BIRTHDAY HYMN OF OUR LADY.

By a Protestant Clergyman.

Hail! of light and joy the day
Told of years by gone;
Chiefest festival, we keep it
[illegible] away
[illegible] sun.
Were the [illegible] chant the song,
Lowly [illegible] chanting—
Mary's birth, [illegible] long,
Floats in triumph o'er us.

Type to fact hath given place,
Gifts for every station;
And [illegible] is [illegible] grace,
Mother of salvation.
This her festal day who came,
Sun of Justice bringing—
Praise her work and love her name,
[illegible] singing.

Fairest pearl of Time's broad sea,
Brightest state of even,
More and better love we thee,
Queen of earth and heaven!
Lo[illegible]
[illegible] us.
He Himself that path has trod,
And his love is o'er us.

Intercede when sin is strong,
Christ my voice is needing;
Desert paths are parched and long,
Our footsteps misleading.
Pray a prayer that rise we may
When we fall or stumble;
So we wait the break of day,
Trusting, patient, humble.

As Time's fretful come and go,
Autumn's blasts are waning—
Faith and love and hope must grow
For great Christmas' dawning.
Thy sweet smile is for us still,
Visions homeward wending,
Then stand round God's holy hill,
Share the song unending.

Wave the banner! Jesus's love
Sing in healing chorus;
Mary's banner, borne above,
Floats triumphant o'er us.
Type of Truth up-bear the light,
Fail we not to falter.
Until Faith gives place to Sight
At the Lamb's high altar. Amen.

THE SUPPER OF ST. GREGORY.

A tale for Roman girls to tell
To careless, sight-worn travellers still,
Who pause before the narrow cell
Of Gregory on the Coelian Hill.

One day before the monk's door came
A beggar, stretching empty palms,
Fainting and footsick, in the name
Of the Most Holy asking alms.

And the monk answered: "All I have
In this poor cell of mine I give;
The silver cup my mother gave,
In Christ's name take thou it and live."

Years passed, and called at last to hold
The pastoral crook and keys of Rome,
The poor monk, in St. Peter's Chair,
Sat the crowned lord of Christendom.

"Prepare a feast," St. Gregory cried,
"And let twelve beggars sit thereat."
The beggars came, and one beside,
An unknown stranger, with them sat.

"I asked thee not," the Pontiff spake,
"O stranger; but if need be thine,
I bid thee welcome, for the sake
Of Him who is thy Lord and mine."

A grave, calm face the stranger raised,
Like His who on Gennesaret trod,
Or He on whom the Chaldean gazed,
Whose form was as the Son of God.

"Know'st thou," he said, "thy gift of old?"
And in the hand he lifted up
The Pontiff marvelled to behold
Once more his mother's silver cup.

"Thy prayers and alms have risen, and blown
Sweetly among the flowers of heaven.
I am The Wonderful, through whom
Whate'er thou asked shall be given."

He spoke and vanished. Gregory fell,
With his twelve guests in mute accord,
Prone on their faces, knowing well
Their eyes of flesh had seen the Lord.

The old-time legend is not vain;
Nor vain thy art, Verona's Paul,
Telling it o'er and o'er again
On gray Vicenza's frescoed wall.

Still, wheresoever pity shares
Its bread with sorrow, want and sin,
And lays the beggar's feast prepared,
The unbidden Guest comes in.

Unheard, because our ears are dull;
Unseen, because our eyes are dim,
He walks our earth, The Wonderful,
And all good deeds are done to Him.

—*Irish Catholic Messenger.*

Margaret De Montespan.

Faithful Until the the End—A Story of the Crusades.

CHAPTER I.

A grand festival was being held at the castle of Sir Roland de Montespan. It was the eve of departure of a gallant company of knights and nobles for the Holy Land, and the merry-making was to bid them "God speed." Not all, it is true, of the brilliant gathering in that hospitable hall were going to see the sacred soil from the crusading motive alone. Some, it must be confessed, had scarce given a thought to the holiness of the work, and very many of the rest had much of the alloy of ambition, curiosity and love of adventure mixed with the pure gold of Christian indignation. Old hoary-headed knights, two or three young knights, were conversing earnestly with an old crusader; there Sir Rowland and a few of the veterans were "fighting their battles o'er again." The dance was forgotten in the excitement of the occasion.

