

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE Times of Queen Elizabeth.

The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon,

By Rev. Joseph Spillman, S.J.

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CHAPTER XXVI. CONTINUED.— My betrothed was the first to desert us, and he hastened 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 shamefaced 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 we rode on, accompanied by my dear Windsor, who gave as a reason for joining our party that he had a communication of 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 beech to the crossroads. 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 out 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 clapped our hands with delight, explaining: "This is indeed a special interposition of Providence!" Then we in our turn, told him about Lord Burghley'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 he 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 day-break, 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 blessing, 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 gate closed behind us. I turned to take one last look at Woxindon, whose turrets 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 home 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 up 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 rudderstrings, 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 dirty, unsavoury 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 the 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 mulled 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 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 retired 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 there 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 hour 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 rudderstrings. 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 patter 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 noiselessly into the boat. We shook his hand without 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 warder, 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!" "Shout yourself hoarse," muttered old Bell, "it will not be easy to overtake us. Pull a long stroke and all together, we have a good quarter of an hour's start."

He gave Johnny a sign, the boat's head was turned, and until we were out of sight of the shouting warder, we made a feint of going up the river. But soon resuming our former direction, we shot down the stream like an arrow, propelled by four pairs of oars, tide and current both with us. Passing by on the opposite side, we saw lights moving to and fro outside the Clink, and some of the guard running down to the docks, where the boats lay. Swiftly we flew past the crowd of vessels anchored below London Bridge, past the gloomy walls of the Tower, where so many Confessors of the Faith were immured, past the outlying houses and the City Wall.

Now we thought it was safe to speak. But the boatman said there was still great need for caution. The rain and darkness which were so much in our favor at the Clink, were now just the reverse, for we were now just run upon a sand-bank, or come into collision with one of

the vessels waiting in midstream for the turn of the tide. He himself took the helm, and sent his boy into the bow, to keep a sharp lookout. The first streak of light in the east, heralding the dawn of day, found us between Woolwich and Gravesend. The river was getting broader, the banks flatter; nothing was to be seen but water, sandy reaches, left bare at low tide, and on the banks a few stunted willows. When the tide began to flow, rowing became more difficult, but a light breeze sprang up, our sail was hoisted, and we sped onwards to Gravesend.

As it was nearly light when we got there, Bill proposed that we should go ashore, and pass the day at a secluded tavern which he pointed out to us, as he thought it unsafe to go on board the Jeanette by daylight. The police were sure to come down before long, and make inquiries for the fugitives. We followed his advice, and lay hidden till evening, when he came and under cover of the darkness, took us on board the Jeanette.

"God who has helped us so far, will help us till the end," whispered my affianced husband, as he assisted me up the ship's ladder. I pressed his hand and followed the others in silence on to the deck. A few moments more, and the friendly skiff disappeared from our sight.

CHAPTER XXVII. — My friend Windsor desires me now to continue our story, and I will not deny that there is much that I can tell which ought not to be omitted from this eventful narrative.

The reader would not be greatly entertained were I to dwell upon the struggle that went on in my soul, distracted as it was by doubt. It is to my own humiliation and shame that I recall the resistance I offered to the truth, a resistance every day more culpable, as conviction was borne in upon me with greater force. Walsingham's design in desiring me to take up my residence, as I did for a time, at Chartley, was that I might watch Windsor and the captive Queen. The more I saw of Windsor, the greater was the esteem I felt for him. He seemed to devote himself to the care of the sick poor, seeking no other recreation than a solitary walk, reading his favorite Virgil in the shade of some spreading tree, or angling in the Trent or the Dove. In fact he appeared to be the most pacific of mankind, and had I not known for certain that he was involved in Babington's plot, I should have thought him the last man to engage in anything in the company of suspicious characters. He avoided me; this was only natural, as he could not but be aware that I was there to play the spy on him, and put a spoke in his wheel, when opportunity offered.

