

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXINDON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

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PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION OF B. HERDER, ST. LOUIS, MO.

(Reproduced from the Montreal True Witness.)

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Continued.

And when the next morning I awoke for the first time in my life at High Mass, and witnessed the impressive ceremonial of the Church appointed for the celebration of the bloody sacrifice of the New Testament, as the clouds of incense ascended, as the choirs of incense ascended, as the "Sanctus," tears of devotion ran down my cheeks, and heavenly consolation filled my heart, Miss Cecil, who knelt beside me, was not less affected than myself. Afterwards she said to me: "May God forgive those poor deluded ones who stigmatize as idolatrous, the elevating and beautiful ritual of the Catholic Church! And those who in the name of liberty of conscience, destroy the monasteries and disperse their inmates out of these dwellings of peace! Oh how happy should I count myself, if I could spend my whole life before the altar of the Lord! How different to attendance at the Court of Elizabeth, in which my early youth was passed!"

After a few days passed in tranquility and peace, we heard that the Jesuit Fathers had found a suitable domicile for us. Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador, offered to receive us into his house as companions for his wife. By this act he took a truly Christian revenge of Lord Burchley, who two years previously had caused him to be ignominiously dismissed from his post of Ambassador in England. Miss Cecil would have preferred to remain at Montmarie, since she had never felt so happy in her life as she was there. In fact, she begged the Abbess to admit her as a postulant, but the old lady was too wise to allow her to take such a step in the first flush of youthful fervor. "If in a year's time you are still of the same mind, and you feel that only within these quiet walls will your heart find rest," she said to her, "then come, my child, and you shall try our vocation with me. I too, was so sorry to bid the name good-bye, that I almost regretted having pledged my troth to Windsor. It was with a heavy heart that I followed our new guardian to his place on the banks of the Seine. On the same day my uncle Robert left Paris to join the army at Brussels. Nothing of importance occurred during several weeks. Count Mendoza and his wife treated us like their own daughters, but I felt uneasy at receiving no tidings from the Convent to Windsor, no reply reached me, however, and from my host I could learn nothing definite as to the progress of affairs in England.

At length the glorious Feast of the Assumption came. We received Holy Communion at an early hour in the private chapel of the embassy, and afterwards accompanied Count and Countess to solemn High Mass at Notre Dame, where the Archbishop officiated with great pomp and ceremony. But neither the soul-stirring music, nor the other accessories of Christian worship availed that morning to inspire my heart with festive joy. It was filled with sad forebodings, and I felt impelled again and again, to invoke for my loved ones in England our Lady's powerful protection.

On our return to the embassy, a courier was waiting with despatches from England. After what appeared to me a very long time, I was summoned to Mendoza's cabinet, whither he had withdrawn to pursue his letters. I had a presentiment of misfortune, and my fears were confirmed at the sight of his grave countenance.

"The messenger has brought bad news from England," I cried. "The scheme for releasing Mary Stuart has failed—tell me all, Count; the worst cannot be as bad as this painful suspense."

"It was to tell you all that I sent for you. It is true, the plan for setting free the Queen of Scots has again been unsuccessful. This time, I fear, the consequences for her will be fatal. The greater number of the conspirators have been arrested."

"Windsor? and Binghamton?" I inquired eagerly. "Binghamton, but not Windsor," Mendoza replied. "But what touches you most nearly is, that, through Binghamton having unfortunately been taken at Woxindon, all your relatives have been thrown into prison. Chateaufort speaks in his letter of two gentlemen and two gentlewomen."

"What!" I exclaimed, bursting into tears, "the barbarians have had the cruelty to take my dear old grandmother, and poor old Uncle Barty, who is as simple as a child, to the Tower! I must go to them, I must go to London immediately, to see what can be done for them."

There is not a soul to succour them. Our cousin Page is a miserable apothecary, who only wants to get our estate for himself. Help me, for mercy's sake, to get back to London! You know what our prisons are, you know by the Queen's command, the prisoners are allowed nothing but bread and water, and rotten straw. Every alleviation must be paid for heavily by the captives or their friends. Alas! my poor grandmother, and my sister too, whose health is much shaken, will perish miserably in the course of a few weeks, if I cannot hasten to their assistance."

The ambassador listened to me patiently. Then he said: "If you are recognized, you will only share their fate. Believe me, Lord Burchley will never forgive you for having facilitated his daughter's flight. A better plan would be to write to Chateaufort, and ask him to send some one to look after the prisoners."

"No, that will never do! If needs be, I would rather die with them, than remain here without stirring a hand to help them. I simply could not endure it, and if I have to beg my way to London I must go. How could one of Chateaufort's agents come properly for my unhappy friends?"

Mendoza was touched; but he said nothing must be done in a hurry, we must think the matter over. He also desired me to ask the advice of my confessor; if he approved of my resolution, and I still adhered to it on the morrow, he would provide me with all that I needed. Accordingly, I betook myself to the Jesuit College, and submitted my project to the Father Provincial for his decision. He sanctioned it fully, and gave me his blessing, only he asked me to say nothing to Fritz, of whose behaviour he spoke with great praise, about my departure. He would tell him of it in due time, and bid him pray for the success of my undertaking.

The next morning Mendoza gave his consent, and supplied me with good advice and the necessary funds in cash and bills of exchange on a London banker. Before nightfall I left Paris, in the suite of a gentleman of rank, who with his wife was journeying to London.

CHAPTER XXXV.

