



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1863.

No. 26.

THE DAUGHTER OF TYRCONNELL. A TALE OF THE REIGN OF JAMES THE FIRST.

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On hearing this earnest and truthful denial Hereford again took Mary's hand. 'In vain would I conceal it,' he exclaimed, 'I had, indeed feared that you loved my friend.' More he would have said but Mary interrupted him in a reproachful tone:—

'Had you not my solemn assurance that such was not the case? Have you, too, learned to doubt me? Then am I, indeed, fallen! There was a marked emphasis on these words that gave them double force, and there was in their conclusion a mournful tenderness that sank into Hereford's soul. 'Then she may be brought to love me—oh! ecstatic thought!' and unconsciously he pressed yet closer the hand he still retained. Short was his dream of hope, for Mary's next words dispelled the illusion:

'It is but justice to you, my Lord of Hereford, to state the cause of my refusal, and when I have assured you that it is purely from a religious motive that I decline the high honor of being your wife, you will, I trust, forgive me.—Holding as I do that the inheritance of faith is our only real good here below, and believing that it might well be imperilled in contracting the closest and most lasting alliance with one who hears not the Church from whom I hold that precious faith, I could never consent to rush upon such a danger. My lord, it were idle to say what I would or would not do if you were a Catholic—suffice it to say that, being a Protestant, you can never be my husband.' She would have passed from the room but Hereford interposed.

'Surely,' he said, 'you cannot do me the injustice of supposing that I would ever seek to interfere with conscientious belief.'

'It matters not. I have every reliance on your lordship's liberality of sentiment and nobleness of soul, but the Church hath ever condemned these mixed marriages, and that for the best of reasons. I cannot, therefore, embark on a voyage which she considers so perilous to my soul. Adieu! I would have you forget me. This is perchance the last time we shall meet on earth.'

Hereford looked round—the countess had disappeared, and, with a murmured exclamation of joy, he threw himself at Mary's feet.

'Mary!' he cried, 'you cannot deceive me—in vain would you conceal the blessed truth!—You pity me—dare I say more?'

'I hear not another word,' said Mary in a decided tone, 'till you have quitted a posture I like not to see you assume.' Starting instantly to his feet, Hereford led her to a seat, took another by her side, and then resumed:—

'You have said that you do not love Don Pedro. Mary, you love another—dare I hope that?—he stopped, and Mary, admiring the delicacy that made him hesitate, hastened to finish the sentence:

'Dare you hope that Mary O'Donnell—the words died upon her lips, for, at that moment the countess entered, an open letter in her hand.

'Mary,' she cried, coming forward, 'all is not yet lost. The queen hath deigned to intercede for thee, and hath obtained thy free pardon nay, even permission to remain a Papist, and thou wilt be so blinded—on condition that thou givest thy hand to some Protestant nobleman, and keepst thine own secret with regard to religion. This joyful intelligence I have received even now from her majesty's own hand. Her highness is pleased to add that thou art free to choose for thyself amongst the nobles who seek thy hand.

Hereford was silent, but he turned his eloquent eyes on Mary, and here fell before their mute appeal. Rising without a moment's hesitation she laid her hand on his shoulder as he sat, while with calm dignity she addressed her grandmother:

'And had I all the peers of England on my list of candidates, here would my choice fall.'

A cry of joy escaped the countess. Hereford seized Mary's hands, looked eagerly in her face—he knew that more was coming, and he dared not give utterance to the joy that throbbled in every vein. 'Yes, madam!' continued Mary, 'I will no longer deny that my heart, in its human weakness, bath long inclined towards my Lord of Hereford, because he stands amongst the nobles of England pre-eminent in all that woman love and man respect—in all that makes man truly noble. Nay, my lord, hear me out. I could have loved, my Lord of Hereford, it may be too well for my soul's welfare—and I might have been your wife had you been of my own faith—as a Protestant you have heard my final decision. I am grateful for the queen's friendly mediation, and shall never cease to remember her with the liveliest gratitude, but my resolution is taken, and the sentence passed upon

me is, therefore, irrevocable!'

