

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE Times of Queen Elizabeth.

The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon,

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CHAPTER XXXVI. CONTINUED.

After a few moments I consented, considering that it was a work of charity to console the afflicted, trusting to my guardian angel to preserve me from harm. Accordingly that night, before the moon was up, I went with the old boatman to the Develin tower, which was situated at the north-west corner of the inner enclosure. We had to pass the quarters of the musketeers, and I was terribly afraid of the guard. But Bell steered our course so wisely that we escaped their notice. When we got to the Church of St. Peter "ad vincula," we stood up close to the wall, until the sentry had turned, and we heard his steps retreating in the opposite direction. Then we stole on to the Develin tower; the warder was waiting to admit us into the dark dungeon where poor Tichbourne was crouching on a bundle of straw.

"Whom have you brought?" he asked my companion, starting up as we entered. "I said I wanted a notary."

The man explained that in the Tower one must have whom one could get; besides he was bringing an old acquaintance. He turned his lantern on my face, and Tichbourne recognized me at once. In a few words I told him how I came there; he was greatly touched, and listened to my expressions of sympathy with tears in his eyes. Then he kissed my hand, and declared his readiness to forgive all who had brought these misfortunes upon him, primarily Babington; also Salsingham, whose intrigues he attributed to the connection of their plot with Savage's design, his judges, and the cruel Queen, who had commanded the frightful sentence to be carried out with the utmost severity. He also said that he accepted this violent death in expiation of his sins.

I laid the paper which I had brought with me on a wooden stool, to serve as a table, and kneeling before it, I wrote from his dictation a wonderfully beautiful letter to his poor young wife. In touching words he begged her forgiveness. His zeal for the Catholic cause, his compassion for the innocent Queen of Scots, his attachment to his friends, had brought him to this pass. He had to choose between betraying his associates or giving himself up to the hangman, and the latter seemed to him the most honorable alternative. That thought must be his and her consolation. The manner of his death would be no disgrace because so many priests had drunk the same chalice, and thereby cast a halo round the shameful gibbet. He died, like many of his noble ancestors, for a chivalrous cause, the rescue of the innocent, and the promotion of religion; so at least he thought, when he engaged in the enterprise. It had turned out otherwise; but God and all good men would look to the intention, not the result. Finally he exhorted her to find true solace in God, and concluded with the hope of an eternal reunion hereafter.

I read over to him what I had written, and he attempted to sign it. An illegible scrawl was all that he could achieve. "Mr. Topcliffe with his rack is a bad writing-master," he said, as he handed me back the pen with a sorrowful smile. Then he begged me to write down some verses that he had composed since he was sentenced. They are very melancholy, and show how much it cost him to give up his life; yet I liked them so much that I asked if I might keep a copy of them, in reward for my services as amanuensis. He consented willingly, and asked me to pray for him on the day of execution, and afterwards for the repose of his soul. The following are the verses he dictated:—

My prime of youth is but a frost of care;
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain;
My crop of corn is but a field of tears;
And all my goods is but vain hope of gain;
The day is fled, and yet I saw no sun;
And now I live, and now my life is done!

My spring is past, and yet it hath not sprung;
The fruit is dead, and yet the leaves are green;
My youth is past, and yet I am

but young;
I saw the world, and yet I was not seen;
My thread is cut, and yet it is not spun;
And now I live, and now my life is done!

I sought for death and found it in the womb;
I lookt for life and yet it was a shade;
I trade the ground and knew it was my tombe,
And now I dye, and now I am but made,
The glass is full, and yet my glass is run—
And now I live, and now my life is done!

Bill Bell warned me that it was time to depart, if I wanted to look in on my uncle, who was confined in the same tower. So I bade farewell to Tichbourne, whom I I never to see again on earth, and followed my companion into another cell. I only stayed a moment with uncle Remy, and we said but few words to one another. "Is that you Mary," he said, when he recognized me, rubbing his eyes, as if to rouse himself from sleep, but I saw he wanted to conceal the tears that filled them. "It is too bad of you, to come and wake me out of my first sleep." Then the strong man broke down, and sobbed like a child. He clasped me to his heart, caressing me, and saying: "What an old blockhead I am! Now go, child, and do not trouble yourself any more about me, except to pray for me. Barty is already in heaven, and he will help me to follow him. Give my love to mother and poor Anne." He turned his face to the wall and made me a sign to go. In that manner we parted.

