

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXTON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

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CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

And before they run us to earth, we shall have reached our goal; the illustrious Queen, the fairest and noblest of her race, born to inherit the crown of England, will be free will have fled with us to the continent, and our names will be inscribed in our country's annals in letters of gold.

"Or we shall be branded as traitors, and our heads impaled on stakes on London Bridge." Donne quietly replied to Babington's enthusiastic outburst.

"What?" continued the latter, "is the first semblance of difficulty to overthrow the plan we have pledged ourselves to, as a breath overturns a child's house of cards? Did we not take into account the chance of failure, when we resolved to liberate the captive queen? He who would win fame's highest prize, must be prepared to hold his life cheap."

"Far be it from me to risk my life, and what is dearer to me, a time-honored name and the happiness of my young wife, for the sake of earthly glory," Tichbourne replied with great gravity. "I counted it my duty to pledge myself for the liberation of the Queen of Scots, hoping that this might be the means of upholding the Catholic Faith in England. That was my only motive in joining this chivalrous enterprise, and I am fully resolved to keep my word if, as we have stipulated, the plan appears feasible. For in so important a matter we must not trust to chance. That would not be courage, but simple madness, and the failure of the undertaking would not only be sure perdition for ourselves, but the prisoner herself would be involved in our fate."

We all declared that we agreed with him, and only on this condition were we prepared to venture our lives and our property in the attempt to which we had pledged ourselves.

Babington then explained how amongst his friends at Charlley, he would have no difficulty in raising a body of 200 men to liberate the prisoner by force of arms, if need be.

"And if the plan succeeds," asked Salisbury, "how are we to get the queen over to France?"

"There are two ways open to us," Babington replied. "One is through Lincolnshire by the Wash, where in the little port of Fosdyke I have made the acquaintance of an old fisherman, who would let me have his smack for £100. Of course I did not tell him what I wanted it for, he thinks it is a love affair. Or perhaps it would be safer to go westward to the Mersey, or through Lancashire to Formby, or Southport; for Ostholme are a majority in Lancashire, and if we were pursued, we could reckon upon help there. Nothing will be easier than to find the owner of some vessel who is willing to let us have his bark and his services for a good price, to sail southwards round the English coast, or northwards round the Scottish coast, and land us on the shores of Normandy. The distance to the sea is much the same whether we go to Lincolnshire or Lancashire, about six miles, and could be covered in 10 or 12 hours, providing fresh horses are ready at three halting places at least."

After a long consultation as to which route should be adopted, we finally decided upon going through Lancashire. It was longer, but the one which we should be less likely to be thought to have taken. Only two of us were to escort the queen, while the others were to fly in the opposite direction, in the hope of putting our pursuers on a false scent. It remained to determine who was to accompany the queen besides Babington, to whom, as our leader, the place of honor was naturally given. For this we cast lots; the lot fell on Salisbury, an ardent, resolute young fellow. He promised at once to execute the instructions, namely, to acquaint himself thoroughly with the road from Charlley to Formby, and as certain as what places a relay of horses could be obtained. Barnwell was to go with him, for he had friends residing in the Lancashire coast, and knew a good Catholic skipper, who had already smuggled several priests out of the country, and might be induced to lend his services in this instance. So far all had, so we imagined, been wisely considered. It was, of course, impossible to fix the time when the venture was to be made, as it was necessary to await a favorable opportunity. Still we were all of opinion that it must not be indefinitely postponed, because on the one hand the queen was now in such evil care, and on the other, Walsingham would be certain to put a spoke into our wheel, if it were true that he had got wind of our project.

Whether this really were so Babington undertook to discover on the morrow, when he was going to see him about Topcliffe's behaviour at Woxton, as well as to speak on behalf of the two prisoners. We warned him to be on his guard, for Walsingham was known to be the most crafty and unscrupulous politician to be found not only in England, but in Europe. He said there was no fear that he would let himself be hoodwinked, and when I repeated my caution, he told me I had better go with him. This, at the wish of the others, I consented to do.

