

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 XXII. CONTINUED. —
I rang my hands in my trouble. "Meanwhile," I said, "in all probability Walsingham is on the track of this man; perhaps he has already caught him and put him on the rack! Who knows but that at this very hour he may, under stress of torture, have revealed all our names as accomplices and accessories to his bloody purpose! If so, nothing remains for us but the gallows and some of the best names in England will be branded for ever!"

"Yes, my dear fellow," Gifford coolly rejoined, "you had best consider well before you embark in this sort of business. If the plan for delivering the Queen fails, nothing will save you from a traitor's death."

"I have considered all that, and am prepared to lay down my life in the enterprise, for that will not be regarded as a blot upon my escutcheon, whatever the verdict of the royal law courts may be. But to be condemned as an accomplice in a murder! Every idea of such a deed was scrupulously excluded from our project, and I should feel justified in retiring from it, if Babington combines, independently of us, with so dangerous an individual. I shall reflect upon it, and decide what it is my duty to do."

"Do so by all means," Gifford answered. "But remember your withdrawal will not put a stop to the enterprise, and your name will always be connected with it. Besides, you will lay yourself open to a charge of cowardice."

I repeated that I would think the matter over, and allow no consideration to prevent me from doing what I thought right. Then I asked him when he was returning to London.

"To-morrow," he replied, "I shall receive the Queen's correspondence from the honest brewer, and carry it to London at once."

"Very well," I answered, "perhaps I shall ask you to take some letters for me at the same time." And here our conversation closed.

That evening in my solitary chamber I pondered long over the startling intelligence I had heard, without, however, arriving at any decision as to the course of conduct I should pursue. The thoughts that perplexed me in my waking hours haunted my pillow at night; at length I concluded to remain passive, and, for the present at least, content myself with writing to Babington a letter of warning, couched in general terms.

Nothing worthy of note marked the next few days. Gifford received from the brewer, as he expected, a thick packet of letters, addressed, he told me, to the French ambassador, the Archbishop of Glasgow, the Duke of Guise, and other of Queen Mary's partisans. There was also a short letter to Babington; with these Gifford started at once on his way to London, and I gave my letter to my sweetheart Mary, besides a few lines to Babington, into his charge.

CHAPTER XXII.—For several weeks I led a quiet country life at Chartley. My humble patients visited me daily, and in ever increasing numbers, so that the host of the "Mayflower" was fain to place at my disposal a small room on the ground floor to be used as a consulting room.

Frequently I sought out the sick myself, in their scattered dwellings on the banks of the Done and the Trent, or the borders of the wide-spreading moorland. By this means I learnt how faithfully the rustic population clung to the old religion. Christian almsgiving seemed quite to have died out under the influence of the so-called "pure Gospel," the new creed wherein faith was everything and works were nothing. The numerous monasteries, the great dispensers of charity, at whose gates the impotent and indigent never sought help in vain, had been suppressed, and their revenues bestowed upon highborn favorites of the Queen, who squandered on their pleasures the "heritage of the poor," as church property was considered to be in former days. Thus the alms distributed by the imprisoned Queen, were doubly welcome, and served to enhance the sympathy and compassion which misfortune invariably evokes from the hearts of the poor. Everywhere I heard her spoken of with affection and respect, while never a

good work was said of Elizabeth and her counsellors. I felt certain that we might rely upon the peasantry of those parts for aid in our enterprise, as well as for secrecy.

I began in my turn to construct a scheme which could be carried out independently of Babington and his comrades. In the course of my visits to the sick, in the forest that stretches to the north from Burton nearly to Derby, I had come upon the cottage of a gamekeeper whose son had been attacked and severely injured by a wild boar. The savage animal had torn with its tusks the flesh of the boy's thigh penetrating to the bone, before the father could hasten to his rescue. The wound was so much inflamed, and the boy in so high a fever, when the father conducted me to his bedside, that I almost despaired of saving his life. For some time I made my way daily to the sequestered spot where the cottage stood, a distance of some four miles along a solitary path shaded by high fir trees and spreading oaks. I quite enjoyed the walk, and I was rewarded for my pains, for, with the blessing of God, and the use of suitable remedies, the boy's vigorous constitution triumphed. When the people discovered that I was a Catholic, their attachment was unbounded. One day I surprised them saying their beads by the sufferer's bedside; they left off and appeared embarrassed, but I drew my rosary from my pocket and said it with them. When I went away, the gamekeeper walked a good part of the way with me. "Mr. Windsor," he said, "God reward you for all you have done for my poor lad. A man like me can do nothing more than pray for you."

