

# The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEB. 23, 1872.

NO. 28.

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

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(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER I.—ST. GERMAINS.

Gently fell the evening shadows over the fertile valley of the Seine, as on the close of a lovely day in August, in the year 1690, the sun set behind the western hills, shedding a deep roseate tint on the richly wooded prospect, which extended far and wide around the Chateau of St. Germain, the retreat of one of the most unfortunate of English monarchs, the exiled James Stuart, and his good and beautiful queen, Mary Beatrice of Modena. Situated on a gentle eminence, embosomed amidst the umbrageous branches of noble forest trees, arose in all its grandeur the kingly residence which the generosity of *le Grand Monarque*, the courteous Louis of France, had placed at the disposal of the unfortunate James; and the gorgeous rays of that early autumn sunset now play upon its walls, and penetrate within the cabinet of the ex-king, throwing a ruddy tinge on its antique paintings of dark green and gold, and rich and quaintly carved cornices, and shed a halo of light over the little group there assembled.

The king is seated at a small table, his head resting on his hand, his countenance wears the traces of much mental anxiety, for he suffers bitterly in the sorrows and privations of those faithful followers who have given up all for him and he listens sadly and silently to the conversation of two ladies now closeted in the royal cabinet. In the embrasures of a window stands one, tall of stature and delicately formed, and she fails not to recognise, when we look on that delicately oval countenance, with its complexion of exquisite fairness, full black eyes, softened by their long silken lashes, and tresses of the same raven hue, the beautiful Mary of Modena. Beside the queen stands a maiden of some twenty-three years old; she has many personal charms, but the beauty of Florence O'Neill, the orphan *protegee* of the queen, in no way resembles that of her royal mistress.

Florence was but little above the middle height; she was slender of form and fair of complexion, and her deep, violet eyes, shaded by long brown lashes, are bathed in tears.—Softly fall the sun's last rays on the golden tresses of the girl, lending a still brighter tint to that richest of woman's ornaments, which, despite the strict rules prescribed by fashion, Florence, like her royal mistress, often suffered, when in the privacy of home, to fall in its rich luxuriance over her shoulders, instead of conforming to the odious practice, then prevalent, of forming a stiff and powdered pyramid of those tresses which Nature surely never meant to be so ill used.

"Nay, then, cheer up, *ma mignonne*," exclaimed the queen, "and remember this Reginald, who, you say, the playmate of your childhood, can be no fit mate for you. His family, up to the time of the Commonwealth, were faithful to the royal cause, then, shame upon them, they abjured their faith, were false to God and to their king, and ever since have paid but poor allegiance to the Stuart rule; be true to yourself, Florence, and grieve no more for one who has openly joined the forces of the false William of Orange."

"My royal mistress," replied Florence, "it were wrong in me to obtrude my personal griefs in the presence of your majesties, but you will not chide me, when I tell you that to Sir Reginald St. John I owe my life; not merely do I feel an interest in him because we grew up children together in my early Irish home, but also because, at the imminent peril of his own life, he rushed to save me when I had lost all power to help myself; my horse had taken fright, I had given myself up for lost, for it wound its way along the brink of a precipice, a moment more, and I must have been hurled into the chasm beneath had he not, at the risk of his own life, and at the cost of a broken arm, thrown himself in the animal's way, and saved me from a frightful death.—Ah! indeed," she continued, "I cannot but feel the deepest friendship for Sir Reginald, his is such a noble soul, perverted, alas! by early associations, reared by a fanatical parent, still I am sure the day will come when he will bear a sword in the right cause, return to the faith of his fathers, and"

"Nonsense, Florence," exclaimed the king, impatiently, "do not speak so tenderly of one who, as the letter you have received informs you, is one of the favorites of my traitorous and perjured nephew, and if what report says be true, is always with him; you, the daughter of such a faithful veteran as your father was, should not waste a thought upon him; he is a renegade to his faith, and a traitor to his king. But do not look so sad, my child," added James, rising and placing his hand tenderly on her head, for Florence knelt as the king approached her, "you must learn to be

more of a heroine, and be more courageous under the trials that may await you."