On arriving at my destination, I lost no time in making my way to the Tower. It was with a heavy heart that I approached its gloomy portals, clad in my oldest, simplest gown, and carrying in my arms a basket filled with small loaves, to give myself the appearance of a maid servant. I had no difficulty in passing the guard at the postern, at the entrance of the footway that crosses the broad moat; at the middle tower and the by-ward tower, which give admittance to the inner circumference, I was also permitted to pass unobscured. But when I was about to go through the frowning gateway of the bloody tower, into the interior of the fortress, one of the watchmen suddenly lowered his halberd, and pointing it directly at my breast, called to me to halt. Startled and alarmed, I nearly let fall the basket I was carrying; but one of the other soldiers interfered, saying to his comrade: "Out upon you for an unmannerly knave! Is that the way to deal with a fair maiden? Let her go by; I will wager it is our commandant's new serving-maid. I did not think Madam would have got another so soon. By my troth, 'tis the third since mid-summer! We shall see how long she can put up with the old dragon. Go on your way, mistress; but first you must give me a kiss or pay me a groat as your ransom."

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log gateway of the bloody tower, into the interior of the fortress, one of the watchmen suddenly lowered his halberd, and pointing it directly at my breast, called to me to halt. Startled and alarmed, I nearly let fall the basket I was carrying; but one of the other soldiers interfered, saying to his comrade: "Out upon you for an unmannerly knave! Is that the way to deal with a fair maiden? Let her go by; I will wager it is our commandant's new serving-maid. I did not think Madam would have got another so soon. By my troth, 'tis the third since mid-summer! We shall see how long she can put up with the old dragon. Go on your way, mistress; but first you must give me a kiss or pay me a groat as your ransom."

I willingly put the required coin into the man's hand, and with a sense of relief hastened through the dark archway into the open space, in the midst of which rose the so-called White Tower, flanked with four turrets. The watchman's speech contained a suggestion which was a god-send to me. I resolutely walked over the turf to the residence of the Commandant, or Lieutenant of the Tower as he was called, and knocked at the door. It was opened by an elderly serving man, who asked my business. With a beating heart I said I had heard that a serving-maid was wanted, and had come after the place. He scanned me closely from head to foot, and left me standing in the hall, while he went into the kitchen, whence the cook, a tall, raw-boned woman, presently issued and subjected me to a similar scrutiny. Finally she fetched a thin, sharp featured lady, the expression of whose restless eye bespoke a love of fault-finding and scolding. She too looked me over, and then in a high-pitched falsetto voice, asked my name. To have given my real name would have been to defeat my object and hazard my liberty; so I gave as my own my mother's maiden name, Mary Forester.

The lady began to find fault immediately, protesting against the use of so Popish an appellation, which recalled the dreadful days of the Spanish queen, the persecutor of the people of the Lord, and reminded her too of the Queen of Scots, who inveigled into her toils a party of young men, and had nearly been the cause of deluging England with blood. Only on one condition that I would change my name for one of the biblical names of the Old Testament, such as Sarah, Rebecca or Ruth, would she consent to take me. I expressed my readiness to be called by whatever appellation she might assign me. This pacified her for the time; she gave me the name of Ruth. Then a fresh difficulty arose; she saw my white hands, and cried out that I was surely an impostor, no honest menial. I acknowledged that until then there had been no necessity for me to earn my bread, but that family misfortunes and the successive loss of all my near relatives within a short period, obliged me to take service. If she would engage me she would find me trusty and industrious, and willing to do the roughest work.

Thereupon she consented to try me and I was told what would be required of me. The tasks enumerated were neither few nor light; yet I could hardly conceal my joy when my mistress, Lady Hopton, (the wife of Sir Owen Hopton, to whom the command of the Tower, with its hundreds of prisoners, was committed) mentioned amongst my other duties that of looking after the female Catholic prisoners. This determined me that it should not be my fault if I did not remain there; so I followed the cock into the kitchen, rolled up my sleeves put on an apron, and set about washing the dishes and sweeping the house.

As I was descending the stairs, after putting in order the Council Chamber where a meeting of ministers was shortly to be held, I met my master, Sir Owen, a rough-looking, thick-set man, who was coming up, accompanied by Walsingham. I could not help overhearing their conversation. "So you want me to find board and lodging for your nephew St. Barbe, Sir Francis," my master said. "Well it can be done for the sum you mention. And the other members of the Privy Council are to know nothing about it? Very good, a written order from yourself will be enough. There is a cell close by vacant now, the one occupied by Bellamy, who died from the injuries he received on the rack. Of course we gave out that he strangled himself; but, between ourselves he died a most happy death, with a Popish canticle to the Virgin on his lips. Well he was a poor simpleton at the best."

The effect these words produced on me may be imagined. I was obliged to lean on the balusters, to keep myself from falling. I could not conceal my agitation from the two men who had now turned the corner. The Lieutenant attributed my tears to his wife's scolding, and told me I must get accustomed to her spiteful tongue. I put my apron up to my eyes, but not before Walsingham's keen eye had rested on me. "Who may that be?" he inquired.

"Our new maid, my wife has a fresh one every week, so I am tired of asking their names," Hopton replied as they passed on. And I was thankful to hear him say in answer to Walsingham's remark that I looked more like a gentlewoman than a serving-maid, as for that, no one of gentle birth would stay an hour in their house.

"(To be continued.)"

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THE HOLY NAME. AVE MARIA. Name of Jesus, ever blest, Hallow in my memory rest! Gifts Thy presence doth impart Sweet as honey to the heart.

Hope of those that contrite are, Winning souls that wander far; Nor the mind, beloved Lord! E'er conceived so sweet a word.

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