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AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE Times of Queen Elizabeth.

The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon,

By Rev. Joseph Spillman, S.J.

PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION OF B. HERDER, St. Louis, Mo.

CHAPTER XXIV.—While we were conversing, the flagon had frequently been passed round, and doubtless the good Spanish wine had something to do with our high spirits, for we parted in a merrier mood than had been the case ever since we pledged ourselves to set the royal captive free.

CHAPTER XXV.—My good husband says it is time that I should resume the part of narrator, since I have already been silent for a longer period than is consistent with the love of talking with which he credits my sex. I will therefore proceed with my story, and narrate the events which occurred on the eve of St. Peter and St. Paul, after the departure from Woxindon of my Uncle Remy, with Windsor, my affianced husband.

As soon as they had ridden off, I went up to the top of the watchtower, whence I could follow them in thought, when they had passed out of sight, accompanying them with earnest wishes for their success in dealing with my poor sister Anne. As I think I said once before, I loved to linger in that solitary place, to think of my friends on earth, and raise my heart to Heaven. But I was alarmed to see the threatening aspect of the sky over the wood in the direction of Putney, and I ran back to the house to warn the servants, and direct them to close the shutters on the side of the house where the rain was coming up, before the outburst of the storm that I saw approaching.

searched the great park at Henley, where for some time he had been hidden in a summer house. "So you see," he said, turning to me with a smile, "you need not compassionate me for being wet through with the rain, in an ordinary manner; I have got accustomed to such trifling disagreeables."

As we sat talking, the knocker was heard again, and this time with loud and impatient strokes. We started to our feet, doubting not that the pursuivants were again on the track of the fugitive priest. Thrusting into his pockets, bread, meat and a bottle of wine, we hurried him away to the hiding place beneath the back staircase, of which mention has already been made. I then sent one of the maids to put out of sight the wet clothes he had taken off, as they might give evidence that he was here, and finally I descended the stairs, at no very quick pace, accompanied by Uncle Barthy and old John to see who was battering the door with the heavy iron knocker, as though with the design of breaking it in.

But when I opened the little wicket to inquire, what a joyful surprise awaited me! For who should answer me but my little brother Frith, telling me he should have beaten in the door long ago, if he had been strong enough, for it was not too pleasant to be kept standing outside his own father's house with a gentle young lady in such weather as that. The bolts were speedily drawn back, the heavy chains unhooked, and the door was thrown open wide. I then saw a young lady of distinguished appearance and modest, pleasing demeanor standing beside Frith. Her dress, which was of costly material, was dripping with the rain to which she had been exposed. Before I could address a word to her, Master Frith, all wet as he was, flung his arms round my neck, and poured out a string of questions of which not the least important regarded the welfare of his grey pony. "Fie, fie," I said, chiding him gently, "you will put me in as sorry a plight as yourself, you dear, bad boy," and at last he let me go, so that I could turn to his companion.

The young lady stood by, smiling at the warm, but somewhat inopportune demonstrations of affection showered on me. Her countenance was pale, but pleasing, and the expression of her large dark eyes was very grave. "Miss Bellamy," she said, "may the unhappy daughter of one of the enemies of your faith venture to crave your hospitality?" "Miss Cecil!" I exclaimed, taking both her hands and leading her into the house, "welcome welcome to Woxindon! I have heard how good you have been to my brother Frith at Court. But for Heaven's sake, what brings you here in this weather?" "I have fled from the Queen's wrath," Lord Burghley's daughter responded, as I conducted her upstairs to my own chamber, where she could take off her wet things. She was rather taller and stouter than I was, but yet my dresses fitted her very fairly, for at Woxindon we kept to the old English costume, and had not adopted the new Franco-Spanish fashions of tight bodices and waists pinched in, which were in vogue at Court. In half an hour's time I took her downstairs to the room where my grandmother was sitting, listening to Frith's story. Good Father Weston, who had been fetched out of the hiding place, occupied an arm-chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

When Lord Burghley's daughter entered, they both came forward to greet her with great cordiality, grandmother giving her a motherly embrace, and refusing to listen to her apologies and deprecatory speeches, saying there would be plenty of time for all that when she had had rest and refreshment. When she was introduced to Father Weston, I noticed that our visitor looked at him with some embarrassment, if not timidity, for like many Protestants, she had a dread of Catholic priests, and especially of Jesuits. But she quickly recovered herself, and we gathered amicably around the supper table. Our repast ended, Miss Cecil, not without incessant interruption on Frith's part, told us the story of how she had long doubted the truth of the new doctrines, but had been unable to come to any decision on

matters of faith, because there was so much in the teaching of the Catholic Church that appeared to her strange and incomprehensible. While she was in this state of perplexity, she had learnt a great deal from her little friend Frith, who, she really believed, had been sent to Court by God in answer to her prayers for enlightenment. Oftentimes she had overheard him disputing with the other pages on religious questions, and had been struck by the force of his answers, which fully re-used the objections brought by Calvin and his followers against the most prominent dogmas of Catholicism.