The countess was speechless with anger, and Mary in silence quitted the room. She was crossing the hall when she heard footsteps quickly following, and turning, encountered the agitated face of Hereford. 'Mary!' cried he drawing her arm within his own, 'Mary! will you refuse me one parting moment? are you so fearful that your cruel inflexibility may give way?'

'Not so, my lord, not so,' said Mary, and she suffered him to lead her to an opposite door which stood open, 'not so—my strength of firmness belongeth not to me—it is from above, and I fear not that aught you can say will have power to shake it. But time passes, and I have many matters to arrange within a few hours.'

They had now entered the apartment, and the marquis, having closed the door, poured out an impassioned appeal to the tenderness of Mary's heart, conjuring her to pause ere she rejected forever one so sincerely devoted to her—one, too, who had wealth and power to keep her as became the daughter of O'Donnell. And Mary listened with downcast eyes and glowing cheeks, drinking in the love-inspired eloquence of that voice to which she could have listened forever and be blessed in hearing, but still her resolution was not to be shaken. Strong in the lofty consciousness of right, she walked steadily in the thorny path of duty, though her heart bled for him and for herself. When she turned to leave the room she paused and looked back—the marquis had covered his eyes with his hand, and she could see that his lips quivered with emotion, and his cheek was ashy pale.

'My lord,' she said, and her voice trembled, 'do not, I beseech you, give way to unavailing sorrow. Look at me and learn to subdue your feelings. Think you I feel the sadness of this moment less than you? But this sacrifice I must make—and willingly, too,—though God knows how grievous it is. Oh! Hereford! why were we not of the same faith—or, being as we are, why did we ever meet? On my poor heart rests a double burden—thy sorrows and mine own.'

Afraid to trust her voice farther, she hurried from the room. Hereford attempted not to follow; he saw that Mary's resolution was immovably fixed, and he derived a melancholy pleasure from the certitude he now had that his love was returned, that the pain of parting was not all his own. It was joy to think that Mary O'Donnell loved him, and the pain of disappointment lost somewhat of its anguish as he garnered up within his soul the words and looks which assured him of Mary's love.

Full of these conflicting emotions, he took his way home where he found Don Pedro anxiously awaiting his coming. One glance at the perturbed features of his friend served to convince the Spaniard that he had been deeply grieved, and, perhaps, disappointed since he saw him last. No sooner were they alone together than he eagerly exclaimed:

'Tell me, my friend, what hath happened? how did the king receive the Lady Mary?'

'As might be expected from James Stuart when smarting under a double infliction. He poured out upon the noble maiden such a vial of wrath and vituperation as though she had the sins of all her tribe and of all her co-religionists to answer for. Good truth there were times when I was mightily tempted to throw of my allegiance and beard the cowardly rascal to his teeth. Even now, I marvel how I did control mine indignation—'

He was interrupted by Mezara who, springing to his feet, laid his hand mechanically on the hilt of his sword. 'Caillif!' he cried through his closed teeth, 'base, unmanly caillif! did he dare thus to outrage one as royally descended as himself, and one immeasurably above him in all that commands respect?'

'Yea, that did he, friend Pedro!' returned the marquis, 'but we who know the sage majesty of England are not wont to take much heed of these stormy ebullitions which we generally regard as senseless ravings, forgotten almost as soon as uttered. Nor is the present instance an exception, for scarce had the Lady Mary reached her home when a dispatch arrived from the queen stating that James had revoked his sentence on the fulfillment of certain conditions.'

The sentence—what was it? demanded Pedro with much earnestness.

'That the Lady Mary, in punishment of her obstinate adherence to Popery, should forfeit her royal dower, together with the name of Stuart. The latter is, an I mistake not, a right welcome dispensation, seeing that the O'Donnells have much reason to be proud of their own name, and just as little cause to love that of Stuart.'

'And the conditions whereby the sentence might be annulled—what were they, Hereford?'

