

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXINDON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

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CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

If the truth be told, I too saw no way out of the difficulty, but I would not own this to myself, much less to my companion. I therefore began to speak vaguely about the fallacy of such reasoning, and said it might as well be alleged that no individual teacher could ever err, a thing obviously untrue. She shook her head at this objection, and rejoined that Christ did not promise to preserve every individual teacher who should be commissioned to teach his Church from falling into error, but He had said: I will be with you; that is, the Church herself should be an infallible and unfailing teacher of truth. Thereupon I spoke of the bad lives of some of the Popes, who nevertheless were regarded as infallible in matters of doctrine, and asked, how did that coincide with the promise that Christ would be ever present in the Church? She replied that it was not said that the apostles and their successors should be without sin, but that the doctrine should be preserved from corruption. And for the matter of that, I need not speak of the Popes' failings; the innovators of the present day were no saints, witness Henry VIII, and—but no she would not say a word against Her Majesty, although her heart was not one pleasant to live. I then found a subterfuge by saying that our Lord's words might be interpreted as referring to the invisible Church of elect souls, taught by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and by reading the Scriptures. She asked me, did I really believe that? Had not all pious and god-fearing people both in the Eastern and the Western Church for a thousand years and more, on the authority of the word of God as expounded by the Church, worshipped God under the sacramental veil of the Host? Or were a handful of apostates like the Waldenses and other heretics the only souls whom the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to enlighten? To speak only of this doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist could I fail to see how indispensable it was to believe that our Lord would preserve the Church from error on that point? When at the Last Supper He uttered the words: "This is my Body," did He not in His divine presence clearly foresee that the whole Church in all ages up to our day would understand them in their literal sense? And were they not intended to be so understood did He not foresee that they would give rise to idolatrous worship? To permit such a thing as that could hardly be reconciled with our idea of His Godhead. And even granting that the Church was in error concerning this fundamental dogma and chief article of faith, pray which of the hundred conflicting theories promulgated by the Reformers, each one of whom professes to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, may be taken as the correct one?

I was for speaking about confession, indulgence, purgatory and the like, but Miss Cecil would not let me shirk the great difficulty. She returned to the main question at issue. Either the Church was a divinely appointed Teacher who never erred on any essential point, or Christ is not the omniscient God, faithful to His promise, whom we are taught to adore. Finding myself unable to answer these arguments, I got a little out of temper, and spoke rather sharply to my companion, bidding her take heed lest it should be pride that brought her in danger of losing her faith. Did she consider herself wiser and more clear sighted than all the excellent and enlightened divines, both in England and on the continent who were unanimous in asserting the Papacy to be the handiwork of the devil? Then the tears came into Miss Judith's eyes, and she gently answered that she too had feared the same thing; but she could only humbly pray God to enlighten her. To whom could she go for counsel? Not to the Anglican clergy, as it was impossible to feel any respect for men who altered their doctrines at the pleasure of Queen and Parliament. To her father! Unhappily she was only too well persuaded that as he had already changed his creed from political motives, he would not hesitate to do the same again if policy dictated. She could only look to God, and to her own conscience in this perplexing struggle. If I could render her any assistance, she would be eternally grateful to me.

This was said in so simple, straightforward a manner, that I felt heartily ashamed of having reproached her with pride. Moreover the doubts she had expressed had awakened so loud an echo in my own mind, that I was at a loss what to answer. It was a relief to me that we resorted to the tent at that moment, and looking for the missing kerchief put a tempo-

ary stop to our conversation. It was found at the back of the chair upon which the Queen sat to watch the games, and we started on our walk back to the palace without delay. I was the first to begin the conversation again, by entreating her not to be hasty in deciding on so important a matter. I would give more thought to the difficulties she propounded; I would read books on the subject and consult some learned divines. Meanwhile we must both be earnest in prayer for light from on high; it was quite possible that the Catholic Church was the true Church of Christ. She thanked me, and promised to do nothing rashly; as yet she was far from seeing her way clear on many points. She begged me not to allow her mother or the Queen to know anything about her difficulties for the present; to this I readily assented. Then it suddenly occurred to me to ask whether these dreadful doubts had suggested themselves to her mind, or whether some meddling Papist had done the mischief.

"The principal difficulty that I mentioned to you," she answered, "has staggered me for a long time, but not until quite recently has it clamored for solution. It is ever since I read a little book, I dare say you know it, for it has been much talked of for the last four years, I mean this one." So saying she drew from her pocket a pamphlet which she handed to me. I looked at the title, and exclaimed, "What! the Rationes decem of Campion, the Jesuit! Now I see it all. Those serpents have instilled their poison into you!"

"I am perfectly aware, Mr. St. Barbe," Miss Cecil calmly responded, "that our preachers hate the Jesuits, and say all manner of evil against them, for they regard them as their deadliest enemies. In all my life I have never seen one of them, except this very Campion, the writer of this little book, and of him I never can think without emotion. He was brought as a prisoner to London, three weeks after it was published, and taken to the Tower gagged and bound, on horseback. It was market day; I was standing in Cheap-side, near the cross, and I saw how his countenance beamed with holy joy while the populace surged around; I saw how reverently he saluted the cross. A few days later, the Queen expressed a desire to see the noted Jesuit; I was one of the few persons selected to accompany her to the house of the Earl of Leicester, where the interview was to be held privately. How Leicester, Bedford, and the Queen herself were all deeply touched by the calm, modest demeanor of the young man, just entering upon the prime of life, thus brought face to face with death in its most terrible form. The Queen made him most brilliant offers, promising him the highest dignities, the richest benefices, if he would renounce his allegiance to the Pope. He declined them all, but so gently, that it was impossible for her to be angry, and we all expected his pardon would follow. Far from this, on the very next day he was placed by her orders on the rack, and so cruelly tortured that he could not raise his hand in the presence of the Judge.

