

Doyle's Conqueror. ONLY A WOMAN.

BY HESTER A. BENEDICT.

Only a woman, shrivelled and old!
The play of the winds and the prey of the cold!
Cheeks that are shrunken,
Eyes that are sunken,
Lips that were never o'erbold;
Only a woman, forsaken and poor,
Asking an alms at the bronze church door.

Hark to the organ! roll upon roll
The waves of its music go over her soul
Silks rustle past her,
Thicker and faster;
The great bell ceases its toll,
Fain would she enter, but not for the poor
Swingeth wide open the bronze church door.

Only a woman! waiting alone,
Icily cold on an ice cold throne.
What do they care for her?
Mumbling a prayer for her,
Giving not bread, but a stone.
Under old lace their haughty hearts beat,
Mocking the woes of their kin in the street.

Only a woman! in the old days
Hope caroled to her her happiest lays!
Somebody missed her,
Somebody kissed her,
Somebody crowned her with praise;
Somebody faced up the battles of life,
Strong for her sake who was mother or wife.

Somebody lies with a tress of her hair
Light on his heart where the death-shadows are;
Somebody waits for her,
Opening the gates for her,
Giving delight for despair.
Only a woman—nevermore poor—
Dead in the snow at the bronze church door.

FLORENCE O'NEILL;
OR, THE SIEGE OF LIMERICK.
A TALE OF THE REVOLUTION OF 1688.

CHAPTER III. MORVILLE GRANGE.

TOWARDS the close of a drear October evening, two travellers, spent with a long day's toilsome journey, wended their way across a fertile tract of land on the borders of Gloucestershire. The sky was of that heavy leaden hue which betokens a storm, and hollow gusts of wind ever and anon swept across their path, carrying with them clouds of dust, while the sere and withered leaves whirled in circling eddies beneath the hoofs of the jaded beasts, which had not, as yet, finished a hard day's work.

The closing in of the late autumn day, was indeed wild and black enough to authorise the far from causeless fears entertained by the travellers. At the time of which we write, when not only reckless bands were well known to infest the highway, but also some marauding party likely to be encountered on the road, joined to the fearful state of the weather; the prospect of passing a night on the wolds of Gloucestershire was far from pleasing, should the travellers not reach speedily the place of their destination. The younger of the two might, perhaps, have numbered some thirty years. His dress, a garment of simple black velvet, was made in some sort after the fashion of the day, though, at the same time, it retained, somewhat carefully, the excessive simplicity which formed so prominent a character, even in the outward garb, of the Puritans of old and their immediate descendants. A certain air of nobleness which marked his demeanor, betokened him to have come of gentle blood.

His companion, though with a form unbent with age, might, perhaps, have seen nearly eighty winters; his hair, white as silver, was combed over his forehead, and the naturally morose expression of his features now wore a sterner, harder look than usual, from the very fact that his bodily comforts had been most cruelly interfered with. This aged man was dressed in a suit of sober brown cloth; the style of his attire, and his generally sanctified demeanor revealing, without a doubt, the fact, that Joshua Benson, whose appellation, in his early days, was, "Firm in Faith," was really one of the veritable Puritans of the generation now rapidly passing away.

Sundry exclamations of impatience now broke forth from Benson, as his companion, Sir Reginald St. John, suffered his horse to trot slowly on, while he took a brief survey of the country around him, and wiped away the drops of perspiration which had gathered on his brow, for he had ridden long and rapidly.

"It is a great shame to drag my old bones so far," burst forth the testy old man. "I wonder why you did not put up at the White Bear: it was a comfortable inn, good enough for jaded man or beast. I shall wonder if the Lord does not punish us for running into danger, for, verily, those who love the danger shall perish in it." Moreover, I have no liking for the place you are going to. I, 'Firm in Faith,' Benson, as I used to be called in the good old times, do not like even to enter the house of an ungodly man like this papist, De Gray."

"Nonsense, Benson," replied Sir Reginald, impatiently, notwithstanding the respect he still felt for his former preceptor; "have I not already told you that I bear Sir Charles a letter from the king? He has never allied himself to those disaffected to the present government, but always maintained a strictly neutral position. Sir Charles is immensely rich; he has broad lands in this county of Gloucestershire as well as Cumberland, and if we can but win him over to join the forces of King William, he will bring many others with him, and may well afford to aid our royal master with purse as well as counsel, and instruct him of much that he ought to know, if all report says be true."