Now Tichbourne suggested another and no less important question: "Were we to liberate the queen without having previously acquainted her with our design, almost, in fact, by force? Would it not be better to communicate our plan to her, and ask whether she gave her consent, and would avail herself of our assistance in the hazardous attempt? At first we could not agree on this point, there was so much to be said on both sides. At last, after a lengthy debate, we concluded that it was perfectly permissible to carry her off, apparently by force, out of the hand of her gaoler, since we might take her permission for granted, provided every arrangement was duly made, and success appeared at least morally certain. Indeed, it seemed as if in this case the wisest plan by far would be, not to breathe a word of it to the prisoner, because then there would be less chance of discovery, and if the attempt miscarried, she would be able to prove that she had not been privy to it. Yet, as in spite of the most careful preparations the enterprise must be attended with great risk, it was thought advisable on the whole, that Babington should let the queen know in a general way, that a number of Catholic noblemen had pledged themselves to set her at liberty, and only waited for a sign of consent from her, to venture their lives in her cause. But before giving a hint of this kind to the captive, we advised him to exchange one or two letters on indifferent subjects with her secretary, Nan, in order to test the means of getting letters in safely into the castle. Then he might ask Nan to tell him of a cipher, to be employed for communications of great importance, but on no account should he give him more information than was absolutely necessary, or mention any persons by name.

We thought now every point in our scheme had been fully deliberated upon, and every precaution taken, so that even the most prudent amongst us, my friend Tichbourne had nothing to urge against it. Meanwhile the flagon had gone round pretty freely, and its contents were at a low ebb. Babington proposed that we should have a glass or two of the stronger vintage of the South, to keep up our courage, and fortify us for our ride home through the chilly night air. So he called to the host to bring us "interior notes Falernum," that is to say his choicest wine; and old Clayton was not slow in making his appearance, bringing goblets of the fine Venetian glass with rings then in fashion, which sounded almost like bells as they jingled, whilst the dusty cobweb-covered bottles were being uncorked. Babington took the opportunity of thanking Ollyton for the information he had given him, telling him that he had determined to explain all about our meetings to Walsingham the very next day, and tell him the meaning of the Latin lines beneath the portrait,

Blood.

We live by our blood, and so it. We thrive or starve, as our blood is rich or poor.

There is nothing else to live on or by. When strength is full and spirits high, we are being refreshed, bone muscle and brain, in body and mind, with continual flow of rich blood.

This is health. When weak, in low spirits, no cheer, no spring, when rest is not rest and sleep is not sleep, we are starved; our blood is poor; there is little nutriment in it.

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which the old man regarded as of especially sinister import.

Our good host seemed well pleased at hearing this: "I crave your pardon once more, gentlemen," he said, for the liberty I am taking, but I must say you are doing the right thing. Always straightforward and open, that is the good old English way, and none of the crooked ways and double-dealing of later times. Do you go and say thus to the Honorable Secretary of State: We are half a dozen English noblemen who have joined together to bring back some of the old jolly in these sullen times. We ride, and row, and play sports and drink together; you tell him that, and tell him too that if that is a conspiracy, then you are conspirators, and old Clayton of the "Blue Boar" at St. Giles in the fields, who always sets the best liquor before his guests, not the doctored stuff for which London folk pay good gold—old Ollyton is our leader and the arch-conspirator. And say if the Lord Secretary of State, and the worshipful lords of the Privy Council will honor him with a visit, they shall learn all the details of this formidable conspiracy over a bottle of this old wine, and see all that is to be seen "in vnum reportum," as one may say, with their own eyes. Ha, ha, ha! all in good part, gentlemen."

Thereupon Clayton quitted the apartment, while we under the exhilarating influence of his excellent wine, proceeded to discuss another and a more momentous matter, of which the reader shall hear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

The old Roman poets, as it is well known, used to sing the power of wine to give courage and resolution to the timid and wavering, so that they feared neither the wrath of kings nor the deadly weapons of their warriors. Perhaps it was the remembrance of Horace's lines, "Tu spes reditus mentibus auisus," which we read together at Oxford, that led Babington, feeling that we received his proposals with cautious reserve, to call for the strong wine of the sunny south before making further disclosures to us. Accordingly not until the bottle had been passed around once or twice, and our laughter and merry talk showed that the generous liquor had warmed our blood, did he enter upon a topic of greater magnitude and greater peril. He did not communicate all he had to say at once, but told us gradually.