Still greater was the esteem wherewith Mary Stuart inspired me. I had sought to stifle the admiration which her bounty to the poor exacted on the occasion of my first visit to Chartley, by persuading myself that she was actuated by motives of policy, or at least, by Popish ideas of self-righteousness. But now, when I saw and talked to her almost daily, I was forced to acknowledge that her motives were of the most exalted character. Her patience and gentleness contrasted strikingly with Sir Amias Paulet's harsh, uncourteous behaviour: scarcely ever did a word of bitterness escape her lips, although the indisposition from which she suffered might have excused some amount of irritability. Nor, in spite of the humiliations to which she was subjected, did she ever lose the sense of her regal dignity. Of Elizabeth, her deadly enemy, she always spoke with moderation, repeatedly expressing the wish that she could have a personal interview with her, as she was certain that all the misunderstandings caused by third persons would then melt away like snow in the spring sunshine. She complained very much of her Royal Sister's persistent refusal to allow her this favor that she asked. Of my uncle Walsingham she judged too leniently; perhaps from politeness towards myself, more probably because he had advocated her release. Burghley she regarded as her bitterest foe, and when his name was mentioned, begged me never to speak of him before her, as she found it almost impossible to forgive him for having lent his weight to the Scottish rebels and murderers, to destroy her good name.

She related to me her whole history, from the time when, a child of six, she was taken to the French Court as the future bride of the Dauphin, there to spend twelve happy years, the only happy years of her life. She told me how she had, on the death of Queen Mary, as the heir to the crown, assumed the arms and title of Queen of England, thereby provoking Elizabeth's undying en-

mity; and how, a widow when scarcely eighteen, she left France to ascend the throne of Scotland, disturbed and in unruly times, when the hand of a young and inexperienced woman was singularly ill-fitted to take the helm of the State.

"I should have been treated with the greatest regard," she said, "had I consented to adopt the doctrines preached by Knox. But as I announced my determination to adhere to the Roman Catholic, the only true Church, Knox openly insulted and defied me, and in league with him and his fanatical preachers, the Lords of the Covenant never rested until they ruined my good name and saw me cast into prison. And yet I solemnly swore to respect the Reformed religion as then established, nor did I ever persecute one of my subjects on account of his creed."

She then proceeded to relate how her marriage with her cousin, Henry Darnley, had been a further cause of offence to Elizabeth; how she had proposed, in a constitutional manner, to establish the Catholic religion; how Darnley betrayed his royal consort, and caused Rizio, her secretary, who was conducting the proceedings, to be assassinated in her very presence. How Darnley was deceived in his turn by the Covenanters, who refused him the reward of his treachery, the kingly power to which he aspired, and displayed to the Queen the document he had signed, in proof of the infamous part he had played. How she had, at his entreaty, freely forgiven him, and after his illness, been fully reconciled to him.

And then came the explosion which destroyed the house of Kirk-in-the-Field where Darnley was sleeping! Murray, Morton and Ruthven were accomplices in this murder; Bothwell was acquitted by his judges, and their verdict was confirmed by Parliament. "But suspicion still attached to him," the Queen said, "and therefore I steadfastly refused to marry him, despite the pressure brought to bear on me by a strong party of the Lords. Then he resorted to violence, carried me off to his castle at Dunbar, and compelled me to go through the ceremony which would give him the position of power he coveted. Would that I had died a thousand times rather than submit to it! For this compulsory marriage put a weapon in my adversaries' hands, and gave a coloring of truth to the vile accusation they brought against me of having conspired at my husband's murder. Some forged letters were brought forward in support of this charge, and my fate was sealed. An insurrection of the Lords of the Covenant was followed by my incarceration at Lochleven and the complete abolition of the Catholic religion. After my escape from and the fatal defeat at Langside, I fled to England, where, as you know, instead of the promised assistance on which I relied, I found perpetual imprisonment in store for me. My principal enemies were, within a short time, arraigned before the judgment-seat of God; Murray was assassinated, Mar died suddenly, Morton and Ruthven were executed for the murder of Darnley, almost all met with a violent death; may God forgive them, as I strive to do! Only one thing is a source of continual anxiety to me; the salvation of my only son, whom I left, an infant in the cradle, when I was taken as a prisoner to Lochleven. To win him back to the Catholic faith, I would gladly sacrifice my life."

This sorrowful story, which was told me in detail, differed on many points from the account which I had previously heard. I cannot deny that I was deeply moved by it. Everything about it seemed to bear the impress of truth, and I said within myself, if this is a tissue of lies and hypocrisy, Mary Stuart is an accomplished deceiver, and I shall find the means of unmasking her. Could I discover her to be in any way mixed up in the design of murdering Elizabeth, not a single word will I believe of her self-defence, although it is stated so calmly, and bears so strong an appearance of truth.

The captive Queen did not tell me her history as a connected whole, but in parts, at different times, yet I never detected any discrepancy in her statements. Once I asked her what she would do if she were set at liberty. She replied that formerly it was her design, should she regain her freedom, to hasten to Scotland, to withdraw her son from the influence of sycophants, and defeat their schemes; and to call upon the faithful Catholics in the lowlands, as well as the highland clans, to unite in one supreme effort to maintain the Catholic faith in the country. But now she had completely abandoned all such ideas; the time for action was past, her son was already 20 years of age. She would therefore retire to her beloved France, to her relatives of the House of Guise, to end her days in peace and the undis-

turbed exercise of her religion. Mary and many a time had she besought her Royal Sister of England to release her from this almost intolerable captivity, but she would only consent to do so on certain conditions, two of which could not be accepted, namely that she renounce her claim to the crown of England, and abjure the Catholic faith. In the first she was now willing to acquiesce, as far as she was personally concerned, provided her royal rank was recognized and no obstacle placed in the way of the practice of her religion. The other was of course impossible.

I uttered a few words of encouragement, although I saw the block already prepared for her in prospect; alas, did I not myself aim at obtaining proofs of her guilt! The continual struggle that went on within me was most painful. Was she innocent or the contrary? Was her faith true or a delusion of the Evil one? Ought I to lend my aid to Windsor and Babington for the rescue of the Queen, or hand both her and them over to the executioner? What counsel should I give to Miss Cecil? How were her doubts and my own to be solved? Was it not possible I might finally discover it to be my duty to return to the Church of my forefathers, and give in my adherence to doctrines which I had till now regarded as deadly errors? Then all the frightful consequences of such a step rose up before my mind's eye in vivid colors; the loss of position, the loss of wealth, honors, high office, which the future had in store for me—exile from my country. No, a thousand times not! I exclaimed, I will not, cannot believe. It is all a lie, a delusion and a deceit!

This conflict went on within me for several weeks, during which I found no rest by day or night, for I had not recourse to the only means of relief, humble prayer for enlightenment and guidance.—I was heartily glad when towards the end of June, Gifford brought me a note from my uncle, requiring my presence in London. I preferred to start on my journey alone, rather than wait for Windsor, who was going a day later than myself, although on account of the insecurity of the roads, especially in the neighborhood of the metropolis, the company of a fellow-traveler was generally accepted gladly. On my arrival, I betook myself immediately to my uncle's house.

He received me very kindly, but remarked upon my altered appearance, for I was looking thin and ill. This was owing to my mental unrest, but I told him I had not slept very well lately, and did not think Chartley a healthy place. He answered that he was all the more pleased that there would not be occasion for me to remain there much longer, as matters must soon be brought to a climax. He then took me into his private room, and asked me a great many questions about the royal prisoner and her new physician, all of which I answered truthfully, to the best of my knowledge.

For a short time Walsingham sat silent apparently pondering over what he had heard. At last he said: "It is really much to be regretted that Windsor and Tichbourne who seem to be honorable and estimable young men, should have associated themselves with that fellow Babington. However, it is their own doing, and they must suffer for it. We have abundant evidence of their treasonable designs. What we now want, is to procure some proof of Mary Stuart being a party to those designs, and this I fully expect to have within the next fortnight. All the conspirators are to meet at the Blue Boar on Friday. Babington will then probably acquaint them with Savage's proposal, of which they are for the most part ignorant and there will be rather a sharp contest, for strangely enough, these Papists are in the main wonderfully loyal to Elizabeth. What I trust to is the influence of a man named John Ballard, formerly in my pay as a spy. He was instrumental in bringing many a Papist to the gallows, but, for what reason I know not, he became a Papist himself, and made some studies—not very profound ones I should imagine—in their college at Douay. Well, as is often the case, this convert evinced extraordinary fervor, and this induced Dr. Allen to ordain him priest. Now, so Gifford informs me, this zealous, but not very wise personage, desires to wash out with his blood the stain of having once been a persecutor. We will see that this wish is gratified."

(To be continued.)

It is best to begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push, see what can be finished in a week.

A FRANCISCAN RETURNS TO CHINA.

FRANCISCAN RETURNS TO CHINA. The known Spanish Franciscan missionary, of Barcelona, Spain, has returned to missions conducted by China. Poor as the people are they did not return empty-handed. Being he published a letter to the citizens of Barcelona generosity and appealing prayers that his life-work be successful. He considers it that he shall return alive to his celestial Empire.

A CATHOLIC STATISTICIAN.

A government statistician New South Wales is a Catholic Irishman, named Thomas Coghlan. Just now latest report is provoking discussion among physiologists on continent. By an arguable figures he shows that the last thirty years increased in that count alarming rate, and asserts that no medical science at-conquer it the more fatal Physicians dissent from it is probable that his of government inquiry is upon.