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

(From the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XII.—AFTER MANY YEARS.

As it is not my intention to chronicle the sayings and doings of childhood except in so far as is necessary to show the truth of the old saying, "The child is father to the man," you will please imagine ten summers to have passed away since that night of young Margaret's escapade and the illness that resulted therefrom. It was not very long after the child's recovery before Lady St. John decided that the wisest course to be pursued was to send the damsel to a convent school. Thither, however, she was accompanied by Isabel, with the hope that the example of her gentle, winning way would in the end act beneficially, and help, in a silent, unobtrusive way, to tame Margaret's fiery spirit. The child had remained ill for some weeks, delirious for several days, but as she never reverted, as she became convalescent, to the conversation she had evidently heard, and which it was certain had chafed her proud spirit beyond her child's powers of endurance, Lady St. John had given the nurse strict orders never in any way to touch on the subject of her late illness. During the time, however, that intervened between young Margaret's recovery and the day on which she left for the first time the shelter of her beneficent protectors' roof she was closely watched, and no opportunity neglected by which this strange child's fearfully strong passions might be nipped in the bud—a resolve wisely taken, and judiciously carried out, and all the more necessary because the young damsel so carefully locked up in her own little breast the knowledge that she had obtained merely by an unfortunate accident.—The point, too, in her conduct that the Lady Florence least liked was, that her protegee, with the astuteness of one three times her own age, parried all the attacks which she herself and her friend Grace skillfully made, by introducing occasionally into conversation the mention of the orphan state of herself and Isabel. The lips of the young girl remained resolutely sealed; she was armed at all points, and invulnerable to any attack. "The nuns will probe my young damsel and discover what stuff she is made of," said Grace, with a quiet laugh, as she exhibited for Lady St. John's approbation the trousseau of the two little girls. "As far as she dares to show it, my young lady does not give herself even the trouble of hiding the aversion she feels for gentle little Isabel. But mind, if I ever read a character rightly in my whole life, Margaret has a woman of determination to deal with in Dame Agatha."

rough to outward appearance; only reach her heart, and, like the kernel, it was sweet and soft. Thus, despite the exterior and the want of that suaviter in modo which wins the hearts of the old and young, but more especially of the latter, this Dame Agatha had been chosen by the unanimous voice of the Sisterhood head mistress of the school, and many were they whose youthful hearts had beat when first brought within the range of her influence, but who had soon learned to love and respect her as their dearest friend. Having said this much, and also that Grace, who took the young damsels to the Benedictine Abbey, also informed the Sister of the incident I have alluded to, I shall merely add that Dame Agatha did her best. The young lady required the reins to be held tight, and this nun was a well qualified person to tame her into subjection if she could be tamed. But Dame Agatha's efforts were doomed to prove fruitless. She toiled for her, prayed for her, made novenas for her, was now severe, then lenient, but all to no avail. She left the convent school, at the age of eighteen, a beautiful, showy young woman, accomplished beyond the generality of her sex, but proud and unbending to the heart's core. The lessons of the religious had failed to teach her humility of spirit, or to grace her character with any of those virtues which make a woman pure and lovable. Her lips remained sealed as to the story of her infancy, as they were in the days of her childhood. It was only the hours of delirium which had revealed what she had felt. In future Margaret's actions alone shall speak for her. I will say a few words to you concerning Isabel. She had grown up to be almost a woman without any pretension to beauty. Her mouth was too large, her nose too retroussé to be pretty, the upper lips not sufficiently short, and yet the face wins upon you; it is a countenance beaming with good nature and natural kindness, and at last you learn to love it the oftener you see it; and you will agree with me in the end, that the face which prepossesses and charms your fancy in this way is far better than that which takes you by storm with its beauty. As I am not one of those persons who believe in perfectly faultless characters, never having met with such a one, and not entertaining any belief in their existence, I shall describe Isabel to you in a way free from exaggeration as to terms. By nature she was mild and gentle, and the antithesis was ever before her in the foster-sister, who, perhaps to try her own virtue, was ever near her for many years of her life. She was not, however, such an angel in human shape as not to writh under, and sometimes even resent, the sarcastic taunts of the beautiful Margaret. Naturally meek-tempered, you will perceive she had less merit in turning away wrath with gentle words than if she had been prone to the contrary vice; but opportunities were not wanting to her, and virtue and good-will helped her to bear and forbear where, without either the one or the other, she had fallen away. CHAPTER XIII.