The marquis hesitated a moment—a slight blush suffused his cheek, and his eyes sought the ground. After a short pause, however, he look-

ed up, and answered in a voice tolerably firm:— 'That she should marry, without delay, some Protestant nobleman approved of by the king.'

'And thou, Hereford, even thou wert the chosen one!—say, is it not so?' The marquis gazed in surprise on the agitated countenance of his friend. His own calmer nature could scarcely understand the fervid feelings of the Spaniard, yet he could and did sympathize with him.— Reaching out his hand he grasped that of Pedro as he replied in a melancholy tone:

'Alas no, my friend! that blissful lot can never be mine! I will not conceal from you that I offered myself for the Lady Mary's acceptance, but I was refused, Pedro, I was refused!'

'And yet she loves you, Alfred, if ever woman loved man,' cried Mezara with desperate pertinacity.

For a moment the darkened face of Hereford brightened up as his heart swelled with the joyful conviction that Pedro's words were true, but the glow soon faded from cheek and brow as he remembered that the love which Mary had so generously, so frankly confessed, was but a barbed arrow in her noble heart, and could profit him nothing.

'Nay, nay, my friend,' he answered dejectedly, 'it were an idle boast to say that the Lady Mary O'Donnell regarded me with favor, for she at once and most decisively declared that she never could, and never would give her hand to a Protestant. But let us change the subject!' he quickly added, drawing his hand across his eyes to dash away a starting tear. The Spaniard muttered in his own tongue—'Then do I, indeed pity thee, my noble friend;' and they both resolutely turned from a theme of such absorbing interest to both.

'But these young chieftains,' said Don Pedro, after a brief silence, 'are they to be left to their hard fate, connected as they are with one whom we both must love—her countrymen—her kinsmen—shall we not try to save them—gallant gentlemen, too, as they are?'

'Hush, Pedro, hush!' said Hereford, drawing a step nearer, 'and prithee, speak of this matter in the Castilian tongue—you forget that I acquired some little proficiency therein during my short sojourn in Spain.' He then went on in the Spanish language: 'During our drive to the palace this morning I had some discourse with the Lady Mary on that subject, and I have ascertained that she is most anxious for the safety of these young men. From the court or the council there is no hope—they are lost if an effort be not made to save them. And yet what—what can we do?'

After short consultation the two gentlemen sallied forth to reconnoitre the precincts of the prison. It was a large and strong building frowning gloomily over the Thames, which at one side bathed its walls, the other sides being entirely surrounded by an embattled wall at least thirty feet high. There was but one entrance, and that gave no hope, being a massive oaken gate thickly studded with huge iron nails, and fastened within by bolt and chain. Having walked round and round the desolate-looking building which stood entirely alone, a heavy sigh burst simultaneously from Hereford and his friend, and both exclaimed at the same moment—'the river—the river is our only hope. But,' continued Hereford, 'even if we had a probability of effecting their liberation, how could we discover in what part of the building these lords are confined?' And again they almost gave it up in despair. As they retraced their steps homeward, nevertheless, they resolved to consult Lady Mary herself as to the best means of discovering whether the chieftains were or were not in that portion of the prison overlooking the river, as, if not, there was no possibility of effecting their liberation.

It was then arranged that the marquis should call on the Lady Mary immediately, Don Pedro being deterred from accompanying him by the fear that his presence might be distasteful to the countess after what had passed.

It was easy to obtain access to Mary, for the countess was gone to unburthen her mind to the queen, and Hereford was at once introduced to the young lady's presence. At another time the marquis would have been struck by the deep dejection of that lovely countenance, and the general languor that spoke of grievous mental suffering, but he carefully refrained from looking in Mary's face, and when she rose to receive him, he merely took her offered hand a moment, and then dropped it, saying in a tremulous tone:

'Let not the Lady Mary suppose that I again intrude myself upon her on my own account.—For myself, hope is utterly extinct, and I am here only to consult with her on the best means of saving her kinsmen from the untimely death awaiting them.'