On Tuesday, the 20th of September, A. 1. 1586, the first half of the condemned conspirators were executed. It was a warm autumn morning. A great number of bailiffs and men-at-arms accompanied the mournful procession which was formed under our windows. Three hurdles were brought, and at 9 o'clock, precisely the accused were led out and bound on them. Sir Owen Hopton gave the signal, and they wle set in motion. On the first hurdle were Ballard, Babington and Savage, the supposed ring-leaders of the plot; next came Tichbourne and Barnewell, while two of their friends, strangers to me, Tilney and Abingdon, brought up to rear. The men appeared to be tranquil and self-possessed; as the hurdles disappeared beneath the gateway of the Bloody Tower, I caught the sound of the "Miserere," which Ballard began. They were dragged, as I heard to my disgust, all the way through the town to St. Giles-in-the-Fields, where they used to meet to concoct their plan for Mary Stuart's deliverance. There, under the spreading oaks, were the gallows and scaffold erected. Bravely they went to their death. Ballard again declared that all he had done was done in good faith and for the sake of religion, and never had he conspired against the Queen's life. Babington said the same; he acknowledged his error, and implored forgiveness. Tichbourne spoke at greater length. He depicted his happy youth, when he wanted nothing he could wish for, and said nothing was further from his mind than a conspiracy against the Queen. He was the victim of regard for his friend. He was descended of a house that had existed for 200 years before the conquest, and whose members were never stained with crime. Tilney declared that he was a true Catholic; upon which he was interrupted by the Protestant minister, a Dr. White, who was present. Tilney replied: "I came hither to die, Doctor, not to dispute," and desired to be troubled with no more questions. Then they fell to prayers, and I believe Ballard gave his companions the last absolution. The dreadful execution followed, over the details of which we must pass, only remarking, that by the express orders of the Queen, they were put to death with studied cruelty, their sufferings being protracted to the uttermost. Ballard was executed first; he was disembowelled while yet alive, and fully conscious. Babington followed; his youth and elegance made a great impression on the spectators. In the midst of his

agonizing torments he cried several times aloud in Latin: "Parce mihi, Domine Jesu!" In like manner all the others were put to death in their turn.

The horrid scene, together with the patience of the victims, had excited the disgust and pity of the bystanders to such a pitch, that when, on the following day, my uncle Remy and the rest were to be executed, this was done with less cruelty, for fear of an uprising of the people. They were therefore not cut to pieces until after death.

At length these terrible days were ended. The victims had been sacrificed, and I thanked God that it was all over. I had now only to think of the two sick prisoners in the Cold Harbor, and it seemed probable that through the mercy of God their sufferings would, ere long, be terminated also.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—I had been kept a close prisoner in Walsingham's house for a fortnight, when he came to me one morning, and talked quite kindly to me at first; presently, however, he asked me if I had not yet come to a better mind. Quietly and firmly I replied that I could not do better than follow my conscience, even if by so doing I destroyed my earthly prospects. Thereupon he rose up and said: "Very well. As you please. To the Tower you will go this very evening." With these words he left me.

