

THE WONDERFUL FLOWER OF WOXINDON.

An Historical Romance of the Times of Queen Elizabeth.

BY REV. JOSEPH SPILLMAN, S. J.

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CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

This was no sooner said than done. Frith mounted the priest's horse, a gentle animal, which trotted along beside old John, who as he neared the gate, began to sing snatches of drinking songs like a man in his cups, so that Topcliffe's men heard him coming from afar.

Such had been the adventures little Frith had met with. I need hardly say that he did not tell me all this that same evening, but only came to my side when father was being carried upstairs, and pulled my sleeve, whispering "It is all right." And even this one word, which took at least one load off my mind, nearly got me into fresh trouble; for Topcliffe, who had eyes before and behind, flew like a hawk upon the boy, asking him what was all right, and where he had been.

When we had put my father to bed in the spacious room upstairs, beneath the very spot, as I already remarked, where the wonderful flower grew, Topcliffe took Windsor aside, and put a few questions to him. Immediately after, he announced his intention of quartering himself upon us, with all his men. For the latter was to be served in the hall, with bread and meat, or whatever else was in the house; for himself, as he was tired out, he would sleep upon a sack of straw upstairs, it would be time enough next morning to make a thorough search in the house.

I must acknowledge that the quiet, modest behavior of the young doctor did not fail to make a good impression upon me, and he soon won my confidence. I plucked up courage to ask him, when my father appeared to have fallen asleep, what he thought of his condition? He shrugged his shoulders and looking at me very gravely, said: "Miss Bellamy, the first words I speak to you shall not be calculated to deceive you, therefore my answer must be this: All things are possible to the God whom we serve, but medical skill can do nothing more for him."

These words, which struck sorrow to my heart, were said in so kind a manner that through the tears that filled my eyes, I looked gratefully at the young man. As soon as I could control myself, I asked how long he thought my father might live.

"A few days, perhaps even longer," he replied. "But he may go off much sooner, if he has a fresh attack, as I fear he will."

"Then he is in immediate danger of death, and if it were possible, we ought to have him anointed?" I inquired.

He nodded assent. Then a sudden thought struck me. "Did that man—that Topcliffe—ask you about my father's state?" I said.

"He did," was the reply, "and I told him his condition was most critical."

Windsor listened to me attentively and asked me a few questions, then he acknowledged I was right. He went to the window, to ascertain, as far as the darkness would allow, at what height it was from the ground, asking what the rooms were below. I answered they were my grandmother's, my sister's and my own.

"That is fortunate," he remarked. "And under them?"—"The library," "That again is well. The height from the ground will be at most some 35 or 40 feet," he continued, asking me did I know whether there was a ladder that length on the premises? I replied that there was one at the stables which would reach up to the roof. But why all these questions? We could not tell the servants to bring the ladder and put it against the house, still less could we send them to fetch the priest. At the mention of the priest, Windsor asked if he was perhaps hidden somewhere in the house, where one might get at him without attracting the notice of the pursuivants. I answered, no; he was most probably lying hidden in the old castle, not more than five minutes walk from here; my little brother Frith knew the place exactly.

After questioning me in this wise Windsor paced up and down the room a few times without speaking. Then he stopped and said to me in a low voice: "Miss Bellamy, I have made a plan, a somewhat venturesome one, but not, I think, impossible. In such a case as this one must be a little daring." He then asked me if I could help to get the priest into the house in defiance of Topcliffe, and this I promised to do most willingly, not indeed for the sake of defying Topcliffe, but for my poor father's spiritual benefit and consolation, provided the scheme was not too impossible of execution. He replied that the only, or at least the chief difficulty that he foresaw was that of getting out did I perhaps know whether there was a rope for a clothes line of sufficient length anywhere on the premises? I told him there was a clothes line hanging up in the laundry, and the laundry was not one of the out-houses, but under the roof, close to the kitchen. He begged me to endeavor to get the line, and bring it upstairs concealed under my frock, for if I could succeed in doing so, the first step would be taken in the accomplishment of our design. My little brother Frith could be gently lowered to the ground by means of a rope; he could cautiously conduct the priest to the house, and it would be easy for his Reverence to get into the room by means of the ladder, and administer extreme unction to the sick man.

I made all manner of objections to this scheme. First of all I said that it was out of the question for the priest, with no assistance but Frith's, to drag a heavy ladder to this spot, still more to plant it against the wall, while to take the servants and get them to help would be incurring too great a risk. Windsor said he would himself slip down the rope and help the clergyman. "But what, I asked, was to be done if Topcliffe persisted in demanding admittance to the chamber whilst the priest was in it?"—"Then we must bolt the door," Windsor replied, "until he had got down into the garden again, and the ladder was removed."

