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FLORENCE O'NEILL, OR, THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.

By Miss AGNES M. STEWART, author of the "World and Cloister," "Life in the Cloister," "Grace O'Malloran," &c.

(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.—(Continued.)

Then after a while I became calm, and told Grace the example of her courage, under trial so unexampled, ought, indeed, to give me strength.

"Madam," she replied, "my trials were the result of obstinate folly, not so yours; but, courage and patience, even should the eve of the day fixed for your bridal bring no help, the morrow's morn may set you free. God will not let this marriage take place. Only be calm and submissive apparently to the queen's will, and all will yet be well."

After the recital of Grace's story I became more and more attached to her, though I do not like that a woman with a mind like her's should be employed in menial offices. As far as she is concerned, nothing seems to disturb her or to come amiss; she accepts all, I believe, as an atonement for her early transgressions.

February 12th, 1692.

The fifteenth is appointed for my nuptials. Grace still begs me to bear up and feign composure. The task is so hard I feel as if I should give way. Oh, for her unwavering faith!

February 13th.

Grace has just entered with my bridal robe, a present from the queen. It is a truly royal present.

The petticoat is of white satin, looped up alternately with orange blossoms and sprays of pearls and diamonds; the train of Brussels point, the long veil is also of Brussels lace. Oh, my God, support me, strengthen me. Am I to be robed a victim for the sacrifice? Grace still says no, it shall never be; God will not permit it. Oh, Reginald, Reginald, my betrothed!

February 14th.

I cried all night long. Last evening the Count was overwhelming, the queen kind and even affectionate in her manner; even the king less boorish. They talked openly about my embarking for Holland with the king and the count early in March. Grace is calm and composed, though to-morrow seals my fate. She rebukes me for the slightest manifestation of distrust in God's infinite power.

February 15th.

Last evening I stood with Grace at a window in my chamber overlooking the park.—The king and count had been out since early morning enjoying the pleasures of the chase. My eyes streamed with tears. "A few hours, Grace, and I shall be the bride of the Count," I said, "unless I run away, to be brought back, mayhap, and taken to the Tower."

Suddenly the king's hounds appear through a break in the trees, and a goodly company of knights and nobles, with the king at their head; but there is no mirth amongst them, they all seem sad and sorrowful, we say.

A few moments later the cause was explained. Half a dozen men slowly advanced bearing between them a plank, on which lay the form of a man, evidently covered to hide some appalling sight beneath.

I turned sick and faint, my heart seemed to stand still; a cold sweat poured down my face; I sickened as, in imagination, I pictured to myself the ghastly burthen stretched beneath the dark covering that, improvised for the occasion, had been thrown over it. Grace opened the easement; the murmur of many voices fell upon my ear; I heard the name of Von Arnheim; I saw the ghastly upturned face as the covering was drawn aside, and I sank fainting in her arms.

May, 1692.

The pleasant Spring time has put forth its young green blossoms. Three months have passed since the night that heralded my release from the meditated sacrifice, and I am only now recovered enough to resume my pen, and give my dear Mrs. Whitely a little more news before my faithful Grace consigns these papers to a trusty messenger who will see that they reach her hands.

The horror of the death-struck face of the hapless young Count, who was to have been forced upon me in marriage on the following morning, together with the mental anxiety that succeeded that terrible night, and the revulsion which that sight occasioned, ended in a nervous fever, from which I am but slowly recovering.

Her Majesty, softened by my submissive demeanor respecting my marriage, has been kind and sympathizing. Especially was she touched when she was told that the shock was made so frightfully sudden by my own eyes beholding the body of the Count as it was carried into the castle.

The Count was an ardent huntsman, and had entered with the king into the full spirit of the chase, but had managed to separate himself from the rest of the company. To come up again with his party he had made an ineffectual attempt to force his horse over a gate. The animal stumbled and fell, throwing his rider, whose head, coming in contact with a block of stone, had produced almost immediate death. He spoke but a few words, describing only the manner of his death, and bidding them bear his dying love to myself. Blame me not, dear Mrs. Whitely, nor let another party deem me unworthy of his love, that I shed tears to the memory of this hapless Count. I wept over his sudden death and his unrequited love.

For a long while I was delirious. When at last I recovered enough to think over the past, I called Grace to my bedside.

"Dear Grace," I said, "do you remember saying it would never take place? How much do I owe you—first, the example of your unwavering trust and confidence in the Providence of God; and, secondly, that, following your counsel, I became passive in the hands of the queen. How bitterly would she have felt had I opposed her to the last; and, after all, the Providence of God had decreed that union should never be."