When darkness had closed in, old Gray came in. Placing upon the table a link that he carried, he began: "Mr. St. Barbe, His Excellency the Secretary of State desires me to ask whether what you said this morning is your final decision. Upon my giving an answer in the affirmative, he shook his gray head, and besought me to have pity on my youth. "It is useless to swim against the current. Your evidence will not be taken against that of the Secretary of State; the proofs are destroyed. Look at those two secretaries, Nau and Curle; they began by protesting they would rather die than be faithless to their gracious mistress. Now they have gradually taken down their pride, for fear of prison and rack they have already asserted that the letter shown them by Walsingham appears to be genuine, or is at any rate the same in its main features as the original. Some further revelations to their mistress' disadvantage may presently be expected from them. What would you have! Life is sweet and the rack very bitter. Another thing, young sir; you cannot possibly save Mary Stuart, you will only ruin yourself and bring your uncle into disgrace with the Queen. And let one who has known you from a boy tell you in confidence, your uncle's monetary affairs are in a bad state. You know how parsimonious the Queen is in regard to grants of money for political purposes, lavish as she is in her expenditure on dress. Consequently Walsingham has been compelled to pay the hundreds of spies he employs in Paris, Madrid, Rome, and even in the seminaries and convents, to a great extent out of his private means. This last conspiracy, the progress of which he has watched by means of his emissaries, and utilized to his own ends, has cost him a mint of money. Unless he gets some gift from the Queen, he is undone. He means to ask Her Majesty to bestow Babington's estate, which is said to be the finest property in Derbyshire, on you; and he will probably get it, because he ascribed to you the principal part in the disclosure of the conspiracy. You already stand high in the favor of the Queen, whom God preserve!" She has twice sent a messenger to inquire after your well-being; each time your uncle had to answer that you were still suffering from the fever you had contracted in Her Majesty's service."

"The next report will be that I am dead and buried," I rejoined. "It will be true; for once the gates of the Tower are closed on me, I shall be dead and buried as far as this world goes. You mean kindly, and I thank you for your good intentions; but I would rather be buried alive than incur the guilt of innocent blood. I am sorry that my uncle should get into trouble on my account, but we all know ingratitude is the worldling's reward." Thereupon Gray drew a paper

from his doublet, and laying his hand on my arm, said: "I arrest you in the Queen's name by order of the Secretary of State."

I followed him without resistance. At the door of the house two armed men placed themselves on either side of me, and we passed through the narrow alleys to the riverside, where a boat was waiting. We soon reached the Tower, on whose turrets and battlements the calm moonlight rested. Once more I looked up at the glorious moon and the star-lit firmament; once more I inhaled the cool night air, as a light wind from the sea fanned my temples; once more I heard the sounds of mirth and music wafted on the breeze from the southward side. "A few moments," I said to myself, "and you will be cast into God knows what underground dungeon, never again to behold the clear sky, to breathe the fresh air, or hear the sound of merry laughter!"

Passing the King's stairs and the Traitor's gate, we stopped at a landing place opposite the Cradle tower, the so-called Tower docks, a narrow embankment between the river on the one side and the moat of the fortress on the other. As we stepped out of the boat, Gray, who sat beside me without speaking, laid his hand on my arm, and said: "One word and we go back!" I shook my head; the narrow drawbridge over the moat was let down. A man came forward from the shadow of the gateway to meet us. It was the Lieutenant of the Tower; he conducted me in silence into the interior of the fortress, past the Bloody tower, where a sentry challenged us, and across the green to the Bell tower, where he unlocked the door of a prison, which was, I thought, to be my abode for an unlimited time, probably until the day of my death.

This cell I recognized at the first glance as the one wherein, in Henry VIII's reign, John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, was confined. He, with the learned Chancellor Thomas More, and a few Carthusian monks, had the courage to adhere to the old faith, and refuse to acknowledge the Royal Supremacy. The dungeon in question is a vaulted apartment not more than five feet square, occupying the upper story of the round tower. The walls are of enormous thickness; several loophole-like windows look onto the Thames, onto the Beward tower opposite, or across the broad moat to the heights of Tower Hill. Before a clumsy chimney-place some bundles of straw were piled to form a bed; the floor was composed of rough paving stones. It was considered one of the best cells in the Tower, yet I shivered when I thought of spending the winter, aye, many a winter too, within its damp, cold walls. Only the remembrance of the holy Bishop, an old man of 75 years, who half a century before, had inhabited and sanctified by his presence this dismal place, inspired me with courage and resolution.