—THE OLD, OLD TALE. The large, quaint old chateau at St. Germain was still tenanted by the two families, the Lady Florence and her husband, with their son and daughter-in-law. Between the two ladies the tenderest attachment had always subsisted, and the long and frequent absences of the Marshal and his son, both being in the French army, drew these ladies yet more closely together. But the tie became still more tender after the death of Madame's husband, who fell as a brave soldier on the field of battle, and now, left of both son and daughter, the affections of the Lady Florence were centred still more strongly on Madame and her children. These two ladies lived in great retirement and privacy; therefore, it may readily be conceived that as time wore on and the eldest son of Madame St. John returned from his studies at St. Sulpice and declared his intention of entering the military profession, that the foster-sisters hailed his arrival with pleasure, as for a time at least the monotony of their lives would be broken. Tall of stature, of dark complexion, and with a cast of features which seemed chiselled as those of a Grecian statue, Maurice St. John exhibited in his person the true type of manly beauty. When the two damsels arrived home from the convent, Maurice was still at St. Sulpice. They remembered him only as the playmate of their childhood, but the case was altered now, and a certain sort of reserve and shyness must be mingled with aught that might remain of their former familiarity. "Is it possible? Surely you are not the Margaret and Isabel I played with when a child," was the remark of Maurice as the black-eyed beauty tripped smilingly forward, whilst the more timid Isabel lingered beside

his mother. "What a change the lapse of time has made!" he added, gazing admiringly on those whom he only remembered as children, but who had now sprung up into womanhood. "But you forget how long that lapse of years has been," said Margaret. "If my memory be not treacherous, it is not less than ten years. We were but children when we parted." Unquestionably, the return of the young man to his paternal home was the thing best calculated to rouse Margaret from the melancholy which seemed her normal state. Her proud heart had never forgotten the revelation of ten years since, and whenever honest Denis by any chance came in her way, when the Marshal happened to be at home, she felt a sore wound to her pride at the remembrance that he, a serving-man, had offered to adopt her. You may readily conceive that Isabel was the favorite with the elder ladies of the chateau. Moreover, she was beloved by all who knew her. Again, she was the orphan child of a friend, and that consideration, united to her own good qualities, formed another strong link to bind the three together. It would have well pleased the Lady St. John if, when her daughter-in-law occasionally took the damsels to spend a few weeks at the hotel of the Baron de Breteuil, she could have seen her haughty protegee safely launched in honorable matrimony; but, as yet, she was simple Margaret Lindsey. If those she met were struck with her beauty, they were in no way enamored with her pride, or with the frivolity which, beguiling those who at times made their advances, coolly threw them aside when a new face or a larger fortune appeared on the scene. But the cold, proud, evil heart seemed after all to have a soft spot when the son of Madame St. John arrived at the chateau. To see Margaret well married, to know that she had sobered down into a good and happy wife, would have given infinite pleasure to those who, if her willfulness rendered love out of the question, had still her warmest interests at heart, but to see her enter their own family, to behold her become the bride of the eldest grandson of the Marshal was not at all what they desired. As to Margaret, she could when it pleased skillfully conceal the dark traits in her character. She could even condescend to be civil to Isabel, humble to Lady Florence, and officiously polite to the mother of one whom she wished to please. With regard to Maurice himself, he was wholly engaged in preparations for his new career. At first his thoughts scarcely turned to the dangerous beauty in his path; eventually he found certain pleasure in her conversation, a tacit acknowledgment that she was the most lovely and accomplished woman he had ever met. Endowed with every quality which would render a woman a devoted and affectionate wife, and with a heart susceptible of the most tender emotions, innocent and virtuous, Isabel had yielded up her heart unconsciously to herself. "Can I wonder," she said to herself, as she beheld her pale face and irregular features reflected in the glass, "can I wonder that his fancy is caught by Margaret? She is as beautiful as I am the reverse, and far more talented and accomplished. My voice is weak and ineffective, and I behold him entranced as her rich contralto resounds in his ears. She is so witty, too, though, alas! the playfulness of her wit, as she terms it, comes too often like a barbed arrow to my soul, for it veils some cutting sarcasm on my lack of genius or my homely