I have written to another person, dear Mrs. Whitely, still very dear to me; but there seems no chance of my leaving this place, so that I have released him from all engagements should he wish to be freed. It will please you, I know to see that I have found in Grace a wise and an invaluable friend.

"Poor Florence," said the queen, when she had finished reading her packet of papers, which the king had listened to with intense interest, "she has had and still has much to suffer. It is, indeed, a vague matter as to when she will be able to return to us. But St. John shall have the perusal of these papers immediately. It will please him to see how true she is to her pledged troth, and he will, of course, be at no difficulty to surmise the reasons for which she expresses a willingness to release him from his engagement."

"Send for St. John at once, let him come here," said the king.

The queen rung a small silver bell. It was answered by a page, who was forthwith sent in search of Sir Reginald.

Between his wounds, illness, and anxiety, St. John was, indeed, a very different person to the Sir Reginald who, two years since, had visited Sir Charles at Morville Grange. His eyes sparkled with pleasure when he saw the bulky packet in the hands of the king. His greatest torture consisted in his inability to release Florence from her state of bondage; for he argued, and with reason, if the king and queen tried to force her into marrying once, the scheme may be repeated, and in the end with success.

"Tut, man," said the king, good-humoredly, trying to rouse him out of his depression, "go and read your letter. It ought to make you happy the thought alone of your betrothed lady's constancy to you." As the king spoke he held forth the packet, delicately giving, at the same time, the sum of fifteen pistoles, folded in a small piece of paper. It was thus the fallen king used to relieve the indigent Jacobites whose modesty prevented them from applying to him for pecuniary aid.

Dark and more sad grew the fortunes of the hapless exiles. They felt no trial which had befallen them, after the usurpation of William; more than witnessing the sufferings of the devoted Jacobites, who, with unswerving loyalty, had given up their estates and fortunes,

and were, in fact, starving in a foreign land for their sakes, the town of St. Germain's being filled with Scotch, English, and Irish families.

Not only did James and his consort practise themselves the most rigorous self-denial, but also their children, as soon as they could be made to understand the miseries of these poor people, devoted all their pocket-money to their relief, the little princess even paying for the education of several of the daughters of the emigrants, and steadily resisting all persuasion to lessen her little fund by the purchase of toys for herself.

Months passed on, and brought with them such suffering that Louis XIV. pointed out to James the necessity of disbanding his household troops. The French king was the arbiter of his destiny; to him the unfortunate James owed whatever he possessed. A large number of these unfortunate gentlemen then passed into the service of Louis.

"A desolating reform," Mary Beatrice had truly termed this reduction of the military establishment at St. Germain's, and an affecting scene took place between James and the remainder of the brave followers of Dundee. These consisted of 150 officers, all men of honorable birth. They knew themselves to be a burthen on James, and begged leave to form themselves into a company of private sentinels, asking only to be allowed to choose their own officers. James assented, and they went to St. Germain's to be reviewed by him before they were incorporated with the French army.

A few days later they dressed themselves in accoutrements borrowed of a French regiment, and drew up in order, in a place through which he was to pass as he went to the chase.

The king enquired who they were, and was astonished to find them the same men with whom, in garb more becoming their rank, he had received at his levee; and struck with the levity of his own amusement, compared with the misery of those who were suffering for him, instead of going forward to the chase, he returned to the palace full of sad and sorrowful thoughts.

When the day arrived on which he was to review them, he passed along their ranks, and wrote in his pocket-book, with his own hand, the name of every one of these gentlemen, returning his thanks to each of them in particular. Then he removed to the front, and taking off his hat, bowed to the whole body.

The poor king's intention was to withdraw, but he returned, bowed to them again, and then burst into a passionate fit of tears.

The regiment knelt, beat their eyes downwards, then rose, and passed the king with the usual honors of war.

The speech which the king made to them ended with these words:

"Should it be the will of God ever to restore me to my throne, it would be impossible for me ever to forget your sufferings. There is no rank in my armies to which you might not pretend. As to the prince, my son, he is of your blood. He is already susceptible of every impression. Brought up amongst you, he can never forget your merit. I have taken care that you shall be provided with money, shoes, and stockings. Fear God, love one another. Write your wants particularly to me, and be assured that you will find in me always a parent as well as a king."

Poor, disinherited prince! True, indeed, was his father's assertion that his heart was susceptible. One day, some time later, when unable to endure the life of common soldiers, fourteen of these gentlemen had permission, through King James' having written to their commander for them to return to Scotland, came to St. Germain's to thank the king. Four of them, who were in ill health, remained there. They were wandering near the palace, and saw a little boy of six years old about to enter a coach emblazoned with the royal arms of Great Britain. This child was the son of the exiled king, and was going to Marle.