Now began for me the monotonous, miserable life of a prisoner, for which the confinement in my uncle's house had but poorly prepared me. There I could sit comförtably at the window, and watch the coming and going in the street below. Here the windows were so high that it was all I could do to lay hold of the iron bars and pull myself up for a moment to catch a glimpse of the river or of Tower Hill. Hour after hour I paced up and down, to and fro in the narrow space between the walls of my cell. Then I would throw myself upon my couch of straw to rest, and resume after a while my weary march. Thus day after day, and week after week went by. The autumn passed and winter came, with its short days and long nights, when rough winds raged round the Tower, and drove cold rain or whirling snow through the crevices of the ill-fitting casements; or an icy fog rose from the Thames, and enveloped tower and tenement in a damp, white shroud. The joyous feast of Christmas passed, the remembrance of which made my captivity more intolerable, and the New Year followed with a frost so sharp that the water in my pitcher froze, and I could only quench my thirst with lumps of ice which melted in my mouth.

And how were my thoughts occupied during all these days, one of which exactly resembled the other, and during the long, dreary nights, when the cold prevented one from sleeping? I had leisure to think of my past life, and repent of my disloyal resistance to the known truth. Yes, I had indeed been disloyal. A long time ago in Richmond Park I had acknowledged to myself, that the Church of Christ could never depart from the doctrines of her founder, and Campion's book had strengthened that persuasion. All that I had seen since, the example of the martyred priests; the much-enduring Queen, her innocence, her gentleness and her angelic patience;

the heroic courage displayed by Miss Cecil, in giving up all for conscience's sake; Windsor's noble behaviour and Christian forgiveness; all this, in contrast to the conduct of Elizabeth and her ministers, the vile forgery committed by Walsingham—all this had served to confirm my conviction. I now saw how worthless were the arguments wherewith I had sought to combat them, how I had persuaded myself that I was not bound to join the old, proscribed religion, or at least that I might defer giving in my adhesion to it until a more favorable occasion. I remembered the words of Scripture: "I called, and you refused," and the awful threat that follows those words. I felt truly contrite for my sins, besought mercy from God, and accepted my imprisonment as a just chastisement. Such were my meditations throughout the days and nights of that terrible winter.

The old man, Bill Bell, who brought me my food, used often to stay and talk with me awhile. I spoke to him about the old and about the new religion, and soon discovered that he had remained a Catholic at heart, albeit, like thousands of his fellow-countrymen, he had yielded to the pressure of persecution, hoping that in time the old religion would be re-established. I tried to set before him the obligation of making profession publicly of his belief, and declared my own readiness to do so, provided an opportunity presented itself. He then told me of Father Crichton, and of the services held by night in the Earl of Arundel's cell, in the Beauchamp tower, which was connected with the Bell tower by what was called the prisoner's way. On my expressing an earnest desire to have an interview with Mr. Crichton, and to assist at the service, Bill Bell said he would mention it to Miss Bellamy, of whose self-sacrificing charity he had already spoken to me. Without a bribe the warden of the Beauchamp would not leave the door open leading to the walk along the ramparts; he hoped Miss Bellamy would give what was required, for he knew I had not so much as a groat in my possession.

This conversation took place towards the end of January. A few days later Bill remarked to me that the morrow was Candlemas Day, and it was quite possible that he might forget to lock my door that evening. If I chose, I might see, about 3 o'clock in the morning, whether the small door of the Beauchamp tower was left ajar, for on a feast of Our Lady, Lord Arundel was so much certain to have Mass in the prison. All day long I prayed that this plan might succeed, and all the night I watched anxiously for the clock to strike three. Never did the time appear as long. Before the last stroke of the bell had died away, I left my cell, and felt my way along the dark corridor. It was a stormy night; snow and frozen rain beat over the ramparts, as I crept along beneath them. All at once I heard footsteps behind me; I gave myself up for lost, as there was no means of turning aside. But I perceived the figure following me to be that of a woman, and I conjectured a right that it was none other than Miss Bellamy, to whom I was indebted for this opportunity of hearing Mass. I attempted to thank her, but she stopped me, saying, for the man who saved Windsor's life, she would do much more. Then I remembered she was Windsor's betrothed, and that she had helped Miss Cecil to leave the country. I would willingly have said a few words more, but she reminded me that it was neither the time nor the place for conversation, and only asked me to pray for her sister, who had died not many hours before.

