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FLORENCE O'NEILL, THE ROSE OF ST. GERMAINS, OR, THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.

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

(From the Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XXVII.—(Continued.)

"I shall write to Marlborough," said the king, laying his letter aside, "that his good intentions must be proved by deeds rather than words."

At that moment there was a knock at the closet door, and a page introduced Lord Lucan, whose prodigious size far exceeded that of the stalwart Welchman, Davy Lloyd.

"I have had a letter that has given me pleasure, Lucan," he said, showing him the epistle of the princess, as Lloyd was leaving the room, the fond weak heart of the king yearning towards his younger child. "My daughter Anne, Lucan, is surely better than her sister Mary."

Captain Lloyd's hand was yet on the handle of the door, when this remark attracted his attention. He paused, half opened it again, thrusting forward his white head, saying—

"I beg your Majesty to understand they are both alike in principle; the one is not a whit better than the other; a couple of —" and here the rough seaman used a canine comparison, to which an oath was added, which we may not repeat in these pages.

Poor, foolish, fond James! A deep sigh escaped him as Captain Lloyd closed the door. His words had been harsh and coarse, but the king knew him to be warmly devoted to his interests, and felt that he must be well convinced that Anne was only seeking to further her own selfish views, or that he would never have burst out with such uncontrollable indignation.

"Well, Lucan, and what news has the captain brought for you," said the king, as he threw the letter of the princess aside.

"Merely a letter from Florence, your Majesty. Poor child, she seems to entertain no hope of getting away from Mary's Court. She has also sent a letter to St. John, releasing him, I believe from the contract that existed between them, behold him, Sir, he is walking on the terrace beneath the window. He looks very lachrymose, does he not, rather unlike the fine, dashing, young fellow, who last year offered me his services at Limerick. Active service will rout him out of his trouble most speedily, your Majesty."

"He will not be suffered to remain long inactive," replied the king, "but I grieve for Florence very much, there is little doubt, Sarsfield, but that the rich estates of your young kinswoman are coveted by William. His conquests in Flanders are costing him dear; he is impoverishing England to carry on his wars, and the larger the number of the estates confiscated on the plea of rebellion, the better for him. My poor Lucan, how severely have you and many others suffered by your devotion to our cause."

A tear stood in the king's eye as he spoke. The brave, warm-hearted Irishman beheld it; his heart was as soft as that of a woman, and muttering a few words about only having done his duty in sacrificing his estates, and urging his countrymen to go to France, he turned to the window to conceal his emotion. For the

old mansion in which he was born, and the green hills and dales surrounding it, swam before his eyes, and with the expressions of his royal master's sorrow were more than he could bear. Nor was the scene in the open meadow beyond, where the troops had mustered for their daily exercise, in their dingy, hardworn uniform more cheering to the spirits, for it clearly manifested the scant condition of the poor king's finances.

A moment later the queen entered the closet followed by her beautiful boy, a child of some four years of age. The little prince, as soon as the door was opened, rushed at once to Lord Lucan; his head reached not much above the knees of the somewhat gigantic figure of that personage. The boy's large, dark eyes were fixed on his face, with an earnestness such as is not often seen in childhood. Alas, the little prince was well accustomed to the sight of tears, if you only remember what his parents suffered, and with the acute apprehension of an intelligent child, he at once concluded that something had occurred to make "big Lord Lucan," as he used to call him, look so sad to-day.

With dark eyes, a fair, bright complexion, an abundance of clustering curls of golden hair, and the rest of his features equally good, the little Prince of Wales deserved the appellation of a beautiful child.

He was dressed in his usual attire, a frock of the royal Stuart tartan, with a stomacher of point lace, a cap of dark blue velvet, set somewhat fancifully on the top of his pretty head, adorned with a small plume of black and blue feathers. His tiny hands caught firm hold of those of Lucan, and his golden curls fell over that brave Irishman's arm, as in childish prattle he begs him to come to see a beautiful pony which Monsieur the Dauphin had sent him.

Very good fast friends, indeed, are the child and the earl, though the brave Sarsfield did not live to raise a sword in defence of the rights of the prince he loved so dearly.

He lifted the boy up in his arms, fondling and caressing him as though he were his own. In fact, the little fellow knew well the power he possessed over the brave and gallant Lucan, who, turning with a smile to James and his consort, said, laughing, for the sight of the boy had driven away his sadness.

"You see your Majesties, big Lucan is fairly caught, and as he cannot say 'no' to your child, why you must excuse him, he is going to look at the Dauphin's present."

"A word first, Lord Lucan," said the queen. "I have a long letter from my beloved Florence. I shall read it to the king, and then send it to yourself and Sir Reginald."

