

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE Times of Queen Elizabeth.

The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon,

By Rev. Joseph Spillman, S.J.

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I did not meet with Mr. Babington at either of his accustomed resorts that day, and no wonder, for, as the reader has already been told, the whole party were at Woxindon, whence they did not return until nightfall. I was however with Walsingham on the following day when Babington and Windsor were announced. Before they were admitted, my uncle concealed me in a closet opening out of his private room, only screened off by a heavy curtain, and bade me carefully note down any disclosures of importance that the visitors might make. I could not quite catch all that was said, but through an opening in the tapestry I was able to observe them at leisure. Of Babington I had a full view. When I looked at the gallant young fellow, attractive in face and figure, in the heyday of youth and prosperity, I felt really sorry for him. The horrible scene at Tyburn rose before my eyes, and I said to myself, "O foolish man, are you aware of the awful risk you run in entering the lists with such a one as Walsingham!"

The conversation that passed between my uncle and the two young men has already been accurately reported by my friend Windsor. When they were gone, I could not help asking my uncle whatever induced him to offer one of the conspirators so responsible a post as that of body physician to the Queen of Scots? "I had two motives," he replied. "First, I wanted to make sure that they really were hatching a plot for the liberation of Mary Stuart; for it is difficult to believe that a harum-scarum young fellow like this Babington can possibly be engaged in a serious conspiracy. However it undoubtedly is so; Windsor managed to keep his self possession tolerably well when I made the startling proposal, but the other fairly betrayed himself. Then secondly, I wished to make them think themselves secure. It is of the utmost importance to me that they should attempt this enterprise. Mary Stuart's death depends upon it, as I told you when you came back from Paris. And I had reason to think they were beginning to get timid about it. Now this show of trust on my part will put them completely off their guard; we will see that a sharp watch is kept over this Mr. Windsor, who seems more to be dreaded than his friend. The surer they think themselves of success, the surer we are of it. I had the two children released only for the sake of keeping the worthy gentlemen in good humor. You may as well take them to Mr. Windsor's house, and that will afford you an opportunity of making acquaintance with the conspirators. Give a guinea to Topcliffe, and tell him not to be impatient, it will not be long before he has these young men in his toils."

Soon after Topcliffe came, bringing the two juvenile prisoners from Newgate. I remember still the impression that Anne Bellamy, herself little more than a child, and the merry, bright boy with his quaint way of talking made upon me. Nor have I forgotten the explanation he gave of image worship, which brought all the doubts suggested by the "Rationes" back to my mind. I asked myself on what our objections to the Catholic religion were founded, if a mere child, half in play, could so easily demolish one of the principal ones? The noteworthy occurrences that took place while we were on the river have been duly related by my friend Windsor; nothing therefore remains for me but to let him continue the narrative of the events that followed. I do this all the more willingly, because I should have little to tell concerning my last week in London, except my mental struggles, which would be quite as wearisome to read as they were painful to endure. It was not study that brought me to the light, but the exceedingly great mercy of God, of which I shall speak in the proper place.

One thing I must add: About this time Gifford returned bringing with him a letter from Mary Stuart; thus proving that the means of carrying on a secret correspondence through the good offices of the "honest man" had been successfully arranged. I must now ask Windsor to take up the thread of the story where he left it and relate what happened subsequently to the memorable boating expedition on the Thames.

back to the house, we found the horses standing before the door ready bridled and saddled. We told Tichbourne in as few words as possible what had occurred, and prepared to mount. Miss Anne rode on a pillion behind Babington, after the fashion of those days, and I took little Frith up before me on my saddle. Just as we starting, I caught sight of Bill Bell, our boatman, standing by, and I remembered my promise to visit his sick daughter that evening. But he assured me that she was better, and begged me not to delay my journey on her account; so I contented myself with sending a message to my patient, to the effect that she might expect a call from me immediately upon my return, probably on the morrow, and meanwhile she should continue to take the medicine I had left with her. Then we struck into a quick trot, taking the nearest way out of London, for it was getting late, and a powerful magnet attracted me to Woxindon.