He recognized the emigrants, and made a sign for them to come to him. They advanced, and kneeling down, kissed his hands and bathed them with tears.

The little prince bade them rise, and with that peculiar sensitiveness often early developed by misfortune, told them "he had often heard of their bravery; he had wept over their misfortunes as much as those of his parents; but he hoped a day would come when they would find they had not made such sacrifices for ungrateful princes." Then giving them his little purse, containing about a dozen pistoles, he requested them to drink the king's health.

The child had been virtuously trained; in fact, some of the Jacobites were heard to lament "that the queen, his mother, had brought the prince up more for heaven than for earth."

CHAPTER XXIX.—LETTERS FROM ST. GERMAIN'S.

In never ending fear lest the king should again be moved to bestow the hand of Florence on one of his Dutch parasites, the time passed drearily on. She often, indeed, marvelled why Queen Mary detained her at her court unless to answer two ends—the one, to ensure a se-

paration from a person she detested as much as she did the exiled queen; the other, to have the hand of a disengaged heiress to bestow on whomsoever of his Dutch favorites William should hereafter feel inclined to favor.

The news, too, reached her that Sarsfield and Sir Reginald were both fighting in Flanders, under the French king, and sad as she occasionally was under the continued apprehension of danger to Sir Reginald, or a renewal of tyranny to herself, she would have yielded to a much greater extent but for the lessons and example of her hand-maiden, who never ceased in times of despondency to remind her of the all but miraculous interposition of Providence in her regard, when within but a few hours of being made an unwilling wife. At the same time it not unfrequently happened that she felt an amount of vexation at witnessing the extreme placidity of Grace, whom nothing ever ruffled. She was quite right in conjecturing that it was the result of the lesson she had learned so well whilst passing through that fiery ordeal with the husband whom she had been so eager to obtain.

But there was one very near the queen who was made sorely to suffer by her Majesty, and this was the Princess Anne. The queen was again left by her husband, with difficulties surrounding her at every step. Jacobites, or persons like Grace, were moving about in her own palace, anticipating the restoration of her father, and aware that her sister, with whom she was now at variance, had written a letter to her father, which she had intercepted, in which she had told him "she would fly to him as soon as he could land in any part of Great Britain."

Florence was by nature a gentle, timid woman. When she witnessed the queen's treatment of her own sister her heart involuntarily recoiled to the thought of the danger she had escaped, and the certainty there was that in every contest that might await her in the future, the powerful and arbitrary Mary would win the day against herself.

The princess had sent a humble message to the queen, when, after a time, fraught with much suffering, a child was born to her, but who expired almost immediately.

If the princess thought her situation, seriously ill as she was, and grieving over the loss of her child, would move her sister, she was doomed to be mistaken. She never asked after her health, but seemed as if she only sought her for the purpose of making an attack upon her conduct concerning the sole cause of their estrangement, the Marlboroughs. She addressed the suffering princess in her usual imperious, harsh tone, telling her "she had made the first step by coming to her, and expected she would make the next by dismissing Lady Marlborough, whose husband was her avowed enemy."

The princess turned pale, and trembling with agitation, told the queen she hoped, at some time or other, the request would appear as unreasonable to her Majesty as it then did to herself.

Hard and inflexible as was her nature, she was struck, it may be, with somewhat of remorse, for she said in the presence of Florence, on her return to Kensington:

"I am sorry I spoke as I did to the princess, who had so much concern on her at the renewal of the affair that she trembled and looked as white as her sheets."

Those words she regretted having spoken were the last Mary ever uttered to her sister.

Meanwhile weeks and months passed away. Behind the scenes as she was in Mary's court, Florence learned wisdom with each recurring day, seeing as she did how very little wealth and exalted rank can purchase in the way of happiness and content. She knew that the mind of the usurping queen was a prey to many cares—treachery often at the council table, unfaithfulness in the husband whom she almost adored, and rumors, ever and again of those risings in favor of her unfortunate father—which formed the terror of her whole reign; whilst towards the princess the most utter estrangement continued during the latter years of her life.

On one evening, many months after her long letter had been received by the ex-queen, the usually impassable features of her hand-maiden wore an expression of pleasure. She advanced to meet her mistress with a package in her hand, saying, at the same time, in an under tone, "I have seen Father Lawson; these papers are from Mrs. Whitely."

The first enclosure contained a few lines from Sir Reginald. She opened it eagerly, and read as follows:

I repeat my former assertion, though Heaven knows, with a sore, despairing heart. My fortunes are ruined, I am landless, homeless, a beggar on the face of the earth, and will not do you, my beloved one, such injury as to hold you to your troth. Forget that I ever existed. I ought to have begun this letter with informing you that the gallant and brave defender of Limerick, Lord Luanan, had received a mortal wound at the battle of Landon. He lingered a few days, and then expired in my arms. The name of Sarsfield will be held in honor and veneration by Irishmen in ages yet to come, as a pattern of all that should distinguish the character of a soldier and a man of honor.

