

Wogan

The Rescue Of Princess Clementina Stuart

BHES

Charles Wogan (1685?-1754) was a member of an important Catholic family in Rathcoffey near Dublin, who spent most of his life in exile in France and Spain. A deeply sympathetic character, twice in his life he had occasion to defeat measures taken by George the First, King of England. First he led an escape from Newgate gaol where he was awaiting trial for treason for his part in the rising of 1715; three years later he arranged the escape of a princess arrested on the orders of King George.

The princess was Clementina Sobieski, the grand-daughter of the Polish king who won the battle of Vienna against the Turks in 1683. She was engaged to be married to James Francis Edward, son of James II, the Stuart King who was driven from the British throne in 1688 and replaced by William of Orange, later followed by the Hanoverians. The latter had everything to gain by the extinction of the Stuart line and tried to prevent James from marrying, by the simple expedient of placing his fiancée under house arrest at Innsbruck as she was on her way to join him.

He did not count on Wogan who, with the help of three of his relations, officers in the Irish brigade of Dillon based in France, scooped the princess from her prison; and they galloped over the Alps in their carriage in winter to safety. Clementina and James were married soon after and their first child was to be Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Writing to Jonathan Swift in 1732, Wogan comments on history written to adorn a country with glorious tales, and on the need for an Irish history that would fulfill that purpose. His writing of the Clementina story was a step in that direction. Letters which Chevalier Wogan exchanged with Swift are reproduced in an annex to the book. Wogan's story appears here both in the original French and in translation, together with an introduction by Cathy Winch.

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