presence, was enough to show the happiness she felt; and when he scolded, which, morose as he was, was not unfrequently the case, she was too submissive a wife to repine, but bore with the greatest patience the caprices and outbreaks of his sarcastic and cynical temper.

Behold them settled in their new palace, only for a season; for, as usual, the king's sojourns in England were short and interrupted. Florence held him in horror. Such coarseness as he was guilty of she had not been in the habit of witnessing. It was his inhospitality and vulgarity at the dinner-table which had so disgusted her uncle; and once, with unmitigated disgust, she beheld him, when a small dish of peaches, the first of the season, were put on the table, draw the whole before him, and devour them without offering one to the queen. She was not surprised, however, because she had heard Lady Marlborough mention, as an incident of the same kind, that the Princess Anne, having dined with the king and queen, some green peas were placed before her, but the king, having a mind to them, ate them without offering any to her or the queen.

Early one morning, a very short time after the king had returned to Kensington, Florence, being from habit an early riser, was just finishing her toilette, when the old, awful sound she had heard the night of the fire at Whitehall again broke upon her ears, but mingled with the roar of flames and the crackling of wood rose the voice of the king shouting for his sword. "His sword," thought Florence, "is he bereft of his senses?" But, no, no; as with his wife, the case was the same with him. They had treacherously usurped the crown, and so they imagined treachery always busy about themselves. The king had mistaken the noise occasioned by the destructive element, and the outcries of his attendants, for an attack upon his palace. And amidst all the horror and alarm of an awful fire, the risible faculties of Florence were aroused to a degree of mirth she could with difficulty conceal, on meeting the king in one of the adjacent galleries hastening forward, as one demented, and calling loudly for his sword.*

"It is fire, your Majesty," said Florence; "see, your attendants are coming to apprise you of it. We had best hasten away, the rooms near the stone gallery are in flames."

She was correct. It was found to be accidental, and it was some time before the flames could be subdued. Treachery had nothing to do with these two calamities which pursued the king and queen, one quickly after the other. Nevertheless, that they should suspect treason lurked under all the untoward accidents of

life, showed clearly that they knew they had just cause for apprehension.

CHAPTER XXII.—THE COCK-PIT; OR, THE HOME OF THE PRINCESS ANNE.

Such was the name of the residence which Charles the Second bestowed upon his niece, when she became the bride of Prince George of Denmark.

This mansion was adjacent to the palace of Whitehall, and was built by Henry the Eighth, who was, doubtless, well fitted to enjoy the brutal sport signified by the name the palace bore.

In a boudoir, tastefully decorated, adorned with hangings of pale blue and amber satin, a lady is seated, with an open letter in her hand. Her face is round and pleasant-looking, rather than handsome; she has rich chestnut hair, and a high color; the eyelids are contracted, arising from inflammation in the eyes in her childhood, and those who do not know the cause of this contraction, which imparts a sort of frown to the expression of an otherwise pleasing countenance, might think it the effect of a sullen temper.

Standing, or rather peering, against the chimney-piece, is a lady of bold and masculine demeanor. Her very appearance is that of a woman who will fight hard to carry any point in view. She is exasperated just now, and she nervously beats the ground with her foot, and picks off the waxen leaves of a camelia in a vase just by.

The lady we first mentioned is Anno, Princess of Denmark. The imperious dame beside her is the notorious Sarah Churchill, afterwards Duchess of Marlborough.

"Refused, and refused in such a way!" said the princess, in a tone of indignation, again perusing her letter as she spoke.

"Yes," was the reply, "and to dare refuse your request after all that my lord has done in Ireland, I really do not know how to contain myself. I feel so irritated, so enraged."

"And yet the refusal of my request, contemptuously as it is worded, is not worse for you than what the prince and myself have had to suffer at the hands of Caliban. Could anything be worse than that Dutch monster's leading him to believe that he might serve him as a volunteer at sea, and then when he has made his preparations, and sent all on board the ship he was to sail in, my sister floozeth refuses to let him go with the fleet? What do you think our feelings were when Rochester, whom we both love so dearly, was sent to explain the queen's pleasure (that Prince George was to relinquish his intention of going to sea, and let it appear as if he did so of his own free will.) Then when she found he would not submit to such a message, privately sent, there comes one in form to forbid his embarkation.†"

"Yes, madam, and it is a marvel to me how you can submit so patiently, and after giving up your place in the succession, too, to that Caliban, as you so justly call him, how you can meet the queen as if nothing had happened after such signal affronts, fills me with astonishment; but I, madam, am not so placable. The Order of the Garter is but a due reward to my husband's merit, and instead of taking that into consideration, the queen refuses, and couches her refusal in the most contemptuous terms."

"There is nothing to be done but to submit, my dear friend," said the princess. "I cannot help your disappointment. You well know what we ourselves are called on to undergo, and how my sister's anger has been excited by the pension of fifty thousand pounds having been granted to me. We cannot help ourselves while this Caliban lives."

"I pray you, madam, do not trouble on my account," replied Lady Marlborough. "I do know what you and the prince have to put up with, but a sunshiny day may yet come when we shall be rewarded for what we are at present made to undergo."

Lady Marlborough sat her down, and was buried in thought for a few moments. Vague ideas were floating through her mind as to whether they could not conspire with other disaffected ones, and so hurl the Dutch monarch and his consort from the possession of the regal power.

Meanwhile the unsuspecting Anne was thinking of Florence, and wondering why her sister should detain her at the court.

"What think you of Florence O'Neill?" she remarked. "Is it not strange the queen should keep her near her person. That young Jacobite's head has hatched plots already, she tells me, young as she is."

"Nay, madam, mayhap her majesty wishes to keep the young lady out of further mischief. She keeps a watchful eye, depend on it. A long head, too, that girl has got. She does not like Caliban, I am certain; she was so amused at certain anecdotes I told her about him, and yet was silent herself."

"But the queen found her at mischief once," replied Anno. "My sister told me herself that but for that girl saving her life when the palace at Whitehall was on fire, she knew that about her that she scarce thinks confinement in the Tower would have atoned for. She may have learned a lesson of prudence since then, and

* Tyndal's Continuation of Rapier.

† Dalrymple's Appendix.

* Birch M.S., British Museum.