"The last of my kinsfolk, then, is no more,"

thought Florence, with a sense of the desolation one experiences when aware that we stand alone in the world, with not a soul on earth that can claim that blood relationship which, alas, that it should be so, does not always form, as it ought to do, the very strongest bond between man and his fellow man. Of that, young as she was, she had had practical proof in the conduct of the queen's own family.

As a relative, Florence knew but little of the gallant Lord Luanan, but she had been accustomed to think of him with a sense of gratified pride, and a feeling of gladness that she could claim relationship with a man whom his greatest enemies spoke of as of unsurpassed bravery and unflinching honor. His conduct at Limerick attested the latter in a perhaps unexampled degree; for when help was at last at hand, he refused to profit by it, because he had pledged his word to the followers of William.

The letter from the queen began as follows:

Another Autumn has passed away. Shall I ever, my dear child, clasp you in my arms again?

It is now four years since we parted, and if the merciful God has sent us both trials, it has pleased Him to carry both yourself and your fond Mrs. Whitely safely through them. At present we are all in good health, God be thanked. The king continues to load us with his benefits, and with countless marks of friendship. Every fresh proof fills us with renewed gratitude. Whilst writing on this subject, do you remember, my child, that he promised to grant our Rose, as he termed you, any favor she might beg of him hereafter. It occurs to me that he might be willing to endow you a little service in the affairs of a certain person whose disposition and affection is unchangeable, but who is, alas, too proud to marry, and thus hold you to your engagement under present circumstances.

The remembrance of the sad and destitute condition of these brave gentlemen, who have made themselves poor and destitute, and who have given up everything for us, fills us with the most poignant grief, and troubles us far more keenly than our own calamities.

Farewell, my dear child. I never cease to pray for you, as for myself, that God may fill our hearts with His holy love. We may be satisfied with all else that may happen to us if we possess this. I may add that I was much interested in the account you gave me of your attendant. God has given you a great mark of His goodness, my child, in placing such a person near you. Burn this when read; and, once more, farewell.

CHAPTER XXX.—ALONE WITH RECORDS OF OTHER DAYS.

"Do you really feel worse, madam?"

This enquiry was put to the queen by Florence in a tone of anxious consideration on the evening of the 20th of December, 1694.

"Very much worse, child, indeed, though the king does not like to hear me say it. I feel ill, seriously ill."

The end was drawing nigh; that end which levels all distinction, when peer and peasant, the crowned head and the beggar, are at last equal.

Did Mary entertain a presentiment that this was to be her last? Her conduct on the night following the day in question would lead posterity to believe that she did.

She always had a high, fresh color, so she had on this day in question. She did not look ill, and the two ladies who were in the room with our heroine when this conversation took place, were both to believe that her Majesty's indisposition were other than trifling. Indeed, she had never been in her usual health or spirits since about three weeks ago, when the service at Whitehall came to a full stop in consequence of Archbishop Tillotson who was officiating in the queen's presence, being struck with apoplexy, he never spoke again, but died in a few days.

Like many ladies in our own time, Queen Mary was apt to be obstinate in the remedies she used when unwell. Vainly had a faithful physician warned her against the use of a spirituous cordial, which she was accustomed to swallow in large doses. She partook of it on this occasion, and shortly afterwards became much worse.

For a short time Florence was alone with the queen, and many thoughts passed through her mind, connected with her own presence in the palace. She had been endeavoring to rally the queen's drooping spirits to the best of her power, and the latter seemed to have fallen asleep, and ceasing to talk, Florence fixed her gaze on the full face with that high complexion, and the large corpulent figure of the queen—her size had become such as is rarely seen in a woman—still in the prime of life. Suddenly the queen opened her eyes, she was not asleep as Florence had imagined, but was thinking with closed eyes, probably, on the more youthful personage beside her, whom partly from whim, and partly from interested motives, she had for some four or five years monopolized to herself in a species of honorable captivity. Suddenly Mary exclaimed in a hard, abrupt tone, which made Florence start:

"What are you thinking of, what made you stop so suddenly?"

"I believed you were asleep, madam, and—"

"Yes, very well," interrupted the queen, "I will not press you too closely, instead of insisting on your telling me your thoughts; you shall hear what mine were; I was thinking of you."

"Of me, madam," said Florence in a tone of astonishment.

* Dalrymple's Memoirs of Great Britain.
† Amadee Fiohot.