

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXINDON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

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(CHAPTER IX.—Continued.) Topcliffe immediately retired, while Walsingham, turning to us, said in his excuse that the fellow had his good points, and was a useful servant of Her Majesty in the prosecution of the Jesuits and secular priests sent by the Pope into our country, and who were the cause of a severity which the Queen, who was the most merciful of rulers, had of late years exercised towards Catholics.

As he finished speaking, the clock had struck half-past ten. He rose and bade us farewell, shaking hands with us in the most cordial manner. As we were leaving the room, he added playfully: "Upon second thoughts, Mr. Babington, I think my suggestion that you should go to Court was rather ill-advised. It might occasion jealousies and intrigues, or even bloody duels, if a new star arose to outshine Sir Walter Raleigh, who won her Majesty's favor at the cost of his cloak, not half so grand a one, by the bye, as that which you are wearing. So you had better beware how you launch your gallant bark on to such stormy seas. An revoir, dear sirs, and think of old Walsingham, who is not as bad as he is painted, as one of your best friends. What was I going to say? Oh, the two little Billams had better be sent to you, Mr. Windsor; you will be so good as to see that they reach Woxindon in safety. I believe you live in this neighborhood?"

"Close by—next door to the Anchor on the Strand." "That is all right. Pooley can take the children to you, or perhaps my nephew St. Barbe had better go. Once more good day to you!" So saying, with a polite bow, which we returned, he went back into his cabinet.

CHAPTER X.

In the entrance hall we found Robt. Pooley waiting for us. Babington, who was almost beside himself for joy, literally fell upon his neck, exclaiming: "Hurrah for the Lord Secretary of State! Never amongst non-Catholics have I found a man of such good sense and good feeling, never did I think that I should find one." In fact he was so boisterous in his rejoicing, that some of the clerks came out of the office to see what the noise was about. I put my arm through his, and tried to get him away, but he would not be checked, and invited all present to join us at the Anchor, and drink Walsingham's health in a bottle of canary.

There was a little whispering between Pooley and the clerks, then he and two others, Thomas Phillips 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 Phillips, a red-haired fellow with sharp, feral eyes, and a countenance strongly marked by the smallpox. 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 the 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, our three guests took their cue, and said all they could in his favour, 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 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 clue 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, 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 heads again and go quietly to Mass. "In this 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 fare 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 parlor 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 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 behaviour 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 the 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 yourselves 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; or 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 bear 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 housekeeper, old Barbara came hurriedly into the



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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 Bellams 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 as one 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.

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cess, and I suppressed the hasty ac-