

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 XV.—(Continued.)

At the mention of Mary Stuart, Elizabeth started as if she had been shot; her countenance twitched; one might have fancied that the crying injustice of which she was guilty towards that unhappy lady, suddenly appeared before her in its true colors. How is that horrid Scotch-woman? she inquired. "If my subjects only knew how long she has been a thorn in my side. How often the thought of her has cost me my night's sleep, some honest evangelist would have rid me of her, as Phineas removed the scandal from among the children of Israel. But all the time she pretends love and friendship for ourselves, calls us her 'dear sister,' sends diamond rings, while she is weaving one plot after another against us, and would strangle us with her own hands if she could. Did you see her? How is she looking? and what is she doing?"

I depicted the Queen of Scots' condition, the unhealthy palor of her complexion, her grey hair, her feeble walk, and said Sir Amias Paulet was of opinion that besides the rheumatism from which she suffered, she had a great tendency to dropsy. Elizabeth would not believe this, she said the woman was an arrant hypocrite, and we must not for God's sake allow ourselves to be deceived by her, for if she were once at liberty she would send her stick flying, and run about nimbly. When I told the Queen how I had seen her in the courtyard amidst the beggars, thinking, like the simpleton I was, that it would touch her, she burst out right angrily. Did I not perceive, she exclaimed, that this was the viper wormed herself into the affections of the poor and the peasantry? That very day a messenger should be sent to Sir Amias to put a stop to this amagiving, and order him to allow his prisoner no intercourse with the people. Thus I was the involuntary means, for which may God forgive me, of causing an order to be issued that added another to the many sorrows of the unhappy captive.

When Elizabeth's rage had subsided, she turned to another subject, beginning to speak to me about Lord Burghley's daughter. I felt very much embarrassed, as I did not know what she was driving at. She remarked my confusion, and was amused at it; she told me I was a naughty fellow, for a little bird had long since whispered to her that I was in love with the beautiful, clever and rich, very rich, Miss Cecil, and she admired my taste. Burghley, she said had taken care to feather his own nest with the spoils of the Egyptians. And she thought she could assure me that of all the fortune hunters who paid court to the heiress, none was more favorably regarded than myself. She did not grudge me the preference shown me, for she considered I gave promise of great abilities, which would do me service to the State; and then the Queen proceeded to say: "The interest I take in the young lady, as well as in you, Mr. St. Barbe, makes me desirous to say a word to you, Miss Judith thinks a great deal too much; her mind runs upon religious questions; I even have reason to suspect that she is not so firm an Evangelical as one could wish, and hankers after the flesh-pots of Egypt, the old Popish loaves. On that account I am desirous you should come to Richmond. Do you talk to her on the subject, I will see that you have an opportunity this evening. She has confidence in you, and will speak much more openly to you than to her father. He has changed his creed too often, as the exigencies of the times demanded, for her to have much respect for his religious convictions. She corresponded with you about the vexed question of predestination; I read your answers, they did you great credit. I need not add that her perversion to Popery would forfeit all my favor, and involve the loss of all her property. So do what you can to discover what the girl really thinks, and if necessary, set her right."

Thereupon I was graciously dismissed from the royal presence. The audience had been of so unusual a length that when I entered the ante-chamber, where Sir Walter Raleigh was waiting, that gentleman did not look at me in a very amiable manner, and several of the courtiers began to predict that Walsingham's nephew was the rising star, that is, the new favorite.

In the afternoon the sweet spring weather tempted the queen to walk abroad in the park, where the younger members of the Court were to engage in various sports. At a spot somewhat higher up the river the royal barges were in attendance to convey the whole company back to Richmond. The park, in

love and care for you, amongst whom I pray I may be reckoned. Finally, I should warn you, as the Queen authorized me to do, that you should incur her most serious displeasure, and among other serious penalties that of being completely disinherited. "I am much obliged to you, Mr. St. Barbe, for your frankness in thus warning me of what I might expect from her Majesty, as well as for your own kind, and I am sure, well meant admonitions. As I regard you as a real friend, I too will answer you in all sincerity. First of all, I know you will admit that no worldly considerations ought to have any weight with me, were I really convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion. The martyrs did not shrink from far worse consequences; they endured the most cruel tortures and death itself rather than abjure the true faith or remain in what they knew to be error. Therefore no fear of temporal disadvantages, hard as I might find them to bear, ought to deter me from searching after the truth; for resistance to the known truth would be the sin against the Holy Ghost, wherewith St. Stephen reproached the Jewish Sanhedrim. You allow that, do you not?"