"A long letter at last, Sir," she resumed as Lord Lucan withdrew with the boy under his care, shall I read it aloud?"

The king assented, and placing her chair beside that of the king, she began to read.

We must here remark, however, that the date of the letter was that of the October of the previous year. Consequently it had been kept at random, for sometimes weeks or even months had elapsed without an entry having been made. The corn was now ready for the reaper, its golden sheaves were being gathered in. Nearly another year had passed, showing that the journal had been kept by irregular intervals, and as circumstances allowed, most probably with a view of having it at hand whenever a fortuitous chance might occur, through which she might transmit it to her friends in France.

Without any preamble, for cogent reasons addressing no particular person it began thus:

This day I have for the last time looked on the dead face of my dear uncle. I have collected all his valuables and papers; to-morrow his remains will be removed to Morville for interment. How much would I like to go thither for awhile, and then return to my beloved Mrs. Whitely. (1.)

How much would I give to know if one whom I hold dear is recovered of his wounds. How much to know if I am thought of as in the old, old days, when our troth was plighted beside my dying mother.

December, '91.

The king is at Kensington, and has brought with him the Count Von Arnheim. I am persecuted on all sides. I am asked to give a reason why I dislike him; he is in favor with the king (were he in favor of two kings my aversion would be the same). He is thirty years old, good looking, rich, and enamored of myself, so says the queen. She tells me I refuse him in a spirit of obstinacy, and because I am still fostering attachment to an outlaw.—Both the king and queen were much exasperated to-day, because I still continue to refuse the Count, who urges his suit with a provoking pertinacity when he sees how I am opposed to it. Oh, how I wish I was a poor peasant girl I should not be thus tortured.

January 15, 1692.

This afternoon I received a summons to attend the king in his closet; the queen was not there; my heart beat violently. I looked at my face in the pier glass as I approached him.

(1.) One of the names by which Queen Mary Beatrix was designated in the writings of the Jacobites.

I was ghastly white; my black robe a contrast to my pale face; my knees shook under me. Then I said to myself, "there is not much of the courage of the O'Neills in their descendant," and I mastered my fear a little, and walking slowly up the long room, I made my obeisance to the king. Standing before him, I awaited his pleasure.

Let me try and remember how his Majesty opened the attack. I was so surprised that I have to think before I can clearly recollect all that passed.

His spare little person was seized with a fit of asthmatic coughing at the moment I reached his chair. His manners are always more or less disgusting, so that he did not heed at all the nature of his cough, whilst a young lady stood immediately before him till the fit was over, for I dared not move, as he made no sign; neither did he sign for me to be seated. You know he is chary of speech and very brief in his replies. I was aware that I stood before one who is dead to the generous emotions of the heart, and, at the same time, an imperious sovereign. I felt too that the queen was purposely absent.

At last the king laid aside his handkerchief, and fixing his sparkling eyes on my face, his countenance more grave even than usual, he said:

"I wish to know why you refuse to marry one who is a faithful friend of mine. Now, reply in three or four words."

"Your Majesty, I cannot marry Count Von Arnheim," I said.

"It is woman's nonsense; you shall be his wife before we return to Holland. I have said so; it is my will."

"But Sir, it cannot, must not be," and silly woman that I am, the tears rushed to my eyes, and sobbings choked my utterance.

"Enough, I have said you shall, you understand; now you may go."

"But, your Majesty, I will not marry him," said I, heedless of the person whom I addressed.

The king rarely got in such a passion as on this occasion. He rose from his chair, seized me roughly by the arm, asked me how I dared set up my will against his, and in his rage, flung his handkerchiefs on the ground. I picked them up and handed them to him; he flung them on the floor again, saying: "Do you know I have power to imprison you—how dare you refuse when we approve? I see, I see, you want to endow the outlawed St. John with your estates; they shall be confiscated first, madam."

His violence brought on another fit of coughing. I again picked up his handkerchiefs, and humbly asked should I remain.

"Go, Madam, go; I have told you you shall submit," was the rough reply, and I hurried to my bedroom, and when there, dear Mrs. Whitely, I fell on my knees and had a good long cry. How can I keep my troth as I wish and marry Von Arnheim? Then, again, you know it will not do for both contracting parties to be poor; for, although I know I ought to be very rich when I am twenty-one, sometimes I fear whether a reason will not be found why I should be made poor if I continue obstinate in my refusal, as I mean to do.

January 28th.

The queen continues very cold and harsh, and her exasperation with the Princess Anne—for she persists in keeping the Marlboroughs about her—makes her worse. She told me yesterday that the king was fixed in his resolve; called me an ungrateful, obstinate minx, and said that she had ordered my *trousseau*, and fixed the day for my marriage for the middle of next month. "I bid you receive the Count properly this evening," she said; "I shall be present, and, remember, we shall enforce obedience."

