

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXINDON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

BY REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S. J.

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CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

Soon after noon, accordingly, uncle and I started for the town, leading Frith's pony by a bridle rein to Anne's ride back. Uncle Remy told us we should probably find her at Windsor's rooms in the Strand, and there in fact she was. I was shocked at her appearance, she looked so pale and haggard. As soon as she saw uncle and me, she began to sob and accost herself in a manner that would have melted a heart of stone, lamenting bitterly her rashness in contracting a marriage upon which her grandmother would not bestow a parental blessing.

We tried to console her with our sympathy, which is oftentimes the best, the only consolation that can be given. Uncle Remy was kindness itself, soothing and petting her like a child; finally we prevailed upon her to dress herself, and ride back with us to Woxindon. On passing through St. Giles we halted at the "Blue Boar," for Anne knew that her husband was there with his friends; in fact they were just coming out of the hostelry when we drew bridle under the oaks.

My betrothed was the first to greet me, and he basted up to greet me. Then he called Babington; it was impossible not to observe the reluctance with which the latter came towards us, on perceiving that I was there. But I kissed my hand to him, and when he began in rather a shameful manner to stammer some words of apology, I invited him to come with us to Woxindon. He declined, alleging more important engagements, but said he hoped on the morrow, or the day after, to make his excuses in person to Mistress Bellamy, if I would say a kind word for him in the interval. I was not sorry, for I preferred that the meeting with Anne should be got over first, especially as Miss Cecil was there. So Anne took leave of her husband, and rode on, accompanied by my dear Windsor, who gave as a reason for joining our party that he had a communication in moment to make to Uncle Remy. I need not say that I made no effort to dissuade him from coming.

The long summer day was drawing to a close when we reached the beach at the cross roads. There, sure enough, sat our dear old grandmother by the wayside, Uncle Remy standing beside her. I will not describe the scene that followed; the pardon which Anne besought on was willingly granted; and as the stars came out one by one in the deepening twilight, it seemed as if the angels in heaven who rejoice over the return of the repentant sinner, once more sang their song: Peace on earth to men of good will!

As we proceeded slowly homeward, Windsor informed Uncle Remy that his object in coming that evening was to tell him that an excellent opportunity had unexpectedly presented itself to get poor Uncle Robert out of the Clink. He explained Bill Bell's proposal to us, and we clasped our hands with delight, exclaiming: "This is indeed a special interposition of Providence!" Then we in our turn told him about Lord Barghley's daughter and Frith, and how Father Weston thought the sooner they could cross seas the better. If Uncle Robert were set free, the same vessel could carry them to France, and thus, as Uncle Remy said, we could kill two birds with one stone.

"I have another suggestion to make," Windsor said. "How would it be if my sweetheart were to accompany the fugitives. As I have already told you, I shall have to leave England within the next month, for an indefinite time, and I could then join Mary in Brussels or Cologne."

After a few moments consideration Uncle Remy replied that he saw no objection to this scheme. I opposed it, however, saying I could not bear to leave grandmother. But Windsor urged that sooner or later the parting must come, as I had promised to be his wife, and it was only a question of a few weeks. He gave such good reasons for my departure, that I was obliged to consent, although with a heavy heart, and on the condition that my grandmother's approval was gained.

We agreed not to mention the subject until after supper, for which we found the table already spread when we reached the house. As soon as thanks were returned, Windsor expounded his scheme. Grandmother, who had the greatest confidence in Father Weston's judgment, left to him the responsibility of deciding what it was best to do. The good Father asked several questions; presently, after a short prayer for divine guidance, he pronounced in favor of the plan. It was then arranged that Windsor should immediately return to London and get everything

in readiness to receive the fugitives in his house in the Strand. Uncle Remy meanwhile was to escort us through the wood to Putney, where we knew a fisherman, in whose boat he had often gone out on the river at night, harpooning fish by torchlight. In this boat he would row us to the riversteps at the end of Windsor's garden, where my betrothed would await us between one and two in the morning, before daybreak, that is.

This was no sooner said than done; for there was no time to be lost. I hurriedly put together a few things; grandmother gave Frith and me her blessings, holding us clasped in a fond embrace. The farewells were heartrending; we had to tear ourselves away. Frith enjoined upon Anne to take good care of his pony saying when the Queen was dead we should come back, as the child Jesus did when Herod was no more.

"Yes, children," said grandmother, "think of the flight into Egypt, and take for your companions Jesus, Mary and Joseph. May God and His good angels be with you!"

Again Uncle Remy warned us that time pressed; once more I embraced my grandmother and sister, and then the gates closed behind us. I turned to take one last look at Woxindon whose towers stood out darkly against the star lit sky, before the trees of the wood we were entering, shut it out from sight. How bitter was my grief at that moment! May I not hope that God in his mercy will grant, that those who thus left house and home for His name's sake, will be received by Him into everlasting dwellings?