And, yonder, in a deep recess, where a narrow lattice admitted the soft and softening rays of the moon, stood two youthful figures. There was an earnest, almost holy, look of high purpose mixed with ardent love on the face of the youth. His long crimson cloak, thrown back from his breast, revealed a form rich with promise of vigorous manhood. He was speaking earnestly, tenderly to the fearful maiden beside him. Presently, and with a deep sigh, she looked up.

"God and our Lady bless thee, dear Edward, and keep thee!"

His earnest look caused the rest to die away on her lips, and her eyes to seek the floor again.

"Margaret," said her lover, "betrothed of my heart, I feel that it is only the purest love that can unite us, and I only unworthy of thee. I go to win laurels wherewith to enwreath thy pure brow—to bring back a name, which, won in a holy cause, will surely bless our hearth—our hearth, sweet one, for truly we are so pledged, are we not?"

She blushed; he took her willing hand and went on passionately:

"Yes, while my heart is here in thy keeping, may my sword be a humble instrument for the redemption of the sepulchre of my God."

Margaret de Montespan's heart caught some of the fire of the young enthusiast.

"Go, Edward. Far be it from me to detain thee? I hope in thy hope. I glory in thy glory. Think not because I tremble, and, perchance, even weep, that I cannot feel thy fire. Nay, dear love, I am the daughter of warriors, and I am thine the more that thou lovest the trumpet and the war-horse—aye, and the gory field of battle. I am the child of a saintly mother, and my heart goes to fight with thee in the Holy Land. The God thou servest with thy sword will bless thee, and, surely, me, for thy sake."

A movement among the guests made them turn. Sir Roland made the musicians strike up a crusading hymn, and, as the ladies left the hall, Margaret scarcely had time for 'Farewell'—yes, a hurried hand-pressure and farewell! For the next morning all would be hurry, all excitement, and the knights departed early; and, alas, she dared not show her love openly.

Edward de Faulkner was the son of an old friend of her father. Noble, chivalrous and honorable, with an honest heart and high aims—and some of these qualities were by no means common among the Norman knights—he was poor, his name decayed, and needing a brilliant career, indeed, to make him, in the eyes of Sir Roland de Montespan, a fit consort for his only child. It never even occurred to him to suppose for a single moment that she could dream of union with De Faulkner. And Margaret knew all this. She knew Sir Roland's pride and ambition; she knew of Edward's poverty, and yet—. Ah, love is so stealthy. He creeps in quite unknown to the owners of his victims' hearts, and before they are aware of his presence, behold, he has already taken possession and will not be gainsaid! So that when the time came for Edward de Faulkner to take the arms and name of a knight and march to the Crusade, Margaret was astonished to find herself clinging with all the love of her young heart to him and weeping bitter tears. She had a gentle, loving mother, but how could she confide to her what might be a hopeless affection?

The noble and gentle maidens of that day were taught to be perfectly quiescent in the disposal of their hand. She must abide her time; she must wait and trust that Edward would soon return covered with glory; she must pray that never, never should she be called upon to become a bride of another. How deeply and how purely her heart clung to him!

She waited, the scalding tears in her eyes and a dead weight at her heart. At last all sounds of revelry ceased, and she was growing calmer. A slight noise in the corridor made her start. The chapel door was opened and closed softly. A smile flitted over her face as she threw a blue cloak over her shoulder and left the room. Swiftly and noiselessly she glided down the steps to the chapel, opened the tribune door and entered.

The moonlight bathed the sanctuary floor, casting a thousand glimmering lights over altar and tabernacle from the rich east window. The sanctuary lamps shone like sparks of red fire amid the upper gloom. On the floor, just outside the sanctuary, lay the armor of a knight, and beside the armor, his eyes intently fixed upon the tabernacle, knelt he for whom her soul longed. Silently she knelt down in the tribune upon the soft cushion. "To-morrow, to-morrow, he will be a knight," she breathed. "Oh, God, guard him! oh, God, accept his vows with graciousness! oh, God, bless him in life and grant him a peaceful death!" He saw her not. She knew it and rejoiced. It was joy unspeakable to be near him in the knowledge of his love; to be near him here, in the presence of the Most Holy Eucharist, as pour forth her prayer for him, and to watch with him during the silent night, the eve of his knighthood, the last night—till when?

So they watched together; till, at length, the moon glided past and left the sanctuary dark, and the youth and the armor were almost lost in the shadow. Then she crept to her chamber and slept.