I scarce know how I reached my own rooms. "This evening, this evening," I kept saying to myself. I felt as if a weight pressed on my heart. I called on him whom I must not name on this paper to come and help me, on my beloved Mr. and Mrs. Whitely; and all this while, you see, I had forgotten him who can help when the arm of man cannot sustain us. "Oh, God, come to my aid; Oh, Lord, make haste to help me," I cried out in the anguish of my heart; in the words of the Psalmist, "In Thee I have put my trust; let me never be confounded."

Then in a little while my passion of tears was over, and much time having passed; and as I was to stand behind the queen's chair at the theatre that evening, I got up from my knees, for I knew my maid would soon come to dress me.

I am sure I see no beauty in myself to make the Count so ardent. I was as white as a lily, and my eyes fearfully swollen with crying. I assure you the white silk and pearls I wore were not whiter than my face.

I saw her majesty look sharply at me when I came forward, for the Count, I found, was to be one of the royal party. The queen is a superbly majestic woman now. She looked down on me; was a mind to crush me out of existence; and with a significant glance at Von Arnheim, she said, in an under tone, though loud enough for me to hear it:

"I have fixed the day of your nuptials for the fifteenth of next month, Count; you will thus be ready to return with the king to Holland when he leaves England in March."

My persecutor, of course, presented me his arm. It was impossible for me to speak just then, there was such a throng around us, but I looked up in the queen's face to see if I could move her to pity; but no, the glance she levelled at me was expressive of anger and determination, for her lips were compressed together, as I have seen them when she has visited the princess with any outbreak of anger, and as she swept in all her regal magnificence past me, the word "Beware!" fell from her lips.

Had I formed no prior attachment, I do not think I should like the Count. As it is, I feel an unconquerable aversion for the pertinacity with which he presses his suit, and I also have a vague idea that he woos not me, but the broad lands I inherit.

I took my customary place behind the queen's chair, but tears and grief combined made me feel ill, coupled with the weariness of standing for two hours. Suddenly a cold dew overspread my face, the lights on the stage seemed all to blend in one confused mass, and I remember nothing more till I found myself in a retiring room of the theatre, whither I had been carried. That terrible Count was beside me, officiously assiduous in promoting my recovery.

I returned to the palace in his care and that of one of the queen's ladies. He conducted me to my own apartments, and you may easily imagine how hard he tried to press his suit, backed as he knew himself to be by the king and queen.

At last, dearest Mrs. Whitely—for I encourage the hope that one day, however distant, your eyes may fall on these lines—I grew angry, and turning round upon him, I asked him how he could find it in his heart to persecute one who had no affections to bestow?

"Yes, that is the very thing, Madam," he replied, with an insulting air and gesture. "I have heard of your attachment to a rebel and an outlaw, who has dared to take up arms against their Majesties. This, Madam, is the real reason why I am refused."

My hasty temper was now thoroughly roused. "You insult me by such language, sir," I exclaimed. "I have no intention of marrying at present; moreover, I will never give my hand to a person who has pursued me as you have done."

"Their Majesties—" he began.

I interrupted him at once.

"In this matter their Majesties have no right to control me, nor will I be so influenced. I again repeat I will not be forced to become your wife."

"Madam," he replied, "I forgive you, because you are evidently a young lady of high spirit, who, doubtless, grieves for having said unjust things as soon as she has uttered them; and as I am quite satisfied in the fact that the king and queen can bend you to compliance, I can afford for the present to be silent beneath your hard language."

"And would you be content with my hand unwillingly bestowed," said I, with flashing eyes, and scarcely able to articulate, in what I might almost term my righteous anger.

"Most certainly; the affection of the at first unwilling bride will follow, as a matter of course, after she has become my wife."

"Farewell, Madam," he added, rising, "I shall have the pleasure of visiting you to-morrow in the presence of the queen."

I knew well that all I that night saw red arose from a want of full and entire trust in the power of Him who alone can help us. I forgot all the calm and peace I had experienced earlier in the day, when I committed this matter and my whole being into the hands of God. And so it happened that for some time after Von Arnheim had left me, I remained overwhelmed by the shock I had received. The weather was extremely cold, and I sat for a long time heedless that the fire had almost burnt itself out, and dreading even the coming of my maid.

At length, feeling the necessity of exertion, I aroused myself, and made up my mind to throw myself at the queen's feet in the morning, and make a last effort to excite her to pity.

You may well imagine, dear Mrs. Whitely, that I passed an indifferent night. Alas, I had little to expect from the pity of Queen Mary. It was not left to me to put myself in her Majesty's way, for she sent me a message desiring me to come to her half an hour before the usual time.