As the king spoke he left the cabinet, and the queen, addressing Florence, said:

"As your uncle wishes you to spend some short time in England, I shall place you under the care of a trusty adherent of ours, who is about to leave St. Germain, and I shall look for your return before the winter be far advanced." Then ringing a small silver bell, which stood beside her, the queen bid the attendant who answered the summons tell Master Ashton that she wished to speak to him immediately.

Tall and well formed, with a pleasing countenance, was the young Englishman who, a few moments later, entered the cabinet. Devoted to the exiled family, he was about to undertake a most important and perilous mission.—With deep reverence he approached the queen, who said:

"The king is about to entrust you, my good Ashton, with a delicate and dangerous mission. He will meet you here in the morning, and place in your care certain papers, to which fictitious names are attached. You will see they are safely delivered to those persons for whom you will be told they are intended. I also entrust to your guardianship this young lady, Florence O'Neill, and you will conduct her in safety to the home of her maternal uncle, Sir Charles de Grey. But tell me, Ashton, have you heard the repulse that the false William of Orange has met with at Limerick?"

"No, your majesty," said Ashton; this is, indeed, good news."

"We hear, then," said the queen, "that the gallant Sarsfield, with a body of dragoons, passed the Shannon in the middle of the night, routed the troops that guarded the artillery of our false-hearted son-in-law, disabled the cannon, destroyed the wagons and ammunition, and safely retraced his steps to Limerick. The siege has been vigorously carried, and our loyal Irish subjects have courageously defended their city, and," added the queen, with a flushed and animated countenance, "our enemies have met with such a warm reception that it is said, 1,200 men have fallen, and William of Orange has been glad to decamp, marching on towards Clonmel, and we have it on good authority that he meditates a speedy return to England. So, Ashton, there is reason for us to look upon matters more hopefully. Many of our warmest friends have risen within the last few weeks throughout England and Ireland; some there are also, even within the traitor's camp, whose hearts are rightfully disposed, and it is to some three or four of those persons, whose names the king will communicate to you, that you must see on your arrival in London. And now, my good friend, I warn you that all the skill and discretion which we know you to possess must be called in action on your arrival at the spot in which his majesty's false daughter holds her court. You have often earnestly begged the king to tax your skill in his services; tell me candidly, Ashton, dare you, now that the time has come in which he may put your talents to account, exert them in his cause, for, oh, my good Ashton," continued Mary Beatrice, inexpressible sadness in the tones of her voice, and tears gathering in her eyes, "I must not hide from you that the mission we trust you with is replete with difficulty and peril."

"Do not fear me, my royal mistress," said Ashton, proudly drawing himself up as he spoke, "I am only rejoiced that the time has at last come in which I can prove my devotion to the royal cause by deeds as well as words. At last, then, there is an end to inaction, and the day may soon arrive," he continued, laying his hand on his sword, "when my good right arm may wield this blade in his majesty's services. I am ready, if need be, to shed my blood in defence of his rights."

"Well, then, good Ashton," replied the queen, "remember my words. Conduct yourself with prudence, for you are about to go near the court of *Mary, the daughter*, as our Scottish subjects, in the full bitterness of their satire, denominated the false Mary; near her there must be much danger, and it behooves you to be wary and cautious. I shall not be present, my trusty friend, at your interview with the king, so I may probably not see you again, for we wish you to commence your journey speedily, and remember that very early in the winter we expect to see you back, accompanied by my young friend, Florence O'Neill."

"Ah! madam," said the young man, bending his knee, "rest assured I will carefully execute my mission, and some weeks before the festival of Christmas be celebrated at St. Germain hope to apprise your majesties of a successful rising, and conduct Miss O'Neill in safety back to her royal mistress."

As Ashton spoke he left the cabinet, and the queen, with the air of one who is very weary and ill at ease, threw herself on the chair which James had occupied, and passing her hands caressingly over the golden locks of her favorite, who sat on a low stool at her feet, she murmured, as if unconsciously:

"Yes, we have heard good news, and yet a dread of approaching evil sits heavy at my

heart." What if the undutiful Mary and the traitor William triumph in the end? What if in these risings the blood of good and brave noble men be shed for us, and shed in vain?"

