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The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon

By Rev. Joseph Spillman, S.J.

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There was a little whispering between Pooley and the clerks, then he and two others, Thomas Philipps and Arthur Gregory by name, said they would be happy to accompany us. We were to know enough and too much of those two young men later on; I took an aversion to them from the very first, especially to Philipps, a red-haired fellow with sharp, ferret eyes, and a countenance strongly marked by the smallness of his features, and a young, fox. All three were quite young, scarcely older than ourselves, and knew how to keep up a pleasant conversation, so that before many glasses of canary had been drunk, we had become better friends than considerations of prudence would have allowed. In the exuberance of his high spirits Babington appeared inclined to disclose his projects to his guests, who evidently tried to draw him. I was obliged to admonish him, by treading on his foot under the table, not to say what an hour later he would have wished to recall.

Finding that Babington's lips ran over with their master's praise, and three guests took their cue, and said all they could in his favor, and how it certainly was not his fault that Catholics were so hardly dealt with. They declared Lord Burghley was to blame for that; as for Walsingham, he had for some time past been striving to form a party in Parliament, to bring about a repeal of the more stringent laws against Catholics. It was all through him that the Queen had pardoned so many priests, and the execution of the two seminary priests, two days since, had been entirely Lord Burghley's doing. It was obvious that so astute a politician as Walsingham would be desirous to stand well with the Catholic aristocracy, because each year made it less probable that Elizabeth would marry, and give a Protestant heir to the English throne. On the other hand, there was almost a certainty that the captive Queen of Scots would ascend the throne after all, and this was reason enough why Walsingham should incline more and more to the side of the Catholics. In fact, they thought he would not be so sorely displeased, if Mary Stuart were to escape from captivity, if only to spite Lord Burghley.

Of course we drank in all this information eagerly, as it afforded us a due to Walsingham's unexpected friendliness. Then it was that Babington was on the eve of revealing all our schemes. I was only just in time to prevent this, by administering to him, as I have said, a vigorous kick. I then remarked that every lover of justice must rejoice to see the Queen of Scots set at liberty; but I could not believe that the Protestant party would tolerate a Catholic sovereign upon the throne. In that case it would be seen how patiently the Catholics had borne the heavy yoke, in contradistinction to the Puritans, who would soon rise in arms against a "papist" Queen.

Our guests laughed, and said, possibly some fanatic might draw the sword in his zeal for the Lord, but the majority of the people would take their beads again and go quietly to Mass.

"In that respect," observed Pooley, "we are far more politic than you Romanists. Just as Lord Burghley, then Sir William Cecil, used to serve Mass piously in the days of Queen Mary the Catholic, so now-a-days, he and Walsingham and thousands more would go to Mass again at the Queen's command. If you were a little more time-serving, you would far much better, and do your religion better service, than by bearing fines and imprisonment, not to speak of worse penalties, that are always hanging over your heads."

Such was the gist of our conversation, as we sat over our sack in the private parlour into which our host of the "Anchor" had shown us. We shook hands on parting, Robert Pooley being especially friendly. Babington made an appointment with him to go for a row on the Thames that afternoon.

When at length we reached home, Tichbourne was waiting impatiently to hear how we had fared. When we told him of Walsingham's great cordiality, he was by no means as much gratified as we had been. He thought it was all assumed in order to deceive and entrap us. This made

Babington very angry, and I had hard work to prevent a quarrel between the two. Tichbourne held to his opinion, and said: "Believe me, Walsingham is an old fox, and an enemy more to be dreaded than Burghley, who in some respects is a more honorable man, though it would not be easy to find his equal in guile and perfidy."

"You are a bird of ill omen," answered Babington, "shutting your eyes to the light of day. What could be more honorable than the whole of Walsingham's behavior towards us? If he had suspected us of being conspirators, would he have talked in so candid and frank a manner? If he had had any misgivings in regard to our schemes, would he have offered Windsor's post of body-physician to the Queen of Scots, thus admitting us to free intercourse with the prisoner, and smoothing the way most delightfully for her rescue?"