First of all, he told us that he had received tidings from Paris, from the Spanish ambassador Mendoza, concerning the scheme which was to go hand in hand with ours, namely that Philip II. was at last about to make his long threatened descent upon England. Perhaps the sending of English troops to the Netherlands, or the attack of Sir Francis Drake upon the town of Vigo in Galicia, and the presence of the English fleet among his West Indian possessions had roused the monarch to take active measures. At any rate it was a matter of fact that the Prince of Parma had been asked whether he would undertake the invasion of England, and Alexander Farnese had declared his readiness to do so, provided the Spanish fleet protected the army during its landing, and the king placed twenty thousand men under his orders. The Pope would support the enterprise with his authority and with money, since the object of it was to execute the Bull of Pius V. to dethrone Elizabeth, that is, and reinstate the Catholic religion in England. That the throne would be ascended by the rightful heir, Mary Stuart, would follow as a matter of course. There was even a report that she would marry the Prince of Parma.

It will readily be imagined, that these tidings came upon us like a thunderbolt. We all asked at once when and from whom the news had come, and why he had not told us sooner? He replied that he had received them the day before yesterday, just as we were starting to ride to Tyburn, and as we made it our habit never to speak of such things on the highway, he had waited until we were all together this evening to communicate them to us. "And what will our duty be," if this really comes to pass, and the Prince of Parma lands an army on our shores?"

"Our duty will be to defend our country," some of us replied. "The attack will be against Elizabeth; the illegitimacy of whose birth disqualifies her for wearing the crown, and against her bloodthirsty adherents, who for the space of twenty-eight years already have persecuted us Catholics in the cruellest manner. Think what we have seen this very day, when a delicate young girl and an innocent child were dragged away to prison almost before their father's breath was out of his body, and one more noble Catholic house succumbed beneath the blows of the persecutor. In ten or five years, all our Catholic families will have shared the fate of our good friends at Woxton; and future ages will ask, could not a handful of men be found among all the Catholic nobles of England who would dare a bold deed for their rights and their faith?"

"Thousands of such men have been found, but what good has come of it?" Tichbourne answered. "Remember the sad end of the Pilgrimage of Grace, under Henry VIII,

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Women are coming to understand that the Backaches, Headaches, Tired, Feelings and weak Spells from which they suffer are due to wrong action of the kidneys. DOAN'S Kidney Pills are the most reliable remedy for any form of kidney complaint. They drive away pains and aches, make women healthy and happy—able to enjoy life to the fullest. Mrs. C. H. Gillespie, 204 Britain Street, St. John, N.B., says: "I had severe kidney trouble for which I doctored with a number of the best physicians in St. John, but received little relief. Hearing of Doan's Kidney Pills, I began their use. Before taking them I could not stoop to tie my shoes, and at times suffered such torture that I could not turn over in bed without assistance. Doan's Kidney Pills have rescued me from this terrible condition, and removed every pain and ache."

and of Northumberland's bold attempt in the winter of 1569, instigated by that well-meaning, but most unfortunate Ball of Pius V. Remember the executions of the following Christmas, when hundreds were delivered over to the headsman's axe. I am sorely afraid we shall have a repetition of these horrors, if there is any truth in this report of Parma's expedition against our land."

"And I hope," retorted Babington, "that he will come, and with the edge of the sword put an end to all these preachers and their wretched following, who have brought this misery upon England. And if he does come, surely it will be the duty of every Catholic noble to be on his side."

"I do not see that, by any means," exclaimed several of our number. "Well, quite apart from other weighty reasons," continued Babington, "the Ball of Pope Pius would then come into force. And in that case I am not so sure that it would not be permissible for us to employ against Elizabeth the same forcible measures that she and her council make use of against Mary Stuart. Mind you, I am not hinting at regicide, I do not forget she is a Queen." (To be continued.)

Keep the Balance Up.

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