"Nay, madam, do not suffer such fears to harass your mind. May not the good news your majesties have heard from Ireland prelude some glorious and effective rising for the royal cause?"

"True, Florence," replied the queen; "God knows I try to keep up my spirits." Yet the conduct of Mary Beatrice belied her words, for with somewhat of dismay, she felt, one after another, hot tears falling on her neck as her mistress spoke; indeed, it is well known that the beautiful and unfortunate Mary of Modena was the veriest creature of impulse. It was utterly beyond her power to disguise her feelings, and at no time had she been a match in any way for the unscrupulous and deceitful daughters of James.

Throwing herself on her knees beside the queen, and respectfully raising her hand to her lips, Florence earnestly besought her to keep up her spirits, and become calm and hopeful. It was a scene worthy of the painter's art. The moon had long risen, and its silvery rays, penetrating into every nook and corner of the cabinet, revealed distinctly the figures of one of the most unfortunate of queens and her kneeling *protegee*. Mary Beatrice bent her head forward and imprinted a kiss on the forehead of her favorite. With a violent effort, striving to conquer her emotion, then, rising, she turned to one of the windows, which lay buried in a deep recess.

Bathed in a flood of silvery light lay the valley of the Seine. At the base of the lofty hill, on which the Chateau of St. Germain rose in all its grandeur, the scene was sublimely beautiful, as in the bright moonlight of the summer night each copse, and glen, and thicket in the vale beneath was revealed to view, whilst in the distance might be descried the towers of St. Denis, frowning, as it were, over the quiet, peaceful scene beneath.

Mary Beatrice for some moments stood musingly gazing on the rich country, spread out like a map beneath the chateau, and her thoughts, spite of herself, recurred to the doubtful future.

Was it merely a vague fear of approaching evil, or had the veil which conceals the future from our gaze been for a moment raised before her eyes, but the ruin of her faithful Ashton, and the downfall of her dearest hopes, had passed as in a vision before the eyes of Mary of Modena; yet, striving to banish from her mind the unpleasant impression it had received, she dismissed Florence, saying, in a hopeful tone:

"Now, good night, Florence, and forget not to pray before going to rest for the success of our enterprise." Then, ringing the bell, she summoned her attendant, and sought the king, disguising her uneasiness beneath a smiling countenance.

CHAPTER II.—LE GRAND MONARQUE—THE KING'S PROMISE.

On the morrow, Florence received an order to accompany the queen to Marly, at which place Louis XIV at that time held his Court, in fact, it was to this most gallant of monarchs that she owed the appellation of the Rose of St. Germain, by which name she was generally known at the French Court. The courteous king was indeed never insensible to the charms of the softer sex, and the delicate beauty of the Irish maiden, whom we have omitted to mention was distantly related to the brave Tyrconnell, had not failed to make a due impression on the heart of *Le Grand Monarque*. The mother of the fair Florence was an English lady, by birth, had married one of the ancient race of the O'Neills, and the greater part of the girl's early life had been spent in her father's native land, till some time after his death, which occurred when fighting in the French army under Turenne. Sir Patrick O'Neil had been the bosom friend of the brave Marshal; and thus it was that when Louis beheld Florence for the first time at the little Court of St. Germain, and heard her spoken of as the daughter of a deceased friend of his favorite Turenne, he immediately became interested in her welfare. Florence had barely completed her fifth year when her father fell, while fighting valiantly beside the Marshal; his lady, a woman of great personal attractions and considerable merit, had been in early youth the friend of Ann Hyde, Duchess of York, and some eight years after her husband's death she repaired to London, and received a post in the household of the then Duchess Mary of Modena, who soon looked upon Lady O'Neill in the light of a favored friend: the health of the latter, however, soon began to decline, and she retired again into the solitude she so deeply loved, passing the greater part of her time in religious exercises, and in the education of her daughter of whom she was passionately fond, and died before Florence had attained her fifteenth year.