I thanked him, and said his prayers were the best recompense, adding: "But we live in times when a Catholic may easily stand in need of help and protection from his fellow Christians."

He interrupted me before I could get further. "Oh," he said, "if you or one of your friends, or one of our priests should happen to get into trouble with the people there in London—you understand me—do you come to me. No pursuivant will hunt you out in my cottage, and you could be accommodated with a pleasant little chamber upstairs. There is plenty of game to be had in the wood, and I would share my last crust with you!"

"Remember," I said, "that to harbor a priest or any other outlaw, may cost you dearer than a morsel of bread."

"If I had to give my life for it, I would do so most willingly for the faith or for my persecuted brethren."

The man spoke with feeling; I was deeply touched and shook him by the hand, saying some day I might perhaps remind him of his generous offer. And as I pursued my solitary way homeward, I reflected whether it might not be more advisable to keep the Queen, after her release from prison, concealed in that lonely spot for some months, till the first excitement should have subsided, than to ride post haste across two counties to the coast, and put her on board ship. How easily some unforeseen occurrence, incident to this long ride—a ride which might besides too sorely tax the Queen's strength—such as an accident to one of the horses, uncertainty as to the right road, official warning preceding us, might frustrate the whole scheme!

Whereas were she to remain in concealment a while, no danger would accrue to her from Parma's landing, or that other event, should Babington fail to avert it. And if the invasion either did not take place, or came to nothing, after the lapse of several months the flight would be much easier of execution. In a single night's ride she could reach Lancashire, where many Catholic families of position would readily receive her, and she could proceed at night by short stages to the Mersey, and there take ship.

I thought over this plan a good deal and determined to propose it to Babington when next I saw him. In the interim I gave the gamekeeper money to lay in a stock of provisions, for my mind was made up, that should an opportunity present itself for carrying off the Queen, I would act on my own responsibility, and not allow the occasion to slip.

On my return to the "Mayflower," I found my host awaiting me at the door, with the intelligence that Mr.

Gifford had already been there twice, and was coming again. He handed me a letter, which Gifford had left for me. As the handwriting was unfamiliar to me, I opened it at once. How delighted I was when my eye fell on the signature: "In Jesus and Mary your own true love, Mary Bellamy." I could not conceal my pleasure, and hastened upstairs to my chamber, to devour the contents of the epistle.

I need not have been in so great a hurry, for this first love letter contained much that was bitter as well as sweet. The true and loving heart of the writer spoke in every line, but the general impression was a sad one. She told me that since my last visit to Woxindon, her sister Anne had become more contrary and self-willed, and would not listen to a word of rebuke either from her or their grandmother. On the same day that we had been engaged, Babington had asked to be allowed to pay his addresses to Anne, and Mrs. Bellamy had not only refused him, but had forbidden him the house. This had made her sister extremely angry; and in defiance of her grandmother's express prohibition she had several times had stealthy meetings with Babington either in the wood, or the ruined castle. On hearing of this from the old serving-man John, her uncle Remy, who had always been so indulgent towards Anne, his favorite niece, had spoken very seriously to her. This she took amiss, saying everybody in the house took part against her. Windsor, she knew with certainty, was involved in no less hazardous an enterprise than Babington, yet he was her sister's accepted lover, while she was not allowed to hold the most innocent intercourse with Babington. She would, however, she declared, find some way of attaining her end. She was as good as her word. A few days later, Anne had come into her sister's room at night, embraced her fondly, begged her forgiveness, and entreated her to say a good word for her to the grandmother; then before Mary could answer, she had run off and shut herself in her own little room. Mary hoped that her sister had come to a better mind, and all would go well. But the next morning Anne did not appear at the breakfast table, and on search being made for her, her room was empty, her bed had not been slept in, her chest was open, her clothes and valuables were gone. It appeared that she had caused these to be secretly removed to the old castle on the previous day, and in the night, as they supposed, she had absconded with Babington. At any rate Babington would know of her whereabouts, so uncle Remy had immediately taken horse to London, to make inquiries of him. He had however been unable to meet with him; and therefore Mary wrote, at the desire of her grandmother and her uncles, to beg me, if possible, to go to them for a few days, to advise them, and help them to find the fugitive. The letter closed with kind messages and assurances of undying affection; and a postscript added that satisfactory tidings had been received of Frith, whom Lord Burghley's daughter had taken under her special care and protection.