The sound of cheerful voices, the clink of armor and the noise of armed footsteps awoke her next morning. She rose hurriedly and opened the casement. There, in the courtyard, was mustering the gay throng of Knights. The sun was getting fairly high, and the moon was bright and the vast forest resounding with the songs of a thousand birds. She had missed the ceremony of Knighthood! Her mother, considering the late hour of her retiring to rest the night before, had forbidden her to be awakened. A pang of disappointment and self-reproach shot through her heart. All the warriors saluted her; but only one did she see; she was conscious of but one horseman, saw but one face, full of joy and sorrow and love; and the next moment her breath came short, her eyes swam and for a few seconds she was on the verge of swooning! But pride and maidenly reserve came to her aid; and Margaret de Montespan waved her hand in farewell, her eyes bright with the light of tears and a flush which made her radiant as the morning upon her rounded cheek.

"How lovely she is!" exclaimed a young gallant to Sir Edward as they rode along.

Thus he departed, and Margaret was left with a remembrance sweet and sad, but hopeful. Would he not return and claim her? She lived on, every day becoming more and more attached to her own nook in the tribune; for here, in the chapel, was the one friend on earth who knew her secret, and could and would help and sympathize with her—the veiled Emmanuel in the Tabernacle.

Months rolled past, and there came tidings of great victory over Saladin, then of the march to Jaffa, then the straggling and contradictory reports of King Richard's movements, followed by his uncertain fate. He returned to his kingdom; and still there came no Sir Edward de Faulkner to claim her. Twice she had heard something of him—once a pilgrim asking alms at the castle had mentioned his name in his story of a brilliant sortie; and, again, a knight returned from the crusade reported him and his mercy to a vanquished Turkish officer. But he knew not what had become of him on the return of Richard's army. That was all.

CHAPTER II.

And the years went by—two, three, five. Still Margaret loved and hoped on; hoped till she found that hope had gradually and unconsciously died out, leaving a grave in her heart. Calmly and sadly she thought of him as dead, and instead of praying for his return, found herself supplicating for the repose of his soul. Several times had her hand been sought; but she had ever shown such a dislike of marriage that her mother, deeming from her frequent visits to the chapel, from her thoughtful and saintly ways, that she looked to the convent as her haven of love and peace, did not urge it; and Sir Roland, who had intense respect for his wife, yielded to her representations, though he occasionally brought a vivid blush to his daughter's cheek by a word or a hint about her long maidenhood.

But now the gentle Lady de Montespan was anxious to have Margaret's desire expressed in words. As a mother, she shrank from parting with a beloved child; but, as a Catholic, she dared not place herself between her and her consecration to God.

One morning, when they were at their embroidery frames, Margaret unconsciously paused, and looking up, her mother saw her eyes wistfully turned towards the distant convent, where it stood on the hillside shaded by noble trees, as if the whisperings of nature alone were allowed to intermingle with its holy quiet. The thin wreath of smoke rising from amid the foliage, seemed an emblem of the peaceful and heavenward happiness and prayer within.

Lady de Montespan watched her in silence a moment or two.

"Margaret, my child, (at the sound of her mother's voice the maiden started, and a quick flush overspread her features) hast thou a love for yonder convent, that thine eyes are so often turned towards it?"

"It is a holy life, sweet mother," she replied.

"Truly, my child; and thy constant dislike of suitors had led me to—to—" She paused, her voice trembled, and tears started to her eyes.

Margaret crossed over, knelt down, and kissed her mother's hand.

"Nay, dearest mother, that life is not for me. I was but thinking of our cousin Agnes, the abbess, and of the fulness and beauty of her life. In sooth, to speak with her is to be holier for a season."

Lady de Montespan started with a mingled sensation of surprise and relief. This, then, was not the goal of Margaret's hopes, if she had, indeed, any hopes, for of suitors would she have none either. Soon she spoke again, determined, if possible, to fathom the mystery.

"Then, my Margaret, must we needs find thee a fit companion for thy life. But thou hast been ever so coy that, if we hasten not betimes, the flower of thy life will be withered ere thy hand be bestowed. If thou couldst have found it in thy heart to love—"

Margaret stopped her with a frightened and beseeching look.

"Ask me not, ask me not!" she exclaimed hurriedly; then softly and soothingly continued: "Pardon me, oh, forgive me, sweet mother. But, if it please thee, my hand shall not be given to man. There is none that I love upon earth."

She blushed painfully, aware that she had shown more passion than her mother would deem becoming. And, indeed, there was a slight tone of displeasure, mingled with the tenderness of Lady de Montespan's reply.