Somewhat like herself impulsive and affectionate, the heart of Mary of Modena turned instinctively to this orphan girl, whom she at once adopted, and whose engaging manners and warmth of disposition, endeared her to all in the noble circle in which she lived, till she became

the ornament and admiration of the court. Many suitors, too, had offered themselves for the hand of the fair descendant of the O'Neills, but Mary Beatrice would not sway the feelings of her *protegee*, so far as to extort a forced compliance with a royal command, though both herself and the king were predetermined never to give their consent to her union with Reginald St. John, with whom she had grown up in the days of her mother's early widowhood.

Indeed, to such an union Florence never could expect her royal protectors to agree, for St. John was a cousin of that stern upholder of the Commonwealth, who had been with Vane, Lambert, and others, actively engaged in sowing the seeds of discord and rebellion against monarchy: the present head of the family, too, was a Protestant, and disaffected towards the exiled James, in fact, Florence could not urge a single point in his favor, and was obliged to own to herself that these were very sufficient reasons why her royal protectors should refuse to sanction her union with Reginald St. John.

But let us return to the story from which I have so long wandered, and accompany the royal party on their way to Marly.

It was very early when they set forth, the autumn morning, one of the fairest, and its dews had been quickly dried up by the first rays of the sun which shone cheerily on the chateau, and kissed away its last pearly drops as they rested on each blade of grass and humble floweret in the valley beneath. Despite the misfortunes of the royal pair, there were happy moments still for them to enjoy, and the beauty of the day lent its aid on this occasion to banish from their minds, for awhile, the thoughts of their present overwhelming anxieties.

Blithely they rode onward with but few attendants in their train, and ere the day was far advanced they reached the royal retreat of Marly; the approach to this villa palace was by a noble avenue of trees, the park extending to that of Versailles: in its tasteful gardens were miniature lakes and graceful fountains, their marble basins filled with gold fish, and glistening with the floating lotus.

The royal party now approached the principal part of the edifice, a spacious, square detached pavilion, near which six smaller ones were grouped around; light and graceful, indeed, was the construction of the entire building supported by Corinthian columns, between which were paintings in fresco. Each of the four sides of the pavilion was crowned by a portico, and now ascending to the terrace, James and his train entered one of the four vestibules which served to give ingress to as many suites of apartments on the ground floor reserved for Louis and the princes of the blood, all of which communicated with the grand saloon, octagonal in its form, having four fire places supported by Ionic pillars, over which were painted figures representing the seasons. Many spacious windows, with gilded balconies and oriels, around which were grouped baskets of flowers supported by Cupids, lighted up this most gorgeous apartment.

Though in about his fiftieth year, in the time of which we write, Louis Quatorze had certainly not lost one iota of that noble gracefulness of mien for which he was so distinguished, his eagle eye was bright as in his youth, and the exquisite simplicity of his attire only added to the elegance of his general demeanor.

He was habited, as was most frequently the case, in a garment of black velvet, relieved by a slight gold embroidery, and fastened by a single gold button; his under vest was, however, of crimson stuff, elegantly embroidered, but not one single ring or any jewel whatsoever adorned the person of the king save in his shoe and knee-buckle. Unlike all the former kings of France, he wore his blue ribbon beneath his vest save when on state occasions it was suffered to hang at full length, embroidered with precious stones, estimated at the immense value of eight millions of money.

Saluting the little party with the dignified and graceful courtesy which so well became him, the handsomest and most majestic prince of his time, welcomed to Marly, James and Mary Beatrice, then turning to Florence, who as one of her ladies, was privileged to accompany her, he said: "Welcome too, to Marly, fair Rose of St. Germain, and I assure you, young lady, if our cousin James and his royal spouse do not soon find you a husband, I will myself look after your interests, nay, do not blush, for I vow you shall be my *protegee* unless your name of O'Neill, time-honored as it may be, be not quickly changed for another, for remember I never forget your father was the intimate friend of my brave Turenne, and it would please me to see you the wife of some noble of my own Court."

Blushing deeply, the timid Florence stammered out a few words of grateful acknowledgment, intimating at the same time that she had no desire at present to change her state, whilst Mary Beatrice aware of the interest the courtly monarch really felt for Florence, inwardly resolved that, if possible, she should not cross his path again; she had, in fact, no desire to see the innocent and pure-minded Florence become the *protegee* of a king whose unbounded admiration of the female sex, often

led him to commit the grossest errors and the gravest faults.