Of course I resolved to start on my way to London the very next morning, after my professional visit to the Queen. I read and re-read the letter, picturing to myself the grief of my sweet-heart, the anxiety of the aged gentleman, at this fatal step on the part of a good-hearted but terribly wilful girl. At the same time I felt excessively angry with Babington for having taken advantage of the folly of a mere child. I determined to take him severely to task, my position as Anne's future brother-in-law giving me the right to do this. The more I pondered over what had occurred, the less favorable was my estimate of Babington's character. Hitherto I had only seen the good side; his frankness, his pleasant, facetious disposition, his devotion to his friends and to the cause of Catholicism; his daring, his courage, his skill in all knightly exercises. But this event had brought out in glaring colors the levity I had already remarked in him, and I felt that it made him untrustworthy as a friend, and dangerous as the leader of such an enterprise as ours.

I was still pacing up and down my room, thinking over the contents of

the letter I held in my hand, when Gifford entered.

"What do these grave looks mean, Mr. Windsor?" he inquired. "No bad news, I hope, from your lady love." I was not going to let this man in to our family secrets, so I told him all was well with my betrothed, but in the present day there was much to make a good Catholic sad.

"True enough," he rejoined. "But I am happy to say that I bring you good news." He opened the door to make sure that no one was listening, then dropping his voice, he continued: "If we speak low and mention no names, I can tell you now. He then informed me that all was going on well with our undertaking; they had heard from Lancashire that the way would be made smooth in another fortnight at the latest; Anthony had had a most encouraging letter from the prisoner, and only a few more details remained to be settled. To discuss these, the friends were to meet next Friday evening at the 'Blue Boar' in St. Giles-in-the-fields."

"This is Monday," I answered. To-morrow I must visit my patient. I can get to Woxindon by Thursday evening, and on Friday I will be at the 'Blue Boar.' How about Savage?"

"If only you would not blurt out names!" Gifford whispered. "All is well; you shall hear particulars on Friday."

Thereupon he bade me good night and took his departure. I busied myself in preparing to start on my journey to London directly after my visit to the castle on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIII.—I will not dwell upon my meeting with my sweet-heart, when I reached Woxindon after a long day's ride. The two months of separation had only served to enhance her charms in my eyes, and the tears on her cheeks, half of joy, half of sorrow, might well be compared to dewdrops on the petals of an opening rose. But the old lady had aged perceptibly in the short interval; I noticed how treading the hands she extended to me in welcome. By her two sons I was also kindly received; as soon as I had taken some refreshment, I started for London with uncle Remy, because it was contrary to the good old-fashioned notions of propriety for two persons who were betrothed to pass the night under the same roof.

On the way uncle Remy said that Anne's elopement caused them less concern since they had heard that Babington had married her at once. The nuptial bond had been tied by a seminary priest from Douay, named Ballard, the usual preliminaries being dispensed with in virtue of the extraordinary powers granted by the Holy See to missionaries. Nevertheless he feared that Anne's contumacy and disobedience augured ill for the happiness of her married life. Yet he was prepared to forgive her and recognize Babington as his nephew; both in his own name and on behalf of the other members of his family, provided they would both acknowledge they done wrong, and ask forgiveness. This reconciliation he hoped might be brought about by means of my mediation. I willingly promised to do my utmost to effect it.