Here Frith broke in. "As for that," he said, "you cannot think how stupid the pages were. Just fancy, grandmother, what rubbish one of them talked to me. He said a reformed preacher one day came to a Catholic priest, and said: Here is a poisoned Host. If you really believe what you assert that the formula you utter has the power to change the wafer into the Body of Christ, you will not hesitate to consecrate and consume it. Then we shall see whether you are right or wrong. For if the transubstantiation you talk of actually takes place, it will do you no harm; but if, as I maintain, it remains unchanged—well, you must take the consequences. The priest would not do what the minister proposed, and so they said, as he would not agree to this test, it was as plain as day that he did not believe in transubstantiation."

"The boy only repeated what the learned Dean of St. Paul's said from the pulpit of the Chapel Royal on the preceding Sunday," interposed Miss Cecil.

"Well, what answer did you make to this cunningly devised argument?" asked Father Weston, who was listening attentively to the conversation.

"The answer was easy enough," replied Frith. "I said our Lord gave His priests power to change bread, but not poison, into His Body."

"Bravo! my fine fellow, you shall have the best picture I can find for that answer," rejoined the priest. "What did the others say to that?" "Oh, nothing worth listening to. They talked loud, and said all sorts of blasphemous things, and they cursed me, and boxed my ears, and I came off badly for they were twenty to my one. But I took the odds out of big Essex, who was the first to strike me, for I knocked out one of his teeth. This occasioned such an uproar that the Queen herself rushed out of her apartments, and snatched our faces lustily with her own royal hand. The others all cried out that I, the Papist, was alone to blame, and the Queen ordered the master of the pages to put me on bread and water for a day, and administer castigation with the birch-wood. It would have fared ill with me but for Miss Cecil's kindness, she interceded for me and sent me a famous slice of cake that same evening."

Miss Cecil then went on to say that after this occurrence she frequently talked to Frith about her religious difficulties, and that he almost invariably gave her a satisfactory answer.

"Grandmother, I only repeated what you or my sister had taught me at catechism," the boy interposed. In this manner Lord Burghley's daughter gradually became more and more convinced that the truth pure and undefiled was only to be found in the Catholic Church, and she resolved, with God's grace, to return to the true fold. Yet perhaps she would have lacked courage to acquaint her royal mistress and her father with the step she contemplated taking, had not circumstances obliged her to come to a decision. The Queen had long suspected that she thought of becoming a Catholic, and had threatened her with not the withdrawal of her royal favor alone, but with lifelong imprisonment in the Tower. Only two years before, the Earl of Arundel, Philip Howard, had been immured in the Beauchamp Tower, with no hope of release unless he consented to adjure the Catholic faith. "The day before yesterday," she said, "one of the pages overheard me talking about purgatory with Frith."

could not forgive me for breaking his tooth," said Frith.

"Shortly after we were both summoned to the Queen's presence. She was in a very bad temper, as is often the case, now that she is getting old; besides the new French sempstress whom Catharine of Medici sent at her request, had not made a gown to her liking. She asked us in no very pleasant manner, whether we did not know that every one at her Court must hold the same religious belief as herself? She was the Supreme Head of the Church in England, and she required us to reject the Popish superstition about purgatory, of which not a word was to be found in the Bible. I did not know what to answer, but my little friend was by no means abashed. With more candour than prudence, he boldly replied, that he should be very sorry not to believe in a place of purgatory, as there was but one Heaven and one hell, and Holy Scripture declared that nothing unclean could enter Heaven. According to the new doctrine, almost every one must go to hell, for not many people were so free from sin and guilt at their death, that they could go straight to Heaven. Then the Queen said one drop of the Saviour's blood was enough to wash away the guilt of sin. 'Yes,' the boy replied, 'in this life. But when sin is forgotten, the penalty is not done away with. King David suffered punishment for his sin, although it had been pardoned.' Elizabeth grew furious being contradicted. 'What,' she almost screamed, 'do you say I should not go straight to Heaven?' To my horror, Frith gravely shook his head and answered: 'Your Majesty must know best about that. But I should wish for you to make a good confession before death.' 'And without that I should go to purgatory?' continued the Queen. 'I fear not,' the boy replied.