The shades of evening were beginning to fall before we reached the "Blue Boar" at St. Giles. We drew up under the oaks, and stopped for a few moments, just to tell our host of our satisfactory interview with Walsingham, and refresh ourselves with the stirrup cup of sparkling cider which he brought out to us. Then onward we went through the meadows—already decked in a deeper shade of verdure than when we passed that way before—to St. John's Wood, arriving at our destination about the time of sunset. The porter hastened to throw open the gate at our approach; and behold, as we rode through the grounds up to the house, a pleasing sight met my view, for who should be standing between the thick hedges of yew but Miss Mary, shading her eyes from the level rays of the setting sun, eager to see who was coming through the gate. When she discerned her brother and sister, she cried aloud with joy, and came running up to kiss and embrace them; and in the delight of this unexpected meeting many a happy, grateful look was directed to Babington and me, especially when she heard that to our intercession with Walsingham, the release of the two prisoners was due.

We were next conducted into the hall, where the venerable old lady sat in her armchair by the hearth. She was much shaken by the grief and agitation of the last two days; but her pale face flushed, and her eyes beamed with pleasure when her two grandchildren, looking bright and well, entered the hall. She kissed the laughing boy and the blooming girl on their foreheads, and extended to each of us a trembling hand. Her two sons also came in, besides several old retainers of the family, and for a few minutes the hall re-echoed with joyous clamour, as if it were forgotten that the house was a house of mourning, and that a few chambers off, the head of the household lay on his bier, still and silent in his last long sleep.

But when the first congratulations and inquiries were over, and the good grandmother heard that Frith was to go to Court in the capacity of one of the Queen's pages, her countenance grew grave. "Far rather," she said, "would I see the boy taken to Newgate or the Tower, than sent to Court, where every effort will be made to corrupt his innocence and destroy his faith." To this I could not say nay, for the same thought had occurred to me when Elizabeth expressed her royal will to have him for a page. But what could be done under the circumstances? Every one was aware of the Queen's violent temper; if irritated by opposition, she was quite capable of taking the child from us by force, and we should only gain for ourselves a powerful and unscrupulous enemy. So I told the old lady, and she saw the justice of what I said.

I tried to restore cheerfulness to the family circle by the prospect that it would not be for long. An idea struck me as I was riding down from London, which, if we talked it over, might come to something. It was a plan for bringing about, with the assistance of a man whom I knew well, and who was under some obligation to me, the escape of Mr. Robert Bellamy from the Clink. If it succeeded, he would of course, have to cross seas; in that case it might be arranged for the boy to

slip away from Court and accompany his uncle to the continent, where he could be received and educated in a Jesuit College. It would doubtless be necessary to await a favorable opportunity for the execution of such a project, or a few months at most, Frith's morals would be hopelessly corrupted, or his faith undermined. I thought in saying this of our scheme for the liberation of Mary Stuart, which if carried out, would assuredly necessitate my flight to the continent. I told myself that provided Miss Mary accepted the offer of my hand, as I had little reason to doubt she would, I would persuade her to settle in some Catholic town on the Rhine. But all this I took care to keep to myself.

The old lady considered the idea of her son Robert attempting to escape from prison as too venturesome. But Remy was all the more pleased with it on that account; he volunteered his assistance, and declared he too would cross the Channel, since England was now no place for Catholics to live. "Then you had better go at once, and take the boy with you," the old lady suggested. But that would have interfered sadly with our plans, it would indeed have rendered them nugatory, and aroused the Queen's displeasure against us. Therefore Babington and I exerted all our influence to induce them to send the boy for a short time to the Court, urging that it was quite possible that the Queen would ere long grant the prisoner's pardon; whereas if the child were sent away at once, she would wreak her anger upon the inmates of Woxindon, or at any rate upon Robert, who was completely at her mercy.