Then, as though fearful of hearing her voice, he rapidly continued: 'My friend Pedro and myself have been visiting the precincts of the

prison wherein your kinsmen are confined, and we have ascertained that their only chance of escape is by the river, which lies immediately beneath the rear of the building. The question now is whether they are kept on that side of the edifice, and if so how to open a communication with them. I had at one time resolved to ask the king's permission to visit them as a matter of curiosity, but on reflection I saw that it would but subject me to suspicion, and thus prevent any service I might be able to render. So as woman's wit is proverbially keen, we have decided on seeking your counsel.'

'My Lord,' said Mary, after some moments' thought, 'there are few things now to be expected by me that would give me more pleasure than the escape of these young chiefs. Apart from the desire of seeing them freed from the power of their enemies, I might hope to have their company and protection in the voyage which I must soon take.'

She sighed as she spoke, and Hereford, turning his eyes for the first time on her face, exclaimed with visible alarm—'Why, whither, in God's name, wouldst thou go?'

'Whither but to the hospitable court of Madrid where my brother has long found an asylum. Here I cannot longer remain since my only remaining parent hath cast me off. Heaven grant I may succeed in effecting my escape; but in case I am ready to do any and everything to favor that of my young kinsmen.'

Hereford little heeded the latter part of her answer; striking his hand on his forehead he turned away.

'Oh fate! why hast thou separated us?—Wherefore must Mary seek a refuge in a foreign land while refusing a splendid home with one who loves her as his own soul?' And he turned away in uncontrollable emotion.

Mary stood gazing after him a moment in tearless sorrow, but desirous to change the current of his thoughts, she approached him, saying with assumed composure and a forced smile—'Doubtless, my Lord of Hereford—'

'My Lord of Hereford!' he repeated with mournful emphasis, looking reproachfully into Mary's face, 'oh Mary! how coldly you remind me of the gulf that lies between us, 'My Lord of Hereford!'

Mary smiled sadly, and a faint blush suffused her delicate cheek as she resumed—'Well, Alfred, and that will please you better—you remember, doubtless, the old story, so famed in Troubadour song, how the valiant Cour de Lion was discovered in his Austrian prison by the harp and voice of his lady-love?'

'I remember the legend,' said the marquis in surprise, 'but what then?'

'Why simply this, that it has suggested to me a plan that might be successful in discovering the whereabouts of my kinsmen.' She then explained her project, which, though romantic in the extreme, appeared to Hereford as the best that could be conceived under the circumstances.

'And now, Alfred,' said Mary, when the arrangements were all finally agreed upon, 'I must hurry you away, or otherwise leave you here alone till my grandmother's return, as I have matters to attend to that will not brook delay. I see you are determined to make no inquiries relative to my affairs, but I will tell you nevertheless—I would have no secrets from you. In my proposed flight it is expedient that I should have a companion of mine own sex, and in my morning visits to that house whence you saw me come forth, I have sometimes noticed a young girl of most engaging aspect, who is, as I have been informed, an orphan like myself, and descended from a noble though decayed family. This young gentlewoman will, doubtless, be well pleased to share my fortunes, and her I am about to seek. Adieu, then, till the appointed time. Good angels guard you!' Scarcely waiting to hear the impassioned farewell which yet brought the warm blood to her cheek, Mary glided from the room, while the marquis hastened to rejoin his friend.

Day had almost faded into night when a small boat shot out from Wapping Old Stairs, and floated along over the dark smooth river in the direction of the prison where the Irish lords lay 'in durance vile.' Had the light of day illumined the scene, the appearance of the two rowers must have excited surprise, for although clad in the usual garb of the city boatmen of that day, the nobleness of their mien would have belied their homely guise. It was, indeed, scarcely said the Marquis of Hereford and his Spanish friend. In the stern of the little craft sat Mary O'Donnell and the young gentlewoman of whom she had spoken, both attired as glee-maidens, while over the fantastic gear proper to the character, each wore a large cloak with a capacious hood to protect the head from the cold night air.