Then Elizabeth was so exasperated that she would have struck the child, had not some of the lords interposed, and said doubtless it was a slip of the tongue, and he meant to say 'I hope not.' They had some difficulty in pacifying her, and Frith was delivered over to the jailer to receive a sound caning. I tried to slip away unnoticed, but the Queen sent word to me that on the next day, when the Court was to remove to Windsor, I must either give her an unequivocal assurance of my adhesion to the Reformed religion, or be consigned to the Tower. Her Secretary Davidson should inform my father immediately of what had occurred.

I felt that the time for action had come. There was nothing for me but to seek in flight, and Frith too, must not be left at the Queen's mercy. So during the night I collected all my jewels together, and cut off all the pearls and precious stones which were, after the extravagant fashion of the day, sewn upon the stomacher of my Court dresses. They would, I thought, furnish me with the means of escaping to the continent, where I could live in seclusion and in peace. I also wrote to my father telling him what I was doing for conscience's sake, and bidding him farewell. I said much the same in a few lines addressed to her Majesty.

The next morning in the bustle and confusion of the preparations for removal, we two culprits were not thought of. This just coincided with my plans. No sooner had the Queen left the Palace, than I went to the jailer who knew me well by sight, and saying that the Page Bellamy had orders to accompany me, obtained Frith's release. Poor boy! he forgot his sore back in the joy of being again free, and on his way home, when he only thought severe punishments were in store for him."

Then Frith in his turn, related how they walked through the park together, how they were ferried over the river at Putney, dined at the "Golden Ball," and finally asked their way across the fields to Woxindon. They had not long entered St. John's Wood before the tempest began, and such was the violence of wind and rain, thunder and lightning, that they almost despaired of reaching the house.

We congratulated them heartily on their escape from the fury of the elements. But presently it occurred to grandmother, and to Father Weston likewise, that a far worse storm than that which was still raging around our walls, would soon burst over the two fugitives, and that its most formidable thunderbolts would be directed against Woxindon. Father Weston inquired of Miss Cecil when she thought the report of her flight would reach the ears of the Queen and of her father. She replied that the Queen would most likely hear of it at Windsor next evening, and her father perhaps on the day after.

Before that time therefore, we must contrive that you, Miss Cecil, and my young friend here, and myself, should be in some place of safety, as far distant as possible. We will rest to-night and to-morrow, and when evening comes again, we must start anew on our wanderings."

Miss Cecil began to apologize for the trouble her coming had caused us, but grandmother, cutting her short, proposed that the young lady and the child should be concealed in the house, or in the ruined Castle, without going further afield. But the Jesuit negatived this decisively, saying that as it was a question of discovering Lord Burghley's daughter, the house would be more thoroughly and systematically searched that it ever had been before. We could not deny the justice of what he said.

Then Miss Cecil turned to him and said: "Reverend Father, I cannot doubt that it is the hand of an all-merciful God which has led me to Woxindon while you are here. I do not know when I may have another opportunity of speaking to a Catholic priest, or what may befall me, in these troublous times. I beg you therefore, in your charity to regard me as your daughter, and if you see fit, to receive me into the Catholic Church."

We were deeply touched and greatly consoled by this request. Father Weston declared himself only too happy to render her any assistance, and asked her if there was any point of Catholic doctrine upon which she still had doubts. On her answering, not one, he told her that she had better prepare herself at once for confession; he would then receive her into the Church, and the next morning at an early hour she could hear Mass and receive Holy Communion. To this she agreed, but I could see that she felt great apprehension at the prospect of making her confession, as is always the case with adults who go to confession for the first time, and have never experienced the solace this Sacrament of Penance brings to the souls of those who approach it.

When Frith heard that Miss Cecil was to make her First Communion on the morrow, he pleaded earnestly that the like happiness might be granted to him also. Although grandmother would have preferred a longer time of preparation for him, yet at Uncle Barthy's and my request she allowed us to refer the decision to Father Weston. To our great delight he assented readily to our petition, as he considered the boy's courageous defence of his faith proved him to be sufficiently prepared.