Of course I well knew that this was meant for a private conversation before her ladies gathered round her. When I entered her closet she was working, and without raising her head, or vouchsafing me a single glance, she began by saying:

"I understood perfectly well the cause of your illness last night. A glance at your tearful, swollen eyes is sufficient. I have sent for you in order to tell you that I shall put an end to such scenes very quickly. Your marriage will take place a fortnight earlier than I had intended. Instead of the middle of next month, it shall be solemnized the end of this."

I cast myself at the queen's feet, imploring her not to compel me to disobey her commands, by forcing on my marriage with the Count.

"Disobey!" exclaimed her Majesty, in a tone of unqualified contempt. "I would advise you to think over the penalty of disobedience to your sovereign's will. It will be imprisonment in the Tower. Withdraw, and when you next enter my presence let it be without tears."

Wandering away again from Thee, O God, by the sinfulness of my nature; leaning for help upon an arm of flesh, a reed that beudoth beneath every wind. Oh, forgive me, my Almighty Father, and teach me to see that from Thee alone true help, in the hour of direst need, can come.

Strength was given to me; I obeyed the queen's behest, and wreathed my face with smiles when next I entered her presence.

But let me not forget in this Journal to allude to one to whom I owe this looking up to God, to whom I thus owe more than a tongue can express. I must premise by telling you she is but an humble waiting-woman appointed by the queen as my especial attendant. On that night, after my swoon, when I was so graciously molested by the addresses of the Count, I had remained for some time after his departure, cold and tearful, when Grace Wilmot entered the room.

A strange woman I had often thought her. Plain exceedingly she was; her complexion was swarthy, with large features, ill-formed; her eyes were fine, dark, and expressive—they redeemed, in some degree, the plainness of her face. She was tall, too, and her figure as beautiful as her features were the reverse.

She was a woman of, perhaps, forty years of age, singularly reticent, sparing in her speech as the king himself, but often very sorrowful and abstracted withal, so that I often felt Grace Wilmot had a story of her own, if she chose to tell it.

On the evening to which I have alluded, when she entered my chamber she paused, and an expression of deep sympathy seemed to pass over her hard features. She was about to speak, but as suddenly checked herself, and was, as usual, the humble, unobtrusive waiting-woman. Even the sympathy of poor Grace was much to me where all around me seemed as if their hearts were of adamant. I chanced to look in her face as she was helping to divest me of my dress; our eyes met, in mine the tears still trembled; heart opened to heart; the rich heiress was no more remembered; the woman looked upon the woman, differing only from each other by their social positions; the barriers raised by the conventionalities of life were for the time thrown down, and before I well knew what I was about, my head rested on the bosom of Grace, and her warm tears were falling in a plentiful shower on my brow.

"Dear young lady, dear child, how I have wished to speak, and dared not by reason of the humbleness of my position," she said; but now, blessed be God and his Virgin Mother, the well-springs of sympathy are open; for, oh, my lamb, it is a terrible thing to suffer, and I have none to cheer us with a consoling word."

I recovered somewhat, and raised my head from her bosom.

"My good Grace," I said, in much bewilderment, "you have spoken words none dare to utter here. Are you of the proscribed faith of Rome?"

"Even so, Madam, and greatly have I drank of the chalice of human suffering; but I will show you whence I draw hope and consolation. But Grace Wilmot, the handmaid of a lady of rank such as yours, still presumes to tell her mistress how to gather strength at the same fount, in absence of the Sacraments now so long denied us. From this, Madam, I have drawn my strength."

She drew from her pocket two small and well worn volumes. The one was a copy of the Four Gospels, the other an Edition of that all but inspired book, The Imitation of Christ.

She turned over its pages, and pointed to one chapter, headed: "De l'Amour de Jesus sur toutes choses."

It was a French copy of A Kempis, by which I understood my maid to be an educated woman.

"That one chapter, Madam," said she, "is often on my lips, and I hope ever in my heart. At a time of grievous suffering an aged priest bid me study it well. Since then I have realized more clearly the fact contained therein, that one must 'not trust nor rely on a windy reed; for all flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof shall fade like the flower of the grass. Have an implicit confidence in God, Madam. He will even work miracles rather than abandon those who put their trust in Him.'"

"But, my good Grace, said I, wanting, vorily, the simple, unquestioning faith of my handmaid, whom I was fast learning to regard with respect, "this marriage is resolved on by those who have me in their power; imprisonment and the confiscation of my property will be the alternatives."

Grace sorrowfully shook her head, seeing that, as yet, I had so much to learn before I could get in the right way, and her plain coun-