I was compelled to own that I did. "Very well," Miss Cecil continued, "then let there be no more mention between us of the consequences, as I am well aware of them. The question to be decided is whether the old or the new religion is the Church founded by Jesus Christ. On this point I confess my mind is not at rest: But the more I think it over, the more I pray about it, the less can I believe in the Church established by Parliament and our Queen." She then with her keen, quick intelligence sketched the origin of the Anglican Church under Henry VIII., and its history up to that day, emphasizing the cause which induced Elizabeth's father to separate from the universal Church, and Elizabeth herself to repudiate that same Church to which she had belonged under Mary, the Catholic. In Henry's case it was the desire for a woman who later on he caused to be beheaded for adultery; in Elizabeth's the desire to have the legitimacy of her birth and her right to the throne publicly acknowledged. Since that time Parliament made some change almost every year in religion, and the people were taught the most contradictory tenets.

In answer to this I urged that the fault rested with the Church of Rome which had overlaid the truth of Jesus Christ with so many human inventions, that it was a task of some time for enlightened men to purge away the dross from the pure gold of the Gospel.

She replied that the most incomprehensible thing of all to her was that at any time in Christendom the teaching of Jesus Christ should have been falsified in any essential point. She asked me, did I not believe that Jesus Christ was true God, omniscient, omnipotent and all-wise? "Most assuredly," I replied, "and I would lay down my life for it."

"Well then, she went on, "what did this all-wise, this almighty, this true God say when He sent out His apostles, commanding them to proclaim His doctrines? You know the passage at the close of St. Matthew's gospel: 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.' What does that mean, if not that I, the Lord of Heaven and of Earth, promise that my divine assistance shall never be wanting to you and to your successors in teaching the truths I brought down from Heaven, and in dispensing the means of grace? In St. Mark's gospel he adds these words: 'He that believeth not shall be condemned;' and in another place, He promises Peter that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church. I ask you now how this can be explained, if those who as the successors of Jesus Christ are invested with authority to teach, have for at least the last thousand years deceived the whole of Christendom on the most important points, leading them into fatal errors and degrading idolatry; as for instance, concerning the Holy Mass and the Real Presence of our Lord in the most holy sacrament of the altar? How, were this the case, could it be true that this Divine Teacher is with His Church all days? Can it be supposed that He would compel mankind to accept a lie under pain of eternal damnation? Or have the gates of hell for the last thousand years prevailed against the teaching of Christ? No, Mr. St. Barbe, I see no other alternative than, either to acknowledge that the Ancient Church has on no essential article of faith departed from the truth—and if so, I must receive her doctrines—or, to assert that she has departed from the truth, and then the word of Christ and His solemn assurance are proved worthless. In other words, Jesus Christ is not true God, He is deceived or a deceiver, and if we say this, the whole fabric of Christianity crumbles at a touch. I beg and implore you to help me out of this terrible alternative, for I can perceive no third course to adopt."

As long as we could be seen from the river, we walked along in silence. But looking round, we became aware that the royal barge, together with the other boats, had put off, and were already under way. "There now," exclaimed Miss Judith, "the Queen might have waited a few moments for us! Now we shall have to walk back alone all the way through the park!" "Miss Cecil," I replied, "I am delighted at the prospect of this walk through the quiet woods and meadows in your charming company. I would give up the honor of a place on the royal barge for it a thousand times over."

I heard enough this morning, Mr. St. Barbe, to convince me that during your sojourn in Paris you have become an adept in the art of flattery," my companion rejoined somewhat ingratiingly. "But I thought you knew me better than to address these empty compliments to me."

"I was afraid I had incurred your displeasure this morning," I resumed, "on account of my little exaggerations. I was ashamed of them myself, and only made use of them in deference of my uncle's wishes, and because I thought they were expected of me. You may be assured I have no intention to flatter you, on the contrary, I mean to speak quite openly; so I begin by telling you that the errand on which our Sovereign has sent us was only a pretext to give me an opportunity of conversing with you without fear of interruption."

Miss Judith stood still and looked at me in bewildered surprise. "What could the Queen mean by that?" she inquired. "I will tell you," I answered, as we sauntered along side by side under the spreading trees. "Her Majesty imagines herself to have discovered that the doctrines of the Gospel no longer satisfy your heart, and that you have a leaning towards the old Popish creed; not that I believe this for a moment. She took it into her head that I ought to ask you about this, and warn you of the peril to which you would expose your soul's salvation, for she credited me with possessing some influence over you, my dear young lady."

Miss Judith walked a few steps without speaking, then she responded: "What if it really were so? What if my heart and my reason alike revolted from the vague, often contradictory teaching of the Reformers? Supposing I really did feel drawn to the ancient faith our forefathers held, what would the Queen have you say to me then?"

I was not a little alarmed at this speech, and hastened to reply: "Of my own accord I should make every endeavor to expose the snares of the devil, the fallacious arguments, that is, wherewith he who was a liar from the beginning seeks to entrap simple souls and draw them into error. I should beg you on my knees to think of the interests of your soul, and also of the temporal consequences which would result from your apostasy. Furthermore, I should represent to you the grief that such an act on your part would cause to your father, and to all who

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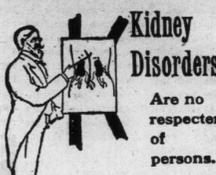
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