And then, in the terrible condition to which he was reduced, no remedies having been given to him, he had to appear in public disputation against our most learned and able theologians, concerning the contents of this very book. He silenced his opponents so completely, I heard my father say, that all further disputations were prohibited. After that a most scandalous trial took place; it is enough to read the official report, though in that a great deal is suppressed. Last of all he was executed at Tyburn, forgiving his enemies, praying for the Queen, like the holy martyrs of old. Such was the maligned Jesuit, the author of this little book! Now I ask you as a favor to read his "Rationes decem, his ten arguments in defence of the Papacy, for which he, and many of our best and noblest fellow countrymen—witness Sir Thomas More—have laid down their lives. But first of all try to lay aside your prejudices against the name of Jesuit, so far

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as to give the reasons he adduces your deliberate and impartial consideration."

This I promised to do, and put the pamphlet, which I had long been desirous of possessing, into my pocket. Yet I went on railing against the Jesuits and repeating the slanders that I had heard or read about them. At length Miss Cecil begged me to leave off, and think what a lovely evening it was. The crimson glow of sunset had faded from the sky, and the moon had risen; a light breeze whispered in the tree tops, and ever and anon the sound of the flowing river fell on our ear. But fair and tranquil as was the face of nature, I was not to a mood to enjoy the beauty of the scene, my mind was too much agitated to feel its charm. Miss Cecil walked in silence by my side for a considerable distance. When I looked at her refined and aristocratic features, the turmoil within my breast rose higher. Was this adorable creature to become a Papist? My whole being rose against the thought, and I resolved to spare no effort in order to snatch his prey, as I said to myself, from the evil one. As we approached the palace, I spoke to her on the subject, imploring her with passionate earnestness, not to listen to the seducer, but for God's sake to think of the consequences a change of religion would involve.

"The consequences?" she repeated. "Which consequences, the temporal or the eternal? And pray whom do you mean by the seducer? There is but one question to be answered: what is the truth taught by Jesus Christ? And when one is satisfied on that point, there only remains to act in accordance with the words: 'What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?'"

CHAPTER XVII.

When Miss Cecil and I reached the palace, we found a page waiting to conduct us to the Queen's presence. We handed over the kerchief; the Queen at once sent away my companion, and inquired whether I had confessed the fair Judith, and what was the result? I replied that Her Majesty's penetration had not been at fault; there were, it was true, some clouds of doubt which distributed the serenity of Miss Cecil's faith, I trusted they might be dispersed before they threatened a storm. She desired me to be more explicit. Fortunately for me at that moment the Earl of Essex was announced, and I was dismissed, the Queen saying that I must at some other time tell her more about my penitent's state of mind. I answered that the seal of confession must not be broken; she laughed, and gave me a playful tap of the shoulder as I withdrew, a sign that I was in great favor.

That night I could not sleep. After tossing on my bed till midnight was past, my mind dwelling continually on the objections Miss Cecil had stated, I rose, and lighting a taper, sat down to read the "Rationes decem." The arguments were so irresistible, couched as they were in pithy Latin, that I could not help reading the book all through. More than once I threw it aside angrily, and paced up and down my chamber to still the agitation it awakened; but each time I took it up again, and read some more. Champion's reason struck me like so many blows; I could have cried aloud, as with physical pain. The mishandling of Holy Scripture by the Reformers, Luther rejecting the Epistle of St. James, his followers rejecting other books, the Genevans repudiating the Book of Esther, just as the Manichees did St. Matthew's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, the Ebionites the Epistles of St. Paul; the wresting of the sacred text by recent expositors for the support of their own opinions, the example cited by Campion, being the words Miss Judith had mentioned. 'This is my Body' to which most contrary meanings were attached; the impossibility that a Church out of whose pale there is no salvation, should be an invisible Church; the Oecumenical Councils, from the first four of which, recognized by Parliament in the first years of Elizabeth's reign, the Jesuits drew proofs of the primacy of Peter; the sacrificial character of the Mass, the veneration of the saints, etc., the authority of the early Fathers and their exposition of the Sacred Scriptures; the testimony of history; the obvious contradictions and false conclusions in the tenets of modern innovations; the fair flowers of Paradise, the hate and rage of hell; the hierarchy on earth, the Church with her missions, her colleges, her cannon laws, her clergy, regular and secular; the splendid adornment of her cathedrals, the pious institutions of our forefathers—all these and more besides, that I cannot now recall, burst in upon my soul with tempestuous force, shaking in their foundations those religious convictions which, imbibed in my childhood, had every year grown with my growth.

My first feeling was one of rage against the writer of a book whose object was to overthrow all that I had hitherto regarded as sacred, and call upon me to venerate what till then had been an abomination to me. (To be continued.)

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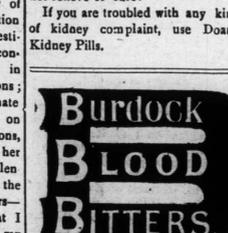
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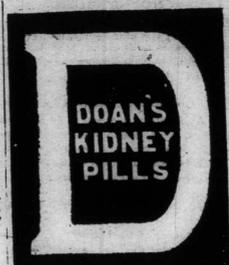
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