"Or rather laying a hidden snare for us," continued Tichbourne. "The fisherman sets the weir-basket wide open; the trout swims in and finds himself caught."

"You always were and always will be the most terrible sceptic I ever knew," rejoined Babington impatiently. "And you Windsor, are far too slow and cautious. With such ways as yours no bold enterprise could ever be carried out. You should have accepted Walsingham's offer at once, and expressed yourself as deeply indebted to him!"

"I believe," answered Tichbourne, "that Windsor's hesitation was the wisest thing either of you did this morning. Walsingham very probably only made this extraordinary proposal as a test, and to have closed with it eagerly would only have been to confirm his suspicions."

"His suspicions!" Babington retorted. "I tell you he has no suspicions. If he had, would he have destined one of us to fill so important a post?"

"To offer any one a post and to destine him for it are different things," Tichbourne answered. "Walsingham has his own ways and means of rendering the acceptance of it impracticable. He may attach impossible conditions to it; he must submit it to the Privy Council, perchance to the Queen, for approval, and that may be withheld; he may—"

Here Babington interrupted him again, saying he would hear no more. "What if Windsor accepts the day after to-morrow?" he asked.

"Then we must hear the conditions, and make sure that we are not being entrapped into anything," Tichbourne replied; and I added, in that case I should believe that Walsingham had political reasons for desiring Mary Stuart to be set at liberty, and he was making a tool of us. At this juncture our house-keeper, old Barbara came hurriedly into the room, announcing that two young gentlemen with a young lady and a little boy were below, asking for us. "They have come," Babington exclaimed, and he and I ran down stairs.

Right enough, the little Bellamys were there, crying and laughing for joy when they saw Babington and me again. The boy threw himself into Babington's arms, and Mistress Anne behaved very graciously towards him, whom she looked upon as an old friend. Robert Pooley had come with them, and another young man, very quiet and demure looking, whom I felt at once I would much sooner trust than Pooley, who was almost cringing in his civility. This young man was introduced to us as Mr. St. Barbe, Walsingham's nephew, now known to us as our worthy Brother Anselm, whom I saw for the first time on that 22nd of April in the year of grace 1586, under very pleasant circumstances, since by his uncle's orders he was bringing the children to us, safe and sound out of prison.

I invited the whole party to come up stairs to my room, and as soon as the first greetings and congratulations were over, I hastened to dispatch Barbara to the "Anchor" Inn, to procure the best luncheon that was to be had, and to fetch from a French pastry cook's in Fleetstreet, some toothsome cakes for desert, such as ladies and children love. I was accustomed to

find Barbara rather contrary, when there was a question of entertaining any of my comrades, but on this occasion, against her wont, she ran off quiet willingly, on hearing that the two children had been shut up all night in Newgate for conscience sake, for she was a staunch Catholic, and a kind old soul at heart.

Whilst Barbara was laying the table and preparing the repast, the Bellamys related their adventures. Topcliffe had himself conducted them to prison, and stopping under the dark, frowning gateway with its iron gates, had asked the boy age, and if he would tell him the Jesuit's hiding place. The child acknowledged that the massive, formidable walls struck terror into his soul, but he stoutly refused to answer, thereby earning a hard blow from his enraged questioner. The poor little fellow went on to say that he had raised his eyes to the niche above the gateway where stood an image of the Blessed Virgin, and remembering that his grandmother had told him how Campion, on his way to execution, had saluted that very image, he bowed his own curly head respectfully, in imitation of the martyr. After that he did not feel much afraid of Topcliffe and the savage looking porter with the great keys. But when Topcliffe pointed out a ruffian-like individual, who glared at the child as if he would like to devour him, and told him it was the headman, who would cut his head off if he did not tell where the Jesuit was, his blood did, he said, run cold. "Then," he continued, "they put Anne and me into a narrow, pitch dark cell, without giving us a morsel of supper, where there was never a bed to sleep on, only a heap of straw in one corner, on which, when we had said our prayers, we huddled ourselves together and tried to sleep. And just fancy how horrible! there came a rustling in the straw, and something ran right over me, a mouse or a rat, I did not know which; and we both cried for fear lest we should be eaten up alive before the morning. We thought of Daniel in the lion's den, and we felt sure that Almighty God, who shut the mouths of the great lions, would surely shut the mouths of the mice and rats. Then I remembered how the prophet Habacuc carried the reapers' dinner to Daniel, and I wished Uncle Kenny would bring me my bread and milk. At last I fell asleep, and when I woke it was broad daylight, at least as light as it could be with only one little barred window, and the jailer was there with a basin of gruel for our breakfast. The whole morning we sat on a bundle of straw, till all at once the key was turned in the lock, and in came Topcliffe, in a worse temper than I had ever seen him before. He was cursing and swearing, and I thought we were going to have our heads cut off. He drove Anne and me down the steps and out of the gate, but I did not forget to make my obeisance to our Lady as we passed. However he did not take us to the scaffold, but to a fine house, where there was a grand gentleman with a gold chain. He was very kind; he kissed Anne's hand and patted me on the head, but I did not like him half as well as I like you, Mr. Babington, or you, Mr. Windsor; I do not know why, but he had such funny eyes—"