In Arundel's cell all was ready for Mass. I knelt down amongst the few persons present, and followed the great act of worship with faith and devotion. What a mystery of faith, that the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth should descend into this poor prison under the form of bread! What a mystery of love, that He should accomplish this marvel of divine omnipotence! A mystery worthy of a religion founded by God Himself, at which my heart rejoiced and yet trembled. The short address Father Crichton delivered on the festival of the day, struck me forcibly also. The idea of sacrifice as the root of all that is good and profitable to the soul, sank deep into my mind. After Mass I spoke to Father Crichton, telling him who I was, how unfaithful I had been to grace, and how greatly I desired to return to the fold of the one true Church, founded by Christ Himself. He was extremely kind, and accompanied me to my cell, where he heard my confession and gave me absolution. As he spoke the words of pardon, tears of contrition and repentance streamed from my eyes, and unspeakable peace took possession of my heart.

How happy I then felt! I thought I should be content to spend the remainder of my days in the dungeons of the Tower. What was earthly suffering to one who was a child of God, and heir of the kingdom of heaven?

About a week later, as it was getting dark one evening, I heard shouts of joy in the direction of Tower Hill, and saw the red glare of a great fire. I raised myself by laying hold of the iron bars of the grating before the window sufficiently to see a multitude of citizens dancing around a bonfire as if intoxicated with delight; they gave cheers for Elizabeth, the valiant Judith, who had beheaded the female Holopernes. I guessed at once what this rejoicing meant, for I had been told that in the foregoing October Mary Stuart was condemned to death by the Star Chamber at Westminster. I will give a brief account of the unjust and iniquitous proceedings against this guiltless Queen.

When she was brought back to Chartley, the chair of state and canopy had been removed from her apartments, and Sir Amias Paulet, that stern Puritan, began to treat her like a common criminal. She bore this with truly regal dignity. She was subsequently conveyed to Fotheringhay, because there was not a hall at Chartley of sufficient dimensions for the Court of Delegates before whom she was to be brought. At first she refused, in virtue of her privileges as a Queen, to appear before the thirty-six judges who were to find her guilty of participation in the plot to murder Elizabeth; but Sir Christopher Hatton overcame her scruples, on the ground that if she refused to plead, the world would attribute her obstinacy to consciousness of guilt. Without counsel or defence she finally appeared before the tribunal, composed of her deadly enemies. The whole question turned upon the authenticity of the letter to Babington which Walsingham laid before the tribunal. Had I been there, and had I been able to produce the documents my uncle had the meanness to destroy, the whole charge would have fallen to the ground. She could do nothing but declare the letter to be a forgery, and refer to the original draft in her own hand, which was among her papers. She was told this draft could not be found, and that her secretary Curle had asserted that it had been burnt by her orders. She demanded to be confronted with the witnesses, but this was not permitted to her. Turning to Walsingham, she observed that it was an easy matter to counterfeit ciphers; and Walsingham could only call God to witness that in his private capacity he had done nothing unbecoming an honest man, and as a minister, he had done nothing unworthy of his place.

This happened in the castle of Fotheringhay. The court was afterwards removed to Westminster, where, in defiance of all judicial rule, the proceedings were carried on without the presence of the accused, and finally on the 29th of October, the judges, with the honorable exception of Lord Zouch, passed sentence of death on the Queen of Scots. This judgment was confirmed by both Houses of Parliament, who petitioned the Queen that it might immediately be carried into execution. On the 6th of December it was proclaimed by sound of trumpet in London; the ringing of bells and bonfires announced it to me in my prison then, just as now the shouting on Tower Hill acquainted me with its execution. That same evening when Bell came in, he told me Mary Stuart had been beheaded at Fotheringhay on the 8th February.

Three days later another surprise was prepared for me. The Lieutenant of the Tower appeared, conducting my uncle, Sir Francis, into my wretched dungeon