"These are strange words, Margaret. Thy father and I, methinks, are the best guardians of thy welfare. We have not pressed a choice upon thee, nor chosen for thee, because I deemed—But that matters not. There are suitors enough for thy hand."

Margaret clasped her hands with a look of agony.

"My mother, forgive me if I speak yet this once. Thou art merciful; compel me not. Oh, if thou knewest all!"

Again a deep flush overspread her features. Her memory told over the scenes and hopes of long ago; and she wept. Gladly would she have suppressed her tears, but their tide swept onward by the force of remembrance, was too strong.

Lady de Montespan turned pale. What meant all this? She felt at one moment bewildered, at another excusable displeasure at what she deemed mere sentimentality and waywardness. Presently she said, Margaret, this is but foolishness. Look up and tell me thy meaning."

Thus commanded, her daughter, by a great effort, overcame her emotion sufficiently to say, "Rememberest thou my mother, Edward de Faulkner?"

"Aye, surely, responded her parent. "But what have all these tears to do with him?"

"We loved each other," said Margaret, faltteringly, and, then, little by little, followed the short story of that youthful love.

Lady de Montespan listened with sympathetic interest. "But, my poor child, he returned not, with or without glory, he is surely dead. King Richard returned, and the last straggling knight has re-entered his own hall. Thou must not waste thy heart's love on the dead. Strive to bury it with him. Come, thou shalt have twelve months for thy task; and then a living love shall be thine."

"Oh, lady and mother, have pity, I cannot love again!—I dare not—," began the weeping girl; but with a look of dignified astonishment, and with severe distinct emphasis, her mother reproved her.

Such is not the condition of mind befitting a modest maiden and a true child, Margaret. I find I must needs leave thee alone to calm thy disordered heart."

And the maiden was left alone, alone with her own thoughts. The embroidery frame was forgotten. Mechanically she twisted the bright silks round her fingers, as they lay on a table near her. The past seemed bright with hopes; the future, to her sensitive and romantic mind, omnicous and dark with fears. A quiet life in the old castle with its romantic scenery had done much to foster the imaginative tenderness of her nature, so that the mere prospect of union with any one but her beloved Edward was the bitterness of death to our heroine. Nevertheless, she was conscientiously assured that nothing remained for her but obedience to her parents, and could only pray for strength. And, now, a series of festivities was devised to rouse Margaret into gaiety. Many a tournament, also, was graced by her sweet presence. But even the prowess of knighthood—so powerful a stimulus in that chivalric age—was unable to warm her with more than a passing excitement. Yet she was so gentle, obedient, so sweet that neither her mother nor Sir Roland could find a single tangible fault with her.

The twelve months' respite was drawing to a close, when a sudden and fatal illness seized the Lady of the Castle. No more was said about Margaret's marriage; it seemed clearly her duty to take, as far as possible, her beloved mother's place, and to soften the grief of Sir Roland. Terrible was the blow to her also. But the knife of bitter grief had been plunged into her heart before, and lo! it had discovered a well of sweetness and sympathy and patience that, now occasion offered, made her a meet comforter for her father, and a gentle and true mistress and benefactress of all under her rule. Trials are blessings or curses according as we receive or reject them.

CHAPTER III.

Years passed; Sir Roland died in battle; a nephew had taken his place in the Castle, whose two motherless children were the special solicitude of "Cousin Margaret." The simple peasantry, in whose hearts she was shrined, told many stories and surmised many reasons why she was still "Mistress Margaret." Some said she had made a vow of maidenhood; others that she had been warned in a vision to marry a certain Knight and would not marry another; and others again that she had remained single to minister to her father, and later had sacrificed herself to her little cousins. But all agreed that it was strange such loveliness had not made her a bride long ago.

One day, when summer was ripening into autumn; when the hedges shone with the red fruit of the rose; when the fields were heavy with their wealth of golden grain and the trees were resplendent in their farewell robes of crimson and gold, a solitary horseman rode slowly towards the castle. A knight he seemed to be by the style of his dress. But his armor was rusty and dented; his cloak was threadbare; and his face worn and anxious. He came across a peasant who happened to be working in one of the fields and accosted him.

"A fine castle, my good friend! Canst thou tell me what knight or noble is its lord?"

"Marry, that can I. "'Tis the young Lord Fitzhugh." Then, gazing curiously on the shabby accoutrements of the rider, "Sir Kight, thou must be a stranger in these parts"

"Fitzhugh—Fitzhugh?" murmured the knight questioningly.