"Frith," interrupted Anne hastily, "for shame, we owe our release to him. Go to that young gentleman yonder, who is the Lord Secretary's nephew, and beg his pardon."

The boy at once went up to St. Barbe, and begged him not to tell his uncle what he had said; adding that he would pray God to reward him for his kindness.

St. Barbe smiled good humoredly, and putting his hand into his pocket gave the child a brand new shilling for his amusing story, and bade him say a prayer for him too. But as he was at that time a rigid Puritan, he reproved the boy for making a reverence to the image of the Mother of God, saying that it was popish idolatry, since God had forbidden us to make graven images. Frith, who was a precious little fellow, immediately said, if images were forbidden, why was the Queen's effigy on his bright shilling? "We are forbidden to worship images," St. Barbe explained. "We do not worship the image of the Mother of God," rejoined the boy, "we only

show it homage and reverence. What would you say if I treated the Queen's portrait here with disrespect? And she is only the Queen of England, whereas Blessed Mary is Queen of Heaven and earth, and carries in her arms the Child Jesus, who is true God and our Redeemer."

I was so pleased with this answer on Frith's part, that I pulled out my purse and gave him a crown piece. Babington did the same, to the great delight of the boy, who had never before had so much money in his possession. To the credit of St. Barbe, I must say that he seemed more disconcerted than displeased by the child's repartee, and took it with a good grace. Pooley kept saying that little Bellamy would surely one day be Archbishop of Canterbury.

Just then Barbara came in to say luncheon was on the table. Pooley and St. Barbe rose to take leave, but we pressed them to join us at our little feast, so that we might, at some slight measure show, our sense of the obligation we were under to the Secretary of State in the persons of his nephew and his assistant. Pooley accepted at once; St. Barbe yielded after a little persuasion, and we all sat down to table. The viands were excellent, and our appetites were excellent too, since two of the party had been fasting in Newgate, and the others were young and hearty. The dessert was what Miss Anne and little Frith appreciated most; gingerbread and confectionery, dried raisins, dates from the Levant and golden oranges, and last of all, a tiny glass of sweet Tokay, a choice liqueur which Tichbourne produced from the cupboard in honor of the day. We should all have been right merry, had not the remembrance of their poor father's recent death prevented the two children from enjoying themselves as they otherwise would have done. But in the morning of life, tears and smiles follow close upon one another, and one could not take it amiss, if the sorrows of yesterday were forgotten awhile in the joys of to-day.

However, Miss Anne presently begged us to escort her and her brother to Woxindon. So we said grace, and Tichbourne went to see about the horses. In the meantime, we went out into the garden; Babington offered his arm to Miss Anne, and gathered for her a little posy of the fragrant violets which grew under the hedge. Frith and I went down to the landing place, where our boat lay. Of course nothing would content the boy, but to go onto the river; therefore, as we saw our boatman Bill Bell at a little distance, we called to him to take us for a row. The rest of the company were willing to accompany us, so we all got into the boat, for we knew that nearly an hour would elapse before the horses were ready.