"What is to become of us poor girls, if you are all going abroad?" Anne asked in a piteous voice. "Are we to be left behind with uncle Parthy and grandmother, unprotected and helpless? What a miserable thing it is to be a woman, dependent upon the will of another! If I were but a man, I know what I would do!" Babington was so touched by this outburst of feeling on the part of the young lady, that he declared then and there, she should never want a protector while he lived, and if the estate were confiscated by the Crown, he would be proud to offer her a home. This speech evidently afforded the greatest satisfaction to Anne, more so than to her grandmother, who gave the young man plainly to understand that under existing circumstances she considered such gallantries ill-timed. I was glad that I had kept silence, and contented myself with exchanging with Anne's sister a glance, of which the blush that mantled her cheek showed that she comprehended the significance.

After a lengthened discussion it was decided that Frith should go to Court; but before giving a final consent, the old lady wished to ask the opinion of Father Weston, who was still in hiding in the old Castle. One of the servants had already been sent to conduct the priest with all precautions, to the house; for it was thought that without too great risk he might say Mass before day-break in the chamber where the corpse lay, and recite the prayers for the departed.

Frith, who could no longer keep his eyes open, was sent off to bed; Mrs. Bellamy and the two girls also retired, leaving Babington and myself, with the two brothers of the deceased, to await the coming of the priest. We occupied ourselves in reciting the Psalter of Jesus for the suffering souls, uncle Parthy taking the lead with great devotion; we had almost got to the end when Father Weston entered. He would not allow us to break off, but joined us in the last sentences, and the "Ave" and "Requiescat" wherewith we concluded. Then he seated himself at the table and partook of a slight refreshment, conversing meanwhile very agreeably with us. I need hardly say that he listened with the greatest interest to the adventures of the children, and our interview with the Queen. His eyes sparkled with pleasure when we told him how Frith had distinguished himself as a controversialist; but on hearing of Elizabeth's command, he looked very grave. He would not give a definite answer, when we asked his opinion concerning the plan we had formed,

saying he must have time to think over a matter which so closely affected the child's spiritual welfare, and seek light from God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He asked however at once, whether we had not thought of sending the boy abroad directly as the simplest way out of the difficulty, and the answer Babington gave, did not seem to satisfy him. He looked searchingly at the speaker; then rising up he asked leave to retire, that he might prepare himself for saying Mass. Though he was but young, I felt from the outset perfect confidence in the good Father, his manner was so quiet and unassuming, so simple and straightforward, I determined to go to confession to him, and ask what he thought about my acceptance of Walsingham's proposal.

Having obtained permission to go to his room as soon as I was ready, I withdrew from the others in order to examine my conscience. This done, I presented myself before the priest, and made a humble and contrite confession of my sins and shortcomings, which were alas! not few in number; when he had set me my penance, and was about to pronounce the absolution, I told him I wished under the seal of confession, to ask his advice about an affair of importance. Then, without mentioning any names, I disclosed our project to him, and acquainted him with the offer Walsingham had made to give me the post of physician to the Queen of Scots. He kept silence for some time, then he questioned me concerning our design, the means whereby we proposed to execute it, and particularly about the qualifications of the persons who had pledged themselves to this undertaking. When I told him there were six young men of good family, ardent Catholics, about my own age, he sighed, and again for a while said nothing. I thought he was seeking to know the will of God in this matter. Presently I broke the silence by inquiring whether he did not think our enterprise permissible? To me and to my friends it appeared chivalrous and meritorious in a high degree. He replied that in itself the release of an innocent person from unjust imprisonment, provided no unlawful means were employed, was certainly a legitimate and laudable action, and this principle held good in the case of Mary Stuart, whose captivity for eighteen years on account of her faith was an open violation of justice. But even a good deed may become wrong, if it could be foreseen that it would be attended with disastrous consequences, for prudence was one of the Cardinal virtues. And in the event of the attempt proving abortive, I must be aware that the results would be fatal not only to those who had taken part in it, but to the captive herself; nay, to all the Catholics of England, who already groaned under a cruel persecution. And what I told him of the youth of the conspirators augured ill for the success of their project. But what caused him the most apprehension was the attitude Walsingham had assumed; there was no doubt he had got wind of the plot, and the wily statesman thought to throw us off our guard by his friendly advances, in order when the right moment came, to crush the whole concern with one blow, and the Queen of Scots per chance with it. He begged us for God's sake to have nothing to do with a man who was so infinitely superior to us in cunning. I then explained that I had sworn to stand by my friends in their attempt to deliver Mary Stuart, and unless he authoritatively assured me that it was sinful, I should not depart from my word. Moreover, I thought the plan would succeed; we had agreed to ask the consent of the prisoner himself, so that she would be prepared like ourselves, to bear the consequences of possible failure. And in speaking of the evil results that might be anticipated, one must not forget the good results that would follow upon the release of the Queen; and considering the flagrant injustice of keeping her captive, one might reckon on the help of God in so good a cause.