"Aye, Fitzhugh," interrupted the man, "the nephew of our good Lord Roland de Montespan."

The knight started painfully. "Aye, I knew Sir Roland once—many years ago. Canst thou tell me, good fellow, aught of him and his family. Methinks he had a daughter?"

"He died some six years since, and my lady long before him."

"But his daughter—his daughter?" questioned the horseman, impatiently, "what of her?"

"Oh, aye," responded the peasant—getting surely, and looking with ill, disguised contempt at his interrogator, "and who be thee, I'd like to know, to ask with such mighty spleenfulness about his daughter? But, an' you are minded to know, she's at the castle, and a right noble lady she is!"

The knight turned rapidly, put spurs to his horse and galloped off.

"Why, saints help us, what's in him! He's gone, and never a groat for my pains. May St. Anthony forget me if ever I tell strangers all I know again," and the man slung his spade over his shoulder and turned off towards the road.

But the knight, suddenly reined in his steed, and passed his mailed hand across his brow. Should he venture to see her, without name, without glory? He looked down at his shabby accoutrements, and smiled bitterly! "She was scarce more than a child when we parted," he murmured; then, with the words came a thought which nearly stunned him. The peasant had said she was at the castle, but was it on a visit? If so, she was married. Or was it still her home? Delirious thought! Could he dare to think so? Then a thousand possibilities flashed through his mind, swifter than lightning. She might have forgotten him, might be widowed. Twenty years was a long time! But, oh! the longer he thought the more did those twenty years contract, till the span across them was but that between yesterday and to-day. Slowly he rode on through the park. How he, instinctively, as it were, threaded his way through its groves and labyrinths! Calmed by the very vehemence of his thoughts, Sir Edward de Faulkner hoped the bright hopes and dreamed the sweet dreams of youth again. Presently a turn in the park brought into view the western angle of the castle, flooded with the glowing light of the setting sun, which glittered, too, on the arms and badge of the warder who paced the battlements.

He dismounted and leaned against his horse. The Angelus bell from the distant convent told sweetly the time of prayer, and he obeyed the summons. As the last peal died away amid the forest trees, he was startled by the sound of children's voices. Soon, two bright little maidens darted across his path, stood for a moment to gaze wonderingly at him, and then sprang away again to a wild chase towards the castle. An old servitor was soon upon them from another direction. De Faulkner watched them over the draw-bridge, half hidden from his view in foliage. His cheek was blanched; his gaze fascinated—were they hers? So terribly was every sense absorbed in that one fear, that he heard not a soft step across the mossy sward. A lady was walking swiftly towards the spot where he stood; but she hesitated when she caught sight of the knight and seemed inclined to turn in another direction. Changing her mind, however, and smiling at what she deemed a foolish fear, struck also by the dejected attitude of the horseman, she advanced.

"Sir Knight, methinks rest is thy need. If I may offer the hospitality of yon castle, say so; and all its best is at thy service."

What was there in that voice that made the knight turn so suddenly? It was the voice he had carried in his heart for twenty long years. Mechanically he held out his arms. For one moment the lady started and drew herself up with dignity not unmixed with fear, and the deep flush that dyed her cheek recalled her youth. The next, some impulse moved her to scan his face. She looked with doubt and uncertainty into his eyes, a new-born hope leapt in her heart—there was a look that she remembered there. As for her lover, he had forgotten all but the Margaret of long ago, and a wild longing took possession of him to clasp her once more. "Margaret," he said in a low voice of passionate appeal, "it is I,—come!" And she came; the last time was twenty years before. It is I—oh, sweet, instinctive certainty of love! There was but one "I" for her in the world.

Let us draw a veil over these moments. After all, words are but clumsy interpreters of feeling; and the more solemn, the more sacred, the more absorbing the feeling, the more inadequate the speech. At last, a fulness of supreme rest succeeded to the rapture of the re-union. And as the sun was casting its last rays over the earth Margaret, leaning on de Faulkner's arm, entered the castle.

"My own," said he, as he paused on the threshold, "this is a hundred-fold return for the heats of the Arabian desert, aye, for a Mohammedan dungeon and years of longing. The thought of thee has guarded me from the sins of the East, even as the possession of thee will be my shield from time to time."

May God grant it!" was the low reply, as Margaret glanced upward with tearful and grateful eyes.

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