CHAPTER XL.—The beautiful spring weather had tempted many people out on the river that afternoon, and it was covered with barges of every size and description, with bright pennons and streamers, and full of gaily dressed folk. From the opposite bank, where the "Paris Garden," a favorite place of entertainment, was situated, came sounds of music; flags flying from the tents invited idlers to enjoy the amusements and pastime provided for them. Many of the boats were plying thither; others like our own, were rowed slowly up and down, that their occupants might bask in the sunshine, and obtain a good view of the town, with its multitudinous houses, palaces and churches. Bill Bell rowed us up as far as Westminster, where the magnificent Abbey was seen to perfection in the soft clear sunlight, but he took care not to approach too near to London Bridge, for fear lest the young lady and the boy should discern the horrible trophies impaled thereon. Babington sat in the stern and steered the boat; the two children and myself occupied the middle, with St. Barbe and Pooley facing us in the bow. We had enough to do to tell the boy, who questioned us incessantly, the names of all the churches and prominent buildings, and were often surprised at the sagacious remarks he made. "What is that gloomy edifice with a quantity of closely barred windows, close to the riverside?" he inquired. "That is the Clink," I answered. "There are about five and twenty Catholic priests confined there now, and many of our martyrs have languished within those walls."

"And now Uncle Robert is shut up there," rejoined the boy. "Please Babington, steer us close by, perhaps we may see him at the window of his cell."

"Very likely we shall," replied Babington, "provided it looks out on the river, for all the pioneers seem to have come to the window for the sunshine. Look, you can see row after row of heads gazing out at the water."

In fact, as we drew nearer to the walls we could see the face of some captive behind the grating of every loophole, and before long the boy's sharp eyes descried his uncle at one of the windows just under the roof. He shouted to him, and Anne waved her handkerchief. The prisoner recognized his hand through the bars waved a greeting in return. But the current was too strong to allow our remaining stationary, so we had to drift down and then pull back in a curve. After this had been done two or three times, it attracted the notice of the watchmen, who called to us, asking what we were looking for, and bidding us begone from the place. The hubbub they made led a boatful of young men and low people who were passing to push their boat nearer, and assail us with cries of "Papist! Papist!" Then they began to ask, if we had come to get absolution for our wicked plots from one of the priests of Baal who had lodging there at the Queen's expense, or if we were scheming to get the black-birds out of their cage?

Babington was never inclined to let himself be insulted by the populace, and he might have got us all into trouble, had not both the young lady and St. Barbe both begged our oarsman to row away as fast as he could. St. Barbe moreover stood up in the boat, and asked the watchmen if they did not know who he was? Then a voice from one of the surrounding boats called out: "It is Lord Walsingham's nephew! Citizens, uncover your heads!" Thereupon both the watchmen on the banks and the people in the boats were fain with humble apologies to let us pass on our way; but just at that moment we became aware of the proximity of a barge of considerable size, whose rapid approach neither we nor the Londoners had observed in consequence of the recent commotion.

The vessel was a most magnificent one; on the prow was the gilt figure of a unicorn, supporting a shield with the arms of England; rich tapestries hung on the sides to the water's edge; in the middle of the deck was a pavilion of red and white silk, raised on painted poles and adorned with costly fringes and tassels. The centre of the pavilion was surmounted by a large gilt crown; plumes of ostrich feathers nodded from each corner while from the stern of the boat floated a silk banner bearing St. Andrew's cross. In the prow two servants of the royal household wearing their livery of black and red and bearing silver staves were stationed; ever and anon they shouted with stentorian voices: Make way for Her Majesty the Queen!