face. Ah, well! ah, well! good Dame Agatha," she added, with a weary sigh, "you used to tell me I was proud and sensitive, and so I am. I must try and be very brave and hide what I suffer, and hope, if she does marry him, that she will make him a good wife, and that, in the wise decrees of God, all will be for the best." There were tears in her deep blue eyes as she spoke, and she dashed them hastily aside as if ashamed of the momentary weakness. There is such a thing as for man, and woman too, to be dazzled by appearances, and thus to mistake worthless dross for the solid ore, for all is not gold that glitters; and so it happened that Maurice St. John had felt an attraction for the meretricious charms of Margaret, whilst Isabel had been passed by. His mother observed nothing, but the Lady St. John was more sharp-sighted; she had her eyes, and ears too, always open. The Lady Florence was now fast sinking into years, but she still preserved in a remarkable degree those charms which, at the epoch of the Revolution, had won for her the soubriquet of the Rose of St. Germain, first conferred upon her by that courtly monarch, Louis the Fourteenth. In the court of Mary, wife of Wil-

liam the Third, the "O'Neill" had been equally celebrated for her beauty, and few who looked on the still handsome and elegant woman could realize the fact that she was really the grandmother of Maurice St. John. It was with a feeling of intense satisfaction that, a few weeks later, the Lady received the Marshal's announcement that within a month Maurice must accompany him to the Netherlands. Lady St. John was cognizant of Isabel's secret, jealously as she thought she had guarded it, yet, thinking it well that the present aspect of things should be checked by the departure of Maurice, she would have kept silence but for a few words expressive of admiration of the character of Isabel which fell from his lips the night previous to his departure. Dazzled indeed he had been for a time, even as she had bewitched others by her wondrous beauty and her wit and talents, but his heart after awhile had turned where the Lady St. John and his mother most desired, to the gentle Isabel, and with their sanction and that of the Marshal, she received his pledged troth on the eve of his departure. CHAPTER XIV.—ON THE WATCH. It was a chill night towards the end of September, the wind blew in fitful gusts around the old chateau in the valley, and the rain, which had fallen in drizzling showers throughout the day, now fell in that heavy, determined down-pour which always betokens a wet night. It was not quite dark; there was sufficient light to descry a female form making its way through the valley, bending ever and again beneath the heavy gale. The towers of the palace on the summit above the vale, which had so long afforded a shelter for one of the most unfortunate of England's kings, loomed darkly in the distance. It was in that direction that the damsel in the vale wended her way. There is a watcher at the library window of the chateau whose gaze is steadfastly fixed on the receding form in the distance. She hears the clock in the turret strike the half of six, and on her superbly handsome features there is an expression of intense hatred, mingled with wonder, and curiosity, and delight. What has she seen? What has she beheld to make her remain away from the cheerful blaze of the wood fire shimmering at the window, with the heavy curtain upraised with one hand, while the other is tightly clenched together? I will tell you. In the distance, just as the female whom she had watched was about to turn down a path which would lead up an ascent to the palace above, she has descryed a young man hastening to meet her; he has grasped her hand with affectionate warmth, and now she leans upon his arm; they walk on, and still there is light sufficient to distinguish them if they turn up the hill. Yes, she is correct in her idea, for after the lapse of two minutes they reappear, till at last the increasing darkness and the blinding storm hide them from her sight. Then the lady who has been watching these two person lets the curtain fall into its place, and creeps away with a shiver to the cheery wood fire. There she sits with her hands folded the one over the other, her beautiful lips wreathed into a cruel, scornful smile; the red flame lights up her features, but they are distorted with the reflection of the bad passions which vex and disturb her soul. She expresses her thought aloud. "I have watched her to-night," she says to herself; "to-morrow I will do more than watch; I will follow her. At last then I have her in my power; at last I can really show her up as she really is, the false hypocrite, who dared to compete with me for his affections. She had made a traitor of him with naught but a gentle manner and a pair of blue eyes; but now I have her fast. What will my Lady St. John and Madame say when they shall hear of these nightly rambles in the wind and rain, and of their immaculate favorite's new acquaintance—Madame so rigorous in her notions that she would swoon at the idea of a maiden being out in the evening hour by herself? What will he say too, he who so cruelly neglected me for that pale-faced minx?" Then she rose and walked up and down the spacious apartment; long and narrow it was, and the flickering light of the wood fire played on the oaken roof and antique panelling of the walls. She was restless and nervous, and after awhile again returned to her seat; her countenance was as that of one possessed by the furies, and clenching her small hand, she exclaimed: "I will destroy you, detested Isabel, even as I would crush a fly. Why was I, Margaret Lindsey, with my glorious intellect, my energetic mind, endowed with the power I feel that I possess of ability to grasp at once a difficulty where she and others of my feeble sex linger far behind, crawling on their way by dint of application such as fools alone need, and yet my evil destiny has decreed that I should be a cast away, the thing of charity, indebted to a mean