Then Father Weston gave us a beautiful instruction on the Sacrament of Penance, dwelling on the fact that it was instituted by the Saviour on the day of His glorious Ascension, as the most estimable and richest means of grace that he could bestow upon His people. "For, when during that first Eastertide He came and stood in the midst of His Apostles, the doors being shut, and showed them the wounds in His hands and in His side, the price and pledge of the forgiveness of sins, twice He greeted them with the words: 'Peace be to you.' And He said: 'As the Father hath sent me, so send I you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them; and He said to them: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins ye shall retain, they are retained.' (St. John XX. 21, 22, 23). With such unction did the good Father expound these words that Miss Cecil's tears flowed freely at the thought of the goodness of the Saviour in bequeathing to His priests this divine power of forgiveness. Father Weston then helped us to examine our conscience, and awaken contrition and resolution of amendment, after which he heard us in confession one after the other.

When this was over, he addressed all together once more, taking Holy Communion for his subject; and then, as it was already late, we separated for the night.

Soon after daybreak, I arranged the altar in the attic chamber, where the wonderful plant, whose blossoms had given place to five scarlet berries, hung down from the rafters, and decorated it with beautiful flowers. Then I fetched Miss Cecil, to whom I had lent a white veil for the occasion. We were soon joined by Frith, who had scarcely slept for excitement, and who was to serve the Mass. Presently in the stillness of the early morning, the Holy Sacrifice was offered, and our Blessed Lord, the source of all grace, hidden under the sacramental veil, vouchsafed to come and dwell in the hearts of those who were prepared to receive him as their guest. This sacred Presence brought to us in the fulness of His mercy and loving-kindness, consolation for past sorrows, strength for coming trials, and the confident hope of an eternal reward.

CHAPTER XXVI.—After some time spent in recollection and silent

prayer, we assembled in the hall for breakfast. I wanted to take Miss Cecil into the garden, and show her Woxindon, but Father Weston put a veto upon this proposal, saying it was not without design, Providence had arranged that the two fugitives should come to us unperceived, under cover of the storm, and we must not unnecessarily expose them to observation. Grandmother said the same; accordingly we agreed to remain within doors. This was no small privation for Frith, for the cherries were ripe on the tree by the wall, and his grey pony was in the stable close by; but he acquiesced without a murmur in the wishes of his elders.

We then began seriously to deliberate upon the best means of placing our two fugitives beyond the reach of danger. Father Weston declared that nowhere in England would they be secure permanently, for it was obvious that the Queen and Lord Burghley would move heaven and earth to get Miss Cecil again into their power. It would therefore be advisable for them to cross the seas as soon as possible. He offered to furnish the boy with letters which would ensure his reception in one of the Jesuit colleges in France, or in Switzerland, where the celebrated Canisius had just opened a school in Freiburg. Miss Cecil might find a home in some convent in Brussels or elsewhere, or if she preferred, he would use his influence to procure for her the part of maid of honor at some Catholic Court. Until an opportunity for crossing the channel was found, he proposed to take them to Henley, where Lady Sturton was always ready to show hospitality to persecuted Catholics.

While we were discussing our plans, Uncle Remy suddenly came in, bringing the welcome news that Anne was desirous of returning to her parents' house. We regarded it as a truly providential circumstance, that on the very day of Frith's and Miss Cecil's First Communion, this consolation should be afforded us; and we scolded my uncle for not having brought her with him, as he knew she would be received with open arms. So he had told Anne, Uncle Remy replied; but the poor child was so downhearted about her fault, and really so far from well, that he could not persuade her to accompany him. It was agreed forthwith that in the afternoon I should ride to London with Uncle Barthy, to assure my repentant sister of full forgiveness, and bring her to Woxindon. Grandmother promised to go as far as the cross roads to meet her, like the father of the Prodigal, who did not wait for his son at the house door, but ran to meet him when he was yet afar off.

Soon after noon, accordingly, uncle and I started for the town, leading Frith's pony by a bridle rein; for Anne to ride back. Uncle Remy told us we should probably find her at Windsor's rooms in the Strand, and there in fact she was. I was shocked at her appearance, she looked so pale and haggard. As soon as she saw uncle and me, she began to sob and accuse herself in a manner that would have melted a heart of stone, lamenting bitterly her rashness in contracting a marriage upon which her grandmother would not bestow a parental blessing.

We tried to console her with our sympathy, which is oftentimes the best, the only consolation that can be given. Uncle Barthy was kindness itself, soothing and petting her like a child; finally we prevailed upon her to dress herself, and ride back with us to Woxindon. On passing through St. Giles we halted at the "Blue Boar," for Anne knew that her husband was there with his friends; in fact they were just coming out of the hostelry when we drew bridle under the oaks.

(To be continued.)

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