It was, in fact, the royal barge, for Elizabeth, profiting by the beauty of the day, was removing the Court from Richmond to her palace at Greenwich. Manned by able oarsmen, it had outstripped the barges and boats of the Queen's suite, which were left almost out of sight in the distance. The Queen was to be seen seated on some velvet cushions beneath the baldachino, herself decked in costly and gorgeous apparel, for, as is well known, she resembled her mother, Anne Boleyn, in the delight she took in the extent and splendor of her wardrobe. I never had so good a view of her as from our boat on the Thames that afternoon, and I was much struck by her proud and majestic appearance. She wore upon her head a small gold crown; an enormous ruff of the finest Brabant lace encircled her throat; her bodice was a blaze of jewels; her huge puffed sleeves of blue velvet were covered with a network of lilac cords, and her white velvet skirt was stiff with gold embroidery and pearls. But it was not the magnificence of her dress that proclaimed her to be the Queen, so much as her haughty bearing, the keen, searching glance of her eye. She had once been handsome; but strong passions, more than actual years, had worked havoc with her beauty, havoc which the roughest could no longer avail to conceal. Several of her ladies in waiting sat at her feet. These were generally selected with care, lest their good looks should throw the Queen into the shade. A few courtiers stood or sat around, amongst them I remarked Sir Christopher Hatton, and the new favorite Sir Walter Raleigh, who took the place of the Earl of Leicester, then absent in Flanders.

I had little opportunity to make these observations, for in less time than it now takes to put these into words, the royal barge was close upon us. Elizabeth had heard the shouts of the watchmen from a distance, and seen how the boats had gathered around us; and when the cry of "Papist! Papist!" reached her ear, she at once gave orders to turn the barge's head in that direction. It may be imagined that we were both astonished and alarmed to find ourselves in the presence of Her Majesty, who from under the baldachi-

no was looking at us with angry eyes. "What is all this about? What has happened?" She inquired in no kindly tone of voice. The smallest boats that were around us immediately drew off, leaving us almost alongside of the royal barge.

"Why does no one answer?" continued the Queen with rising irritation. "What is this about Papists that I heard?"

Babington and I stood up in the boat to explain and excuse ourselves. Before we could utter a word, Elizabeth's eye fell upon St. Barbe, and she exclaimed with some asperity: "Why there is Walsingham's nephew! In somewhat strange company, methinks. Or are the gentlemen perhaps not Papists after all, who were holding a pious conversation with the pretty birds in yonder cage? Fie, fie, what would your worthy uncle say to this? And our beloved Judith Cecil here, the great Burghley's fair daughter, who, if our eyes have not deceived us, gave St. Barbe the foremost place among her many adorers? Look at your faithless knight, good Judith, and look too at the fascinating Circe, who, it appears, has bewitched him."

"Your Majesty seems to overrate my influence very much,—I should rather ask the members of your Court how it is that this young gentleman prefers his present companions to them," replied the girl addressed, who was a more decided beauty than Elizabeth was wont to tolerate about her person, and whom on this account precisely she delighted in annoying.

The Queen cast a sinister glance at the girl, who had spoken with a dignified indifference of manner. "Very flattering for the gentlemen and ladies of our Court, and for ourselves," she rejoined. "Fie, Miss Cecil! Were it not for the services your father, our incomparable Lord High Treasurer, renders us, we should feel tempted to assign you a chamber in yonder Clink, where you would have leisure to study manners for a week or two! But we are forgetting what we came here for, you, little man there, you shall tell us what has happened. You, at any rate, will invent no lies. So tell us at once what is your name, who are the people with you, and what was this commotion about?"

Frith stood, cap in hand; his fair, curly hair tossed about his rosy, childish face, his honest blue eyes looking gravely but fearlessly at the Queen. He told us afterwards, that he should have liked to reproach her for having imprisoned and put to death so many priests, but something seemed to bid him refrain from doing so, and he therefore answered her questions quite simply.

"My name is Frith Bellamy, and I live at Castle Woxindon, not very far from here, the other side of St. John's Wood. When you get to the beech tree at the cross-roads you must keep to the right, for the road to the left takes to the village of Harrow."

"You tell me that, in case I should pay you a visit," said the Queen, laughingly. The maids of honor tittered audibly, all but Mistress Cecil, whose features did not relax. The boy was quite offended at the amusement his words excited, he went on, addressing Her Majesty: "Oh, several monarchs have been in our house, and my great-grandfather, whose name was Frith also, died at Bosworth for your predecessors, fighting against Richard III. If Your Majesty condescends to visit us, I must beg you will come without these ladies, who laugh at what I say."

(To be continued.)

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