"One must trust somewhat to the help of Providence and of the good angels. The priest would not be many minutes at his work, for under exceptional circumstances such as these the sacrament could be administered in a few brief words. I was silent for a few minutes, thinking over the plan in my own mind. Then after an "Ave Maria," said in secret, I inquired whether he had taken into consideration the fact that he would be making himself accessory to an action punishable by law with the severest penalties, imprisonment or even worse? He looked up at me with a loyal, generous expression in his eyes, saying that were he condemned to eternal death for such a deed of Christian charity, he should rejoice to have been able to render this service to my father in his last illness. All my hesitation was now at an end: I forthwith took a lamp, to go down into the kitchen and fetch the rope, trusting to the divine protection. Windsor gave me some good advice as to what I should say if I met either Topcliffe or one of his myrmidons, and down stairs I went, although with a beating heart.

As I opened the door I fancied that the door of the opposite side moved slightly. As it was unoccupied, it struck me that Topcliffe or one of his men might be on the watch there, so I stepped up to it quickly, closed the door, locked it, for the key happened to be outside, and put the key into my pocket. Then I went on my way, as if it were the most natural thing in the world just to turn a key in a lock. On reaching the lowest step of the stairs, I all but stumbled on one of the pursuivants, and in my fright I uttered a scream, and nearly let my lamp fall. The man who had been placed there to watch got up onto his feet, and asked me very crossly what I wanted there. I replied that I was obliged to go down to the kitchen, to fetch something the sick man needed, but what business had he to be sleeping on the staircase at night? I could find a more easy couch for him than that. He told me I had better ask Topcliffe, whom I must have met upstairs, what business he had to be there; then with a muttered oath he resumed his seat on the stairs, and leaning his head against the balusters, went off again into a heavy sleep, for he had evidently been drinking deeply. Thus I discovered that my suspicions were well founded. Topcliffe was, in fact, guarding the approach to the staircase and the sickroom, with the design of seizing the priest in the act of administering the last sacraments. Had he not also stationed sentries outside the house as well? Certainly he might not consider that necessary, since he believed the priest to be already in the house. Yet it was possible, so I determined to step out of the kitchen door, which opened on to the garden, and just run round the castle. I perceived nothing unusual, so I went upstairs again, after I had secured the rope and fastened it beneath my dress. For appearances' sake, I carried with me a jar of clec-tuary, and this time I managed to pass the sleeping guard without disturbing his slumbers. As I went by the door which I had locked, I thought I saw the handle turned, as if some one were endeavoring to open it from the inside. It would readily be imagined that I was not disposed to assist him in this attempt.

Having got back in safety to the sick-room, my first question naturally was about my father. Windsor said his pulse was weaker, and his general condition such as not to justify us in putting off the anointing until the next night. I told him what I had done, and asked him whether it would not be the easier way to fetch the priest and bring him upstairs while the guard was asleep? After a few moments' deliberation he said that, if, as was probable, Topcliffe was the individual I had locked in the adjacent room, he would make a very devil of a noise when he heard steps to and fro on the stairs, and knew the priest was being brought in. Or did I feel sure that the boy could get downstairs past the guard and out of the doors to summon the Father if he went barefoot and took no light with him?

We concluded that it would be best to let Frith himself answer this question; accordingly I went into the next room, where I found grand mother wide awake while Anne and the boy had fallen fast asleep in their chairs. After telling grandmother what we meant to do, I tried to wake my brother. This was no easy task, for as soon as I got him to stand up, he almost fell down, his eyes were so heavy, and not till they had been bathed with cold water, could we make him understand what we wanted of him. But then a fresh obstacle presented itself, for it was impossible to persuade Frith to go alone and in the middle of the night to the old castle. The poor child began to cry, and tell us about the black dog with fiery eyes which he saw at the cross-ways. I must acknowledge that a cold shiver ran over me on hearing this uncanny story, yet for my father's sake I did not hesitate to offer to accompany Frith on his mission. But Windsor, who saw from my face what an effort this would cost me, declared he would go with Frith, and to this my grandmother agreed. (To be continued.)

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BY MRS. MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

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We praise Thee! We bless Thee! O Lord of death and life! We follow where Thy feet have gone, Through deepest night to fairest dawn, To peace through bitter strife!

We praise Thee! We bless Thee! Even when our hearts are riven! Thou art a-near the dying bed, Thy hand beneath the fainting head, And Thou Thyself art heaven!

We praise Thee! We bless Thee! Beside each lowly mound That, daisy-starred or lily sown, Is but the cover gently thrown O'er one in Jesus found.

We praise Thee! We bless Thee! With every pulse and breath. Ours is the never-ending hymn That saints began in ages dim, Thou Conqueror of Death!

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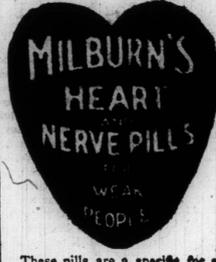
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Mrs. George Williams, Fairfield Plains, Ont., writes as follows: "As there are so many other medicines offered for sale in substitution for Laxa-Liver Pills I am particular to get the genuine, as they far surpass anything else for regulating the bowels and correcting stomach disorders."

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