After awhile Louis and James retired, the latter wishing to lay open to the French king his views and intentions, making him cognizant of the departure of Ashton to England and confiding to the monarch the names of several distinguished persons in England, who were zealously interesting themselves in his service. But the failure of the late attempt at the Boyne had weakened the hopes of Louis as to the restoration of the unfortunate James. Had he been able to have retarded the decisive stroke received at the Boyne some few weeks longer, the French fleet would have become masters of St. George's Channel, and could either have conveyed himself and his army to England, or have prevented aid from coming to William; the unfortunate are sure to meet with censure, and whilst many blamed James for hazarding too much, others condemned him for leaving Ireland too soon. By the earnest desire of the queen, Tyrconnell had urged this hasty retreat, she having entreated him at any cost to save the king's person, but the truly unfortunate James was destined a victim of patience by Providence, his friends exercising him equally with his enemies.

Louis was dissatisfied with the line of conduct he had pursued, and probably at the instigation of his ministers he declined to aid another expedition.

James had keenly felt the censures which had been passed upon him; but hope still led him on, and his queen needed no extraneous aid save the prudence and discretion of Ashton, a tried and faithful servant devoted to the interests of the Stuart race, to carry communications from herself and James to the Bishop of Ely, Lord Preston, the Earl of Clarendon and others who were zealously stirring to bring about the restoration. Thus it was, that painful as was the commencement of his conference with Louis, his sanguine nature did not yield, and when it was concluded, and accompanied by the French king, he sought Mary Beatrice, who with her attendants wandered awhile in the shady groves of Marly, no trace of discomfiture was visible on his countenance.

Nevertheless Louis was truly noble and generous, his kingly nature had developed itself in his dealings with the exiled monarch, whom he would have rejoiced to have placed again on the throne, now usurped by the most worthless of daughters and ungrateful of nephews.

Heavy indeed were the misfortunes with which our second James was visited: he might have used with truth the language of our great poet, and exclaimed with King Lear: "*How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.*"

The cool and hardened cruelty of Mary, his most favored daughter, stung him to the quick, for she heartlessly appropriated to herself the property of her step-mother, amongst other things a costly cabinet of silver filagree, and denied even her father's request for his clothes and personal property, a request which, with unparalleled barbarity, the ungrateful Mary refused to comply with. Evelyn relates that she entered Whitehall joyful as if bidden to a wedding feast. Transported with joy, she ran into the closets and examined the beds, her coarse and unfeeling levity revolting the minds even of Bishop Bennet and Lady Churchill, and hurrying to take into her iron grasp the goods which had fallen into her possession.

James had heard, too, that she had ordered that the standards and other spoils taken from him at the Boyne be carried in procession and hung in St. James' Chapel.

Whatever may have been his faults, he had been to both his daughters the most indulgent of fathers; of their unparalleled wickedness and abandonment of filial duty, no doubt can remain on the minds of posterity.

But return we to our story. Not without an end in view had James sought Louis on the occasion we have spoken of, but he was confident in his expectations of a successful rising, through the unceasing efforts of his friends in England, and so well did he disguise his discomfiture at the result of his interview with the French king, that Mary Beatrice vainly tried to read in his countenance whether there was any further aid to be expected for the carrying out of their plans.

One short hour more was passed in the enchanting spot which the luxurious monarch had chosen for his retreat when he wished for such solitude as in his high position he could obtain. A rural *fete* had but recently been given, and as no cost was ever spared, trees of considerable size had been transported hither from the forests of Fontainebleau and Compiègne, in order to add, by the rich beauty and luxuriance of their foliage, to the pleasantness of the scene, and a very little later to fade away and give place to others.

This was the first time Florence had visited Marly, and the kingly Louis, who, out of affectionate memory for the good Marshal Turenne, bestowed upon her so much notice, bade her remember that she would ever find a friend in him, adding, ere he bade adieu to the royal exiles, with somewhat of emotion, and an unusual moistening in his eye: "The father of the fair O'Neill fell by the side of my brave