servant-man that I was saved from death? Ah! better had I not been saved. Can I ever forget that he should to this day feel that he, in his charity, thought of bringing me up as his daughter forsooth? And then to creep through life with the Lady Florence and Madame, to follow in their monotonous, pious wake, to smother all my proud feelings and ambitious aspirations, to try and lead them to believe I am what I am not, to listen with at least an assumed air of patience to the Cure's admonitions—for he has a long head and is hard to deceive—it is much more than I can bear." The whirlwind of passion that had shook her soul was for a few moments silenced, and tears trickled down her face. Only for a moment, however, did a shade of feminine softness assume its sway; she again rose and paced the room. "Is this life always to last?" said she. "If so, I shall curse the day that the unhappy woman who brought me into the world gave me birth. Shall I ever know who she was?" she added, drawing the miniature from her bosom which her dead mother had hung round her infant neck. "You have lovely features," she exclaimed, apostrophizing the inanimate portrait. "Very lovely, but tame and gentle; not cast in the fiery mould of the unfortunate being you brought into the world. I could fancy you, with your fair hair and blue eyes, had rather been the mother of that detested Isabel, and should have thought myself a changeling, but that nurse's evidence would dispel the flattering illusion." Then, with a weary sigh, she replaced the miniature in the folds of her dress and sat her down again. Her tears, those mute evidences of womanly weakness had passed away, and a bitter smile, arising from a thought that flitted across her mind, and played on her beautiful face. "Yes," she said, "I will let him know by means of an anonymous letter, what her occupation is, and thus I will bring the truant back to myself. If I become his wife I can shake off my thralldom to these women, and, above all, I shall make her suffer who has lorded it over me all my life, she, the child of one of their own friends, whom they believe to possess all the virtues under the sun." Again her meditations were disturbed by the clock in the turret striking the hour of eight. "Eight o'clock, and not yet back," she said. "It is all as it should be. I shall hold my peace and not even speak to Mistress Grace till I shall have watched my young lady to-morrow night; perhaps I will keep it to myself altogether and not even send an anonymous letter to Maurice." Suddenly the door of the library was opened, and the object of her vindictive hate entered the library. Her face was very pale, she looked weary and fatigued, and her swollen eyelids betrayed that she had shed many tears. "Bless me, child, where have you been all this long time," said Margaret, rousing herself for an onslaught. "It is not kind to leave me so much alone in the absence of our idolized mistresses. I am sure I really feel moped to death in this gloomy old place, with its dismal closets big enough in all conscience for sleeping apartments; its spacious corridors echoing back the sound of one's own footsteps; its heavy oaken panellings; its dry moat and gloomy avenue; with the wind pipping a requiem to the decayed and fading hopes of two luckless damsels whose hapless lot it is to be done to death with ennui in the dreary old place." "Oh, my beautiful Margaret, what strange things you do say," said Isabel, placing herself on a small footstool near the fire, and holding out her cold hands in order to warm them by its cheery blaze. "I shall be very glad when the visit of the family to the Scottish home of Lord Bulmerino is at an end, for our home is dull without them. But, I beg pardon, dear, I differ with you on two points." Isabel's face was turned a little aside, but she was so near to her false foster-sister that the latter could see every change in her countenance that her own words might evoke. How little did Isabel know that Margaret's eyes had watched her in the valley two hours since, or that she was now under the domination of a fierce enemy. "And pray, my dear Isabel," and the tones of Margaret's voice lingered with a slightly sarcastic inflexion on the term of womanly endearment, "in what way may I be so extremely unfortunate as to differ with your amiable and accomplished self?" "Do not speak so satirically, dear Margaret. You well know I am not half so clever and accomplished as yourself. I only meant to say that the dear Lady Florence and Madame St. John can scarcely be termed our mistresses; they are rather at most dear mothers in our regard, seeing we were adopted by the Lady St. John in the years of our helpless infancy; and as to the chateau, Margaret, it is only like all other quaint old houses of its kind, dull