Scarcely a word was spoken as we rode through the wood; even little Frith was silent. When we drew near Putney, Father Weston parted from us as his course lay upon the river to Henley. We found the boat moored by the riverside, and Uncle Remy succeeded in making it loose. He made Miss Cecil and me crouch down in the bottom of the boat, while Frith took the rudder-stirrings steering by uncle's directions. Not a syllable was uttered as we shot rapidly down the stream, aided by the current. We made it our aim to keep as much as possible in the middle of the river, and thus could scarcely distinguish anything on the banks. But as we passed Westminster, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and lit up the outlines of the Abbey. By its light Uncle Remy descried a barge moored a short distance ahead of us, which he rightly divined to be that of the river watch. He begged Miss Cecil and me to lie down flat in the bottom of the boat and over our prostrate forms he threw a dragnet, which was in the skiff. A few moments later a challenge rang out; uncle answered it. Almost immediately a boat came up alongside of us. "Any priests on board?" a gruff voice demanded.

"Not a man alive, save this lad and myself," was the reply.

"What have you got there in the bottom of the boat?"

"Nets, as you may see if you care

to look."

"Well, well, give us a trifle, and we will let you pass."

Uncle handed over a gratuity; then he plied the oars vigorously and we glided swiftly onward. I heard the Westminster clock strike one; about a quarter of an hour later we stopped at the steps on the river bank. As soon as the boat was made fast, I heard Windsor's voice asking where the ladies were? Uncle bade him to be silent; then he drew aside the dity, unavoursy nets, and helped Miss Cecil and me to get up. A thick bank of clouds had come up before the moon, so that it was very dark on the river; in a space of a few moments we were safe indoors. We found Tichbourne awaiting us. Some light refreshments were laid out on a table and some mullied wine was prepared for us, of which we were very glad on coming in from the chilly night air.

Windsor had given up his room and helped old Barbara to get it ready for us girls, while a bed had been made up for Frith in Tichbourne's bed-chamber. There Uncle Remy left us, for he had to take the boat he had borrowed back to the Putney, but he promised, if possible, to come again in the evening, as the next night was to be that of our flight.

We then returned to rest, old Barbara showing us to our room, and very civilly offering her services to undress us. This however we declined, as we preferred to be alone.

The whole of the next day we kept ourselves carefully out of sight, much to the vexation of little Frith, who peeped longingly between the half closed shutters, now at the street and now on the river. The confinement was however less irksome to him than it otherwise would have been, on account of the weather, for the rain fell steadily all day long. When I complained to Windsor at having such horrible weather for our flight, he said, we could not be thankful enough for it. On such a night as this the Thames was as safe as the Rhine, and the sentries on the Clink did not stir from their boxes. Had their been intervals of moonlight as there were yesternight, the venture would have been too hazardous to be attempted, and we need not fear a wetting, for Bill Bell would provide us with tarred capes and cloaks.

After supper we lay down for a brief rest. I fell into a sound sleep, from which I was startled by a knock at the door, warning us that it was time to start. Uncle Remy had come, bringing all manner of affectionate messages from Woxindon, where nothing had occurred since our departure. We were soon attired in oilskin cloaks, with sailor's hats on our heads, and such comical figures did we cut in this disguise, that, for all our grief and anguish of heart, we could not refrain from laughing at one another.

Just as the bell of St. Paul's tolled out the hours of midnight, the boatman's boy came to tell us his father was ready. We bade our host farewell; I promised to write to Windsor as soon as we reached Dunkirk. One last kiss, one last embrace, and out we went into the dark night and fast falling rain.

We two girls and Frith took our place in the bottom of the light skiff which our conductor had chosen for this expedition; the seats were reserved for the rowers, and the boatman's boy, a sharp youngster, took the rudder-stirrings. The necessity of preserving absolute silence having been duly impressed on us, we pushed off in the name of God, and drifted down alongside the bank until the frowning walls of the Clink were discernible through the gloom. The footsteps of the patrol going his rounds were audible, we waited in breathless suspense until they had passed; then finding ourselves unobserved, with a few quick strokes of the oars, the skiff was brought close under the walls, below the fourth window.

Again we waited and listened; no sound was to be heard but the pattering of the rain and the rush of the water as it flowed past. Then up got Bill Bell, and taking a dark lantern from under the seat, opened it, and threw a ray of light on the roof of the prison, lowering it gradually till it shone full on one of the windows just under the eaves. A figure appeared at the window, removing one by one the iron bars which had been filed through. As the light fell upon his countenance, I recognized Uncle Robert. I could hardly repress a scream, when I saw him secure a rope to the bottom of the iron bars throw the end down to us, and then clamber out through the aperture. Our men drew in the rope and held it tightly; the lantern was closed, and in a few moments, during which I held my breath in terrified apprehension, the prisoner slid down the rope and let himself noisily into the boat. We shook his hand with out a word. The men resumed their seats, and taking up the oars, put off from the bank.

We now breathed freely, imagining all fear of discovery was past. Suddenly a warden, probably the one whom the boatman had bribed, anxious to avert suspicion from himself, raised the cry: "Turn out the guard! a prisoner has escaped! Help!"

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There's always love that's caring, And shielding and forbearing, Dear woman's love to hold us close and keep our hearts in thrall; There's home to share together In calm or stormy weather, And while the hearth-flame burns it is a good world after all.

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A. COTE. Merchant, St. Isidore, Que., May 12th, 1898.

"Dear me, John," called the cobbler's wife, "are you never going to stop work?" "It's most 12 o'clock."

"What's the difference?" answered the busy man of the last. "It's never too late to mend."



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