When the good Father saw that my mind was made up, and that I was fully convinced of the lawfulness of our enterprise, he no longer dissuaded me from it, but only asked whether any attempt on Elizabeth's life was connected with it? He was evidently relieved by the emphatic denial I gave. I then asked him what he thought about my acceptance of the post of Walsingham's offer, and he replied that it was quite evident, that such an extraordinary proposal on Walsingham's part was a trap of some kind, but what his particular design was, was not so equally apparent. Perhaps her enemies meant to administer poison to the prisoner, and the appointment of a Catholic physician was intended as a blind. He had heard on good authority that hints of her assassination had been given to Sir Amias

Paulet, but he, despite his hatred of Catholics, had repudiated them indignantly. On the other hand it was obvious that my presence at Chartley, even for a few hours, would greatly facilitate the execution of our project. He must leave the decision to me, only imploring me to be continually on my guard, and bear in mind with how artful and determined a man I had to deal. If I embarked in this perilous undertaking, it was doubly imperative upon me to keep my conscience clean, as I might be called at any moment to appear before the judgment seat of God. I must be prepared for a violent death, and so must my friends. Then in a touching exhortation, he pointed out to me that it was not by means of political plots and intrigues, but by prayer and suffering, yea, by the blood of her martyrs, that the Church must hope to prevail in England. And when he had awakened me to contrition and repentance for all the sins of my past life, he gave me absolution.

It was about two in the morning, when we all assembled in the upper chamber where Richard Bellamy had died, and where he was laid out. The windows were carefully curtained, lest a ray of light might betray us; trusty servants were stationed at the doors and on the staircase, lest the pursuivants should again surprise us. The priest said a Requiem Mass; the old lady, uncle Parthy, Miss Mary and myself, received Holy Communion. Afterwards Father Weston recited the "Liberia," sprinkled the coffin with holy water, scattering in it a handful of consecrated earth, in order that the departed might not be entirely deprived of the ceremonial of the Church. The duty of interring his mortal remains in the family vault in the desecrated churchyard must be left to the Protestant minister. A few words of consolation and admonition were addressed to us by Father Weston; then he invested, and cautiously concealed the sacred vessels in a hiding place constructed in the wall; we meanwhile said the Rosary for the soul of the departed.

After breakfast, Father Weston took little Frith with him into the room where I had made my confession the night before, and kept him there some time. On his return, he said it was to be wished that the child should leave the country at once, but as this might bring us into trouble, he would not oppose his going to Court for a short period, trusting that he would be preserved from harm. He had told him what he must do and whither he must fly if sorely pressed by temptation. Thus the question was settled. In the afternoon of the same day I rode back to London with Babington, and on the way told him what Father Weston had been saying to me. He made very light of it, and said not long before he had consulted the Jesuit about the same thing, and received a similar answer. These learned theologians were not capable of any daring stroke, such as alone would be of avail at the present juncture; let it once be carried out and crowned with success, they would be ready enough to give it their approval. In general, Babington had not a good word to say of Father Weston, because, as I afterwards learnt, he had advised him to put all thought of the enterprise out of his mind, telling him to his face that he was not the man to conduct it, and he did not see in what manner he could ever escape out of Walsingham's snares. I also discussed the matter with Tichbourne; he too inclined to the Jesuit's opinion. For one more day I postponed the decision, then, weary of the continual pro and con, I made my choice.

"The dies est casti!" I said to Tichbourne. "I am going to-day to Walsingham to accept Chartley."