As night closed in the two ladies moved nearer the noble oarsmen, and a conversation ensued, which was carried on in low and cautious

tones. As the boat drew near the gloomy walls of the prison, Mary drew from beneath her cloak a small lute or mandolin, and running her hand over the strings in a low, wild prelude, she commenced some popular English air—another and another followed, but no answering sound was heard—the dark pile above lay dark and silent as before, and the night-breeze whispering as it passed, was alone heard during the pauses of the music. Suddenly the sweet sounds ran out again but this time the strain was low and mournful—it was that same air that was wont to affect Mary so strongly when played by her mother in years long past, and as the soft wailing notes flowed forth upon the still air, it seemed like the sighing of the wind over an Aeolian harp. Again the air was changed to a grand old march erewhile played and sung by the bards of Tyrconnell, and scarce had Mary ceased the inspiring strain when something white was thrust forth from a barred aperture not many feet above the water edge. To push the boat close to the wall was but a moment's work, and then there was distinctly heard from above a low, clear voice, saying in the Irish tongue—'For the love of God tell us who you be that play that air? The blood of the Kincl-Connal must flow in the veins and throb in the heart of the man or woman who refreshed the soul of the forlorn prisoner with the home-music that made glad his youth. Who are you that hath so played the dirge and the war-song of the old O'Donnells?'

'A friend—nay, as thou hast surmised—one of thine own blood,' whispered Mary softly from below; 'if you be Constantine O'Donnell, as I pray God you may, then tell us of thy friend and companion in misfortune the brave O'Rourke!—Rests he in the same cell?'

'It is even so,' replied O'Donnell—'he was ill in body when we were brought hither, and at my earnest entreaty was suffered to remain in my cell. He sleeps now and I do not care to wake him, for sleep is the only medicine we have to hope for.'

A murmur of disappointment passed from mouth to mouth below, as the Spaniard interpreted this latter intelligence, for those of the party who knew nothing of Irish. But their disappointment lasted not long, for when Mary inquired whether O'Rourke was so weak as to be unable to attempt his escape, O'Donnell eagerly answered:

'No—oh no! if we have, indeed, a friend who is so interested in our welfare as to devise a plan for our escape, he assured that my poor cousin Hugh will revive to health and strength under the mighty influence of awakened hope! But alas! escape is scarcely possible, and our heads must become the grazing-stock of an English rascal.' His voice died away in a hollow whisper, and a short consultation took place amongst the anxious watchers below. When they looked up at the massive iron bars which crossed the aperture horizontally within a few inches distance of each other, they were all ready to echo the despairing declaration with which O'Donnell had concluded, and fearful of being noticed even in the dim light, and under the dark shade of the prison, by some of the many bats passing and re-passing so near them, they had well-nigh shoved off in despair, when an accident occurred which at once revived their hopes, and gave almost certainty of success.

In the wild frenzy of despair, O'Donnell had leaned heavily against the iron grating to which he had climbed by means of a rude bench left as a seat for the prisoners. A sudden thrill of ecstasy made his heart throb as he found that two of the bars shook beneath his hand. A moment's scrutiny, even by the dim starlight, served to show that just where the bars were driven into the massive wall they had been filled across at both ends, though not quite through, yet so as that it would be easy to wrench them away.—O'Donnell's heart, amid all its exultation, sickened within his bosom as he thought that some wretched prisoner had got thus far with the hope of escaping, and was carried off to a bloody death probably at the very moment when most sure of being able to evade it. Raising his voice again so as to be heard by his unknown friends, if still within hearing, he in a few words communicated the joyful tidings.

'Thank God, thank God!' exclaimed Mary fervently, 'this is indeed joy—and comes too on the heels of bitter disappointment, for we were just about to put off, fearing that escape was for you impossible. We thank thee, oh, Great God! A whispered consultation then ensued, and it was agreed that the boat, to elude observation, should fall down the river for a few hours until the dead hush of midnight had quieted the city, and the various ferry boats were put up for the night. In the meantime O'Donnell was to prepare his friend, and both be in readiness for the signal, which was to be three successive chords struck on Mary's lute.

As the boat moved away from under the shade of the prison walls, Hereford turned