"May be as you say," replied the old man, copying the example of his companion, who set spurs to his horse and galloped briskly onward, "May be so," he continued, in a tone inaudible to his companion, who was again buried in thought; "but if I had you again in my power, young man, as I had when you were a boy, the Lord knoweth you should never have dared drag me on as you have done this cold, bleak night."

At this moment a sharp turn in the road brought them to a fence, enclosing what, in the fading light of the October evening, rendered still more dim by the heavy mist that was now falling, seemed to be a thickly wooded park, whilst between the branches of the fine beech and chestnut, which lined the avenue, appeared the red brick walls, with copings of freestone, of a fine old mansion, built probably about the Elizabethan era.

An exclamation of gratified surprise burst from the lips of Sir Reginald, as, allowing the reins of his horse to fall over its neck, he let it canter slowly up the avenue which led to the principal entrance of the mansion, whilst Benson, with sundry exclamations of impatience, followed, moodily, behind his companion.

"At the Grange at last, then," said Reginald, "for surely this must be Morville, the place I have often heard Lady O'Neill describe as that in which she spent some time of her widowhood. Ah, yes," he added, as his horse trotted slowly on, "the description closely tallies, and, after all, I have reached the end of my journey sooner than I expected. There is the noble flight of steps, I heard her speak of, with a spacious portico, opening to the entrance hall, and, if I do not mistake, the ruddy, glowing light which streams from those narrow windows proceeds from an apartment in which the warmth and refreshment I sorely need may be obtained."

As he finished his soliloquy he found himself at the bottom of the steps leading to the grand entrance of the mansion, and, dismounting, he rang the heavy bell, the summons being at once answered by the hall porter.

It was in the power of Sir Reginald to procure a speedy audience of the baronet at whose mansion he had introduced himself, by means of a sealed packet which he placed in the hands of the servant, and a moment later he found himself seated with Sir Charles in that same apartment, the windows of which had shone so cheerily without, from the united glow of lamp and firelight, on that chill October night. But Benson and the knight both start alike, though each from different causes, as they enter the spacious dining-room of Morville Grange. The former sees the figure of an aged man pass hastily across the room, and disappear behind the tapestry with which the walls are hung, and a strange fancy possess him that in that hasty, fleeting figure, he has recognised the face and form of a venerable ecclesiastic, one of the hunted-down priests of Rome, whom he had known in other and far distant times, and whom his heart rejoiced to see again, and in England, doubtless acting up to the calling of his office, for was he not in the house of the papist De Gray? The start of Sir Reginald proceeded, however, from a very different cause. As he returned the salutation of Sir Charles, who still held in his hand the missive which the servant had delivered, the dark eyes of Sir Reginald, now unusually animated, fell on the figure of a beautiful girl, who for a moment gazed in surprise and mute astonishment on the new comers; who, indeed, should the zealous adherent of William of Orange behold but his betrothed, the loyal and ardent Florence O'Neill, who would have willingly shed the last drop of her blood in defence of the rights of the Stuart race!

She was habited in an evening robe of pale blue silk brocade, the sleeves, according to the fashion of the time, narrow at the shoulders, where they were fastened with loops of ribbon, widening as they descended, and turned up at the cuffs, to show the under sleeve of rich point, the bodice, also, heavily trimmed with lace. Her single ornament consisted of a necklace of large pearls; her hair, perfectly unadorned, and rebelling against the prevailing fashion, fell negligently over her shoulders. Pale, almost as the pearls she wore, now stood the fair O'Neill, gazing in strange bewilderment on Sir Reginald, who thus unexpectedly had crossed her path. For one moment their eyes met in mute surprise, but brief as was that space, it attracted the notice of Sir Charles, on observing which, Sir Reginald, recovering from his astonishment, exclaimed, advancing to Florence:

"Your fair niece, Sir Charles, and my humble self are old friends, or, to speak the truth she is my betrothed bride. I will tell you, if you are ignorant of our secret, that we spent together much of our early childhood, especially during part of the widowhood of Lady O'Neill, who was my own mother's warmest friend. Delighted, indeed, am I to meet Florence here, for I believed her to be at St. Germain's."

It were hard to say whether Florence was pleased or not to meet with St. John, for the smile that had lighted up her countenance on the recognition that had taken place had so soon faded away. A painful foreboding of impending evil fastened itself upon her heart, in short, that sad feeling which we all experience at times, and are so wont to term presentiment, filled her mind with strange forebodings of coming sorrow. She gazed long and eagerly, scarcely noticing St. John, or the letter in her uncle's hand. The one word of astonishment which Sir Charles had uttered on receiving the carefully folded paper from the hands of the domestic, coupled with the baronet's significant look, and the words "William