"May you never repent it!" he answered, and gave me some counsel, as to how I was to keep behind Walsingham. They were of little or no use. The Secretary of State seemed glad to hear my decision, which was evidently what he expected, and said some kind things about my brother, Lord Windsor, who, he hoped, would consider my appointment to this post as a service done to himself. He asked when I thought of going to Chartley, and I replied it was for him to determine that. Then he fixed the Monday after "Cantate" Sunday, and said if I had no objection, his nephew St. Barbe would accompany me, as he had some messages to carry to the Queen and to Sir Amias. But before that we must both go to Court, and take thither the funny little fellow, who had lately made acquaintance with Her Majesty in an unceremonious manner. A fortunate child is that, he said, to have found favor with the Queen at so early an age; the highest honors and dignities will be within his grasp. Thereupon he took leave of me as kindly as at the close of our first interview, so that I said to myself Father Weston had perhaps been somewhat hasty in his judgment of the man's intentions.

Nor did his sending his nephew with me awaken any suspicions, for I thought from the first that he appeared an honorable sort of man. When I left Walsingham, I took my way homeward through St. Catharine's Docks, for the purpose of paying Bill Bell's daughter a visit. I found her much better, wonderfully better, so much so that I would have backed her to live through the summer. This seemed to me an indication of Providence that I did well to go to Chartley, so ready are we to see the finger of God, when it points in the same direction as our own wishes.

CHAPTER XIX.—The next few days were wet and cheerless, days whereby April is wont to check the too rapid advance of spring. By me they were spent in making preparations and concerting our plans of action; for I had determined to give my friends advice immediately, should I find the royal captive willing to make her escape, as soon as a favorable opportunity for the attempt presented itself. Salisbury and Barnewell forthwith set out on the way to Langshib, for the purpose of gaining a knowledge of the route, bespeaking a relay of horses, and making terms with the skipper of a fishing smack, who would transport the fugitives to Normandy. Babington was to leave London the same day that I did. He was going to his estate at Dethick, in the neighborhood of Chartley, to make the necessary arrangements, but not by the direct road, for fear of awakening suspicion.

Now it happened that on the Saturday before "Jubilate" Sunday the weather changed, and nature once more rejoiced in the bright spring sunshine. I rode to Woxindon in the afternoon. The hope of hearing a Sunday Mass there was sufficient excuse for my reappearance, after so short an interval; besides I had promised to fetch Frith on the following Monday, as we were to take him to Richmond to be presented to the Queen on Tuesday. I had also made up my mind to profit by the first suitable occasion to plead my cause with the young lady whose charms, as I could no longer conceal from myself, had completely enslaved my heart and my fancy.

As I rode slowly through St. John's Wood, I noted the change that the last few days had effected. The tender green of the beeches had burst through the brown sheaths, and the young leaves glistened in the sunlight, while a light wind gently shook to the ground the pearly drops left by the recent rain. Even the oaks, always later in coming into leaf, showed signs of awakening life. The birds warbled and twittered as they flitted among the branches, already intent on the business of nest-building. In a sunny, sheltered spot the first wild flowers of the year caught my eye; I dismounted and gathered as great a variety as I could find of these fair spring blossoms: golden cow-slips, fragile wood-anemones, blue-bells and stellaria, pale primroses and deliciously scented-violets nestling under the protecting leaves. These I carefully arranged and bound together with some stalks of long grass so as to form a simple and elegant nosegay.

I was riding onward with it in my hand, when suddenly I was startled out of my reverie by a joyous shout. It was Frith's voice; the little fellow came running to meet me. And who did I see somewhat further on, sitting under the beech tree, but his sister Mary, a quantity of flowers by her side, which she was dexterously weaving into a wreath. I sprang from the saddle and went up to her. She shook hands with me in a very cordial manner, and explained that the garland she was making was to be hung on the cross, which had been put up in the garden, near her mother's grave under the great oak, to her father's memory. "But I see," she added, "you too have been gathering flowers. How tastefully they are arranged!" "Do you like the little posy, Miss Bellamy?" I answered. "I meant it for you when I made it up, if you will do me the honor to accept it, as a token of the great esteem and affection I feel for you."

(To be continued.)

We should manage our fortune like our constitution—enjoy it when good, have patience when bad, and never apply violent remedies, but in cases of necessity.

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