When we emerged from the leafy shelter of the wood, we perceived that a storm was coming up in the west. The sun had disappeared behind a bank of heavy clouds, which were spreading rapidly over the sky, and we put spurs to our steeds in order to reach our destination before the outbreak of the tempest. As we passed through St. Giles, the first gusts of wind, heralds of the coming storm, swept over the plain, enveloping us in a cloud of dust. Low ragged clouds drifted across the sky, like a troop of skirmishers, pelting us with shot in the form of large heavy rain drops. After them came the vanguard of the army, raging and roaring, the main body following in serried ranks upon their heels. We were galloping through Newgate when the war of the elements broke loose, and the artillery of the heavens, which we had heard muttering in the distance, was discharged over our heads. Flashes of red lightning rent the sky, accompanied by sharp peals of thunder, while rain and hailstones pattered down on roof and pavement. We were fain to draw our cloaks over our heads and press onward with all speed to Tichbourne's dwelling house in the strand. We arrived there wet through, but met with a warm welcome, and were soon provided with dry clothes and a glass of hot punch, while the friendly housekeeper took our dripping cloaks to be hung up by the kitchen fire.

We sat in the twilight and told one another of what had occurred since we last met. The storm that was raging without, caused it to become dark long before the ordinary time, for it was midsummer. The rain which came down like a water-

spout, dashed against the windows that looked towards the river, while the panes rattled with every fresh peal of thunder.

Tichbourne spoke of his lawsuit; he said that his counsel had informed him, in so many words, that he could not hope for a favorable verdict, unless he attended the reformed service. This led to a fresh discussion of the vexed question, whether it was allowable, when considerable property was at stake, to assist occasionally as a mere spectator at the heretical worship. I maintained that it was; Tichbourne said no, and he was right, because to be present in the Protestant church was considered as a proof of apostasy. Our debate was put a stop to by a loud knock at the door which opened on to the garden, and my friend, the boatman hurried in, looking to borrow a homely expression, like a drowned rat.

"Mr. Windsor is here!" he exclaimed. "Thank God, I am not too late. Save yourselves, gentlemen, to-night all Papists are to be put to the sword!"

"Why, Bill, what strange story is this?"

"I will tell you presently, when you are in safety. Should I come out for a stupid joke, on a night like this? Do not stop to consider, for God's sake! Take your money and your arms, throw on your cloaks, and in with you into the boat! As true as I stand here, your life hangs on a thread, and we have not a moment to lose!"

We looked at one another in bewilderment. But the man was so evidently in earnest, that we thought it best to follow him. Tichbourne put in his pocket all the money he had in the house; we buckled on our swords and wrapped our mantles round us. Meanwhile Bill informed us that it was reported as a certain fact that a decree had been passed by the Queen's Council for the massacre of all Papists in their houses on that night. More than once already such rumors had been set afloat, which in those troublous times easily found credence, and put all Catholics in mortal fear. Many persons then abandoned their homes and spent the night in the fields; others hired boats on the Thames, and floated up and down the river. We thought possible there might be a murderous uprising of the people, in consequence of a lying rumor about the coming invasion being spread about. It struck me that perhaps our conspiracy was discovered, and the issue of a decree for our arrest had given rise to the report. In times such as ours, no man felt himself safe.

So out we went in rain and storm under Bill's guidance, and soon found ourselves on the river's bank. The boat, tossed about by the waves, was half full of water, and we had to ladle it out with our hats before intrusting our persons to the stream. At last we put off, and so strong were wind and current, that it was all the sturdy arm of our boatman could do to direct the course of the boat aright.

"I will take you to my home," he said, "you will be safe there. Then I must go to St. Paul's stairs, to fetch another friend of yours. He is to be there by 10 o'clock. Listen, half past nine is striking, we must make haste. Look out for the bridge ahead of us!"

