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

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It was impossible to doubt the sincerity of the marquis, whose frankness and honesty were too well known to admit of suspicion, and Mary well knew that nothing could induce him to profess sentiments which he did not feel.

Neither Don Pedro nor the marquis had any desire to remain when the planet who gave light to that cheerless scene had once withdrawn her rays, and they were both on the point of making their adieux, when Mary again entered, her face flushed with some strong excitement, and her person enveloped in a large mantle.

'What! the king hath sent to command thine instant attendance! What may this mean?'

'I know not,' replied Mary endeavoring to control her agitation, 'but since your ladyship is not now at liberty to accompany me, I suppose I must go alone.'

'Not so, daughter, not so,' said the countess with strong emotion, 'it were not fitting that thou shouldst brave alone, it may be, royal anger. I will give thee a more helpful protector. My lord of Hereford, raising her voice, 'will it please you to come hither?'

The significant look which accompanied these words was not lost upon Mezara, though Mary was too much engrossed by her own thoughts to perceive it.

The sudden glow died away on the cheek of the marquis, and in silence he offered his arm to Mary. The latter, as she passed from the room, turned to the Spaniard where he stood in moody silence, and holding out her hand with a frankness and cordiality that at once charmed away his gloom, she half-whispered in Irish:—

'As I know you have but little interest in your present company, do not remain here.—Better come with us.'

With a sudden return of animation Don Pedro advanced to the countess, made a hasty apology for his abrupt departure, bowed coldly and haughtily to the guests, and hurried after his friend who, with Mary, was already crossing the outer hall.

'How now, friend Pedro! methought thou wouldst have remained the countess' guest till my return. Hast wearied already of the clacking tongues of the fair dames there assembled?'

'I faith no!' rejoined Pedro gaily, 'these ladies are an exception to the general rule, for one might as well expect to open a conversation with the statues on guard in yonder hall. They are bronze or marble, Hereford, or any other'

substance harder still. However, as I am in no mood for converting them to a better opinion of Papists, I will, with your leave, take possession of a corner in your house, since I may not accompany you to court.'

They had just reached the door of the carriage, and Mary had her foot on the step when she turned to take leave of Mezara, and as she gave him her hand she could not avoid noticing the dejection of his countenance, nor could she conceal from herself that she was some how the cause of his sadness.

'We part now, Signor Mezara!' she said in a kind and friendly tone, 'but to-morrow, I trust, we shall meet again, as I have many things to tell you for my brother, and by that time, I may, perchance, have many more. Nay, I may have to call on your friendship for active service.'

A melancholy presentiment clung around her heart, as, drawing away the hand so eagerly retained, she stepped into the carriage and was followed by Hereford. For some time no word was spoken,—Mary, on her part, having an undefined but strong notion that her position was a somewhat awkward one.

She was aroused from these gloomy anticipations by the voice of her companion, who made some abrupt remark on the noble bearing and apparent worth of his Spanish friend.

'He is, above all, the friend of Hugh O'Donnell,' went on the marquis with a sort of nervous tremor in his voice, 'and that alone would suffice to win for him a high place in the Lady Mary's affections!'

'Friendship!' repeated Hereford, 'would it, indeed, go no farther?' Then snatching the hand of the wondering girl, he would have carried it to his lips, but Mary withdrew it very quickly, and drew herself up in a corner of the carriage with an air of cold reserve which awed the marquis into silence, and sufficiently reminded him that any declaration of attachment would be, in their present relative positions, highly indecorous.

When Mary was led by the marquis into the presence-chamber she cast a timid, searching look around, and was rejoiced to find the apartment totally deserted. Hereford, penetrating her thoughts, said with a smile; 'This is, I trust a happy omen. God grant we may see his majesty alone, for in that case it were an easier matter to turn him to our wish. But hush! here he comes—his most learned majesty!'

He had scarcely spoken when James threw open a side door and entered the room, his ungainly person wearing an air of slovenly neglect, which completed the tout ensemble. His feet were thrust into a pair of slippers much too large, while his unshaved face looked grimly out from under the long grizzled locks which then hung at either side.

thought of nothing but Mary herself, who was unhappily the immediate object of his indignation. Without at all heeding the marquis, he launched at once into a stormy invective against the Irish nation in general and the O'Donnells in particular.

So unmanly was his attack on a young and defenceless female and so intemperate his language, that it required all Hereford's aristocratic veneration for royalty to restrain his rising anger.

Although it was evident that the king's present indignation was mainly excited by the recent charges made against O'Rourke and O'Donnell, yet in the rushing torrent of his wrath all coherency was swept away, and he actually forgot to mention either their names or their particular offence.

'I am deeply grieved,' she began, 'that your highness should be driven to entertain so unfavorable an opinion of our poor people, and were the king's own excellent judgment alone brought to bear on the subject, the matter would assuredly appear to him in a different light.'

'Hearing this James broke out anew: "What then, doth thy conscience belie the knowest truth? Doth it not accuse thee of an obstinate adherence to the idolatrous worship of Rome? Out upon thee, lassie! thou hast of a surety disgusted us with all thy deceitful sex! Here have we, in the upright simplicity of our own heart, given thee credit for the most orthodox opinions, and have, therefore, loaded thee with our favors, never taking it into our mind to question thee on thy religious belief; while thou, in thy base hypocrisy, hast showed thyself to all appearance a good Protestant, though secretly practising all the forbidden superstitions of the antiquated hag whose thraldom we of these favored realms have succeeded in shaking off."

'Most gracious prince,' said Mary, repressing by a strong effort her disgust and indignation, 'with respect to the charge of being a Catholic I unhesitatingly plead guilty. If it be a crime to belong to what I firmly believe to be the only true Church—to profess the faith which has for countless generations been the cherished faith of my fathers—the faith which consoled my parents in all their tribulations—the faith which alone cheered my father in exile, in poverty, and in death—the faith that shed its brightening halo round the deathbed of my mother, and which that dear mother bequeathed to me as a legacy more valuable than all the lost possessions of our house—if it be a crime to have held fast by that faith, then am I, indeed, guilty.'

'But the second count of the indictment I most distinctly deny with all proper deference to my sovereign lord the king. Never have I, either by word or deed, professed any leaning towards the doctrines of the Reformation, and that I never made known to your highness my adherence to the Catholic faith is owing entirely to the fact that my belief was never, in your grace's presence, called to account. Nor could I, consistently with the high respect due mine honored sovereign, gratuitously inform him that I was a child of the old Church. Surely, then, my gracious liege, who hath been ever, too, my most bountiful protector, will not continue to hold me guilty of hypocrisy or dissimulation.'

The cast of Mary's countenance was, at all times, singularly noble, and as she thus defended with her whole soul in the words, her adherence to the faith of her fathers, and then proceeded

with modest firmness to repudiate the senseless charge of hypocrisy, Hereford gazed enraptured on those inspired features lit up with the bright intelligence of her mind, and he inwardly exclaimed: 'Even such a form and such a face might pagan poets have given to their deified personifications of virtue!'

The truth was that even the sluggish mind of the king was not wholly insensible to the majestic candor of Mary's mien, however little he could appreciate her mental qualities.

'This is fair talking, lassie, and doubtless sounds well, but thou shalt never wheedle us, natheless, out of our just indignation. God's life! dost thou imagine that we could ever be brought to connive at a ward of ours professing allegiance to a foreign potentate, who, as all the world knoweth, hath not one-half our capacity for governing. Of a truth, it were enow to drive a man mad to hear sic an absurdity. Body o' me, but it were!'

He turned and walked half-way across the room in a fit of vehement indignation, and again approaching Mary with a more rapid step than usual, he stamped his foot upon the floor, and shook his clenched hand almost close to her face.

'Verily we have a mind to attain thee of high treason—de'il fetch us but we have. How darest thou deny our entire fitness to govern God's church—preferring before us this Urban, who keepeth court in the ungodly city of Rome?—Are we not every whit as wise, ay! and far more godly? Answer us that now, an' it please thee, young mistress!'

Although Mary could scarce refrain from smiling, particularly as she saw by a glance at Hereford that he was obliged to walk to the farther end of the room to conceal his uncontrollable mirth—yet fully aware that such a breach of respect would have been an unpardonable offence, she resolutely maintained her gravity as she replied:—

'That your highness is a most fitting head for the English Church, by law established, none may deny, as all the world knoweth that your grace presides with equal dignity and wisdom in the spiritual as well as temporal sovereignty of these realms, but as it so happens that my parents belonged to that Church which acknowledges Urban the Eighth as its earthly chief, I cannot, if I would, see this matter as Protestants see it.—But as your majesty well knoweth, the authority of Urban is of a purely spiritual nature, and hath no interference with the rights of kings, that is to say, beyond the limits of his own small territory. As the chief pastor of the Catholic Church, I owe obedience in all things spiritual to his Holiness Urban the Eighth—but as the sovereign lord of these realms—of Catholics therein as well as Protestants—I bow in all submission to a prince whose illustrious lineage places him in the first rank of European sovereigns!—and bowing her graceful head in lowly reverence, she stood before the king.

Pleased against his will, yet afraid of showing how much he was softened and conciliated, James turned away with a muttered imprecation on womanish arts. Just at that moment, Hereford, making a low obeisance, presented himself to the king's notice.

'Why, how is this, my lord marquis?' cried the chafed monarch, 'we were not cognizant of thy vicinity.' 'Death, man, we have no love for eavesdroppers.'

'Nor have I, my liege,' Hereford replied with a heightened color on his cheek, 'for the rest, I came hither in attendance on the Lady Mary Stuart, and have been, I assure your grace, no willing listener to what hath passed.

Here he was testily interrupted by James.—'Call her not Mary Stuart—that name can never belong to a Popish recusant.'

'And yet,' said Mary timidly from behind—'and yet, mine honored prince, it was last borne by a queen whose chief pride it was to be a Popish recusant. If that loveliest of women and noblest of queens was reviled and calumniated—yea, persecuted even to death—it was because she, too, professed the Catholic faith and cherished it in her heart of hearts. Were that royal martyr now living the oppressed Catholics of this realm would have no need of other advocate?'

However unfeeling was James's general disposition, there were times when his stony heart could yield its rill, and few things had such power to move him as the sad fate of his royal mother. This was known to Mary, and hence she had hazarded this allusion to a subject which one less versed in James's peculiarities would have carefully avoided.

A sudden emotion shook the king's frame—he staggered to a seat, and pulled out his handkerchief kept his face concealed for some moments. When he again looked up his eyes were red and swollen, and looking alternately at Hereford and Mary he blubbered out:

'Evil betide the accursed loons who did wrongfully conspire against our royal mother, the Queen of Scots. It canna be denied that she was a staunch Catholic, but times are changed sin syne, and men's hatred of Popery hath become deeper and more confirmed. Even if the King of England were disposed to wink at Popish practices, the whole nation would cry out Shame! But mistake us not, my lord of Hereford, no such weakness is ours. God foretend; as the head of this great and well-purified Church of England we are bound to uphold, and will till death uphold, her doctrines, and discountenance by every means the dangerous encroachments of Popery. Hence it is that we have no choice in the matter—so flagrant a violation of the statutes cannot go unpunished. As the daughter of a known and convicted traitor we did, natheless, receive, nay, cherish thee, ungrateful as thou art, Mary O'Donnell! ay, and still would have favored thee above many who had better claims to our good liking, but as an avowed papist we wash our hands of thee, and cast thee off now and for ever. From henceforth thou shalt no longer bear our royal name, and the princely fortune which was thine doth revert to ourself, the original donor thereof.—Depart from our presence, nor venture again to appear before us, unless it be to recant thine errors.'

'In that case,' replied Mary with great firmness, 'I am now to take a final farewell of your majesty, for as soon might yonder sun turn backwards and retrace his course through the heavens this day, as I give up for earthly motives the faith which can alone save me from perdition.—Before I go hence for the last time, suffer me to thank your highness, in all sincerity, for the many and great favors I have received from your royal munificence.'

'Turning then to Hereford, she gracefully placed her hand in his: 'Now, my lord, be pleased to lead the way: my business here is ended and I would free his highness from the presence of a condemned criminal.'

'Will the Lady Mary permit me to speak a word to the king in this matter?' inquired the marquis who, in making his parting bow, had discovered, or fancied he had, a certain expression in the twinkling orbs of James which might indicate a disposition to relent.

'Not so, my lord marquis, not so!' returned Mary quickly, 'not another word, and you value my friendship. Too long have I engrossed time so precious, and, perchance, even now many other applicants await admission to his grace's presence.'

Hereford reluctantly yielded, and the king, whether in a sullen fit, or from some other after feeling, remained silent for once in his life, while Mary and her noble attendant quitted the presence-chamber. On reaching Lady Kildare's mansion they found the old lady alone and in a state of restless anxiety to know what had happened. She had seen the carriage drive into the courtyard and departed so far from her usual dignity as to meet her granddaughter and the marquis at the door of the apartment. Scarcely had they entered when she eagerly asked:—'What did his highness say? How did he act? I pray tell me, my lord of Hereford!'

But the marquis, fearful of saying what were better unsaid, looked at Mary and was silent.—Mary smiled sadly as she replied:

'Since our friend seems loath to answer your ladyship's question, that task, I suppose, devolves on me. His Majesty hath been told of my being a Catholic, and for that so heinous crime he hath seen fit to strip me of name and wealth. I stand here, madam, not as Mary Stuart, the richly-endowed ward of a king, but as the portionless daughter of a fallen house, depending on your ladyship even for the shelter of a roof.'

'And hast thou the shameless effrontery to say that even the king's authority could not bring thy stubborn heart to obedience? Thou hast, forsooth! given up—martyr-like, I trow—the dowry so generously settled upon thee—all thy hopes, too, from the king's favor—all thy prospects and expectations—and for Popery—thinking, doubtless, that a refuge remains for thee in my protection. But deceive not thyself, Mary O'Donnell! I, no more than the king's highness, will encourage Popery, or Popish people, so that I, too, will discard thee at once and forever if, before to-morrow's sun rises, thou dost not forswear Rome and her abominations.'

'Then, madam,' said Mary with difficulty restraining her tears, 'I have but to repeat to your ladyship the solemn resolution which I have already declared to the king. You may disown me—cast me forth on the wide world as a vile thing—but I will go rejoicing on my lonely way, strengthened and supported by the thought that I suffer for the faith of Christ.'

'Alas! alas!' cried the countess in piteous accents, 'was there ever so obstinate a fool? My lord!' she suddenly added, turning to Hereford where he stood looking gloomily down on the polished oak floor, 'my lord of Hereford! touch-