In a few minutes we reached St. Catharine's docks, and made the boat fast to one of the posts beneath the boatsman's dwelling. Bill gave the signal; the rope ladder was let down, and we all three climbed up into the narrow room, dimly lighted by a small oil lamp. There we found several Catholics who lived in the neighborhood, and had sought refuge in the humble abode. Women and children cried and lamented; the men paced up and down, some guarded the door, others watched from the window what went on in the alley below. One said one thing, one another.

"On the stroke of midnight," said one, "the great bell of St. Paul's will give the signal for the massacre."

"No, a shot will be fired from the Tower, when it is to begin," another asserted.

"Oh, it has already commenced in St. Dunstan's and Whitefriars," a third declared. "No mercy is shown even to women and children."

"I have been informed," another said, "that no shooting is to go on, by order of the Privy Council, lest, if the gunpowder is used freely, it will run short when the Spaniards land."

"They have landed already, near Dover, 50,000 strong; to-morrow they will be before London," was the confidential assertion of the same individual, who stated that the massacre had already begun. "Those who are fortunate enough to live through this night, will see the old Catholic days back in England. The Spaniards once here, we shall see no more of Anne Boleyn's daughter,

who has done all the mischief, for they will set Mary Stuart on the throne. Bolt the doors, friends, and be patient, to-morrow may have good things in store for us!"

One did not know what to make of these contradictory reports. My friends and I were shown into a small upper room, where we could be quiet. Standing at the window, we gazed out on the broad river. The rain had abated, the clouds had broken, and the moon cast an uncertain light on the waves as they hurried by. By these fitful gleams we could discern a quantity of craft of every size, crowded with people, passing to and fro.

"Fugitive brethren!" said Tichbourne. "Merciful Heavens, what days we live in! It could hardly have been worse for us in Rome, under Nero or Diocletian."

"Our enemies are evidently determined to drive us to desperation," I remarked.

"Here comes our worthy boatman with a new freight," exclaimed Bellamy, pointing to a light skiff that was being made fast to the posts supporting the house. At that moment a ray of moonlight broke through the clouds, enabling us to recognize the persons seated in the boat. "By George! it is my niece and Babington," he ejaculated.

I laid my hand on his: "Here is an opportunity, my dear friend, to practice a Christian virtue, and show that it is not with your lips alone that you say daily: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'"

He returned the pressure saying: "You do well, Windsor, to remind me of that. But go you to meet them, and just say a word to them before I see them."

Accordingly I went down into the lower room, which I entered just as Babington and his young wife ascended the rope ladder. In the dim light they did not recognize me at once, so I left them a few minutes to recover themselves, before taking Babington aside, and speaking to him: "You here, Windsor!" was his astonished exclamation. "Yes, and Tichbourne too, and—do not excite yourself—Bellamy!"

"What, Remy! Good Heavens! In that case my wife and I had better take refuge somewhere else. She is so excitable, and is so irritable at the least mention of Woxindon, that I often regret having persuaded her to leave it."

"That makes it all the more necessary to avail yourself of the occasion that now presents itself for a reconciliation. I give you my word for it. Bellamy is prepared to forgive all, if you and Anne will acknowledge yourselves in the wrong, as freely as I forgive you."

"As you!" he rejoined. "Pray what have you to forgive? Was it not through your tale-telling that the old lady turned me out of the house? What were we to do, but to take the law into our own hands?"

"My good fellow, I assure you upon my honor, that never a word to your disadvantage did I utter to Mistress Bellamy. It was a servant who reported to the old grandmother your secret meetings in the ruined castle, against which I had already warned you. But let that pass now. At any rate your mode of procedure has caused much distress to all the members of the family at Woxindon. And the fact that at this moment we have, as it is reported, a sword hanging over our heads, is reason enough to ask pardon of all against whom we have offended, and seek mutual reconciliation."

For all his levity and vanity, Babington had too good a nature to allow him to harden his heart against this friendly overture. He grasped my hand affectionately: "God bless you, Edward," he said. "I see that I have wronged you, and given pain to others, and I will do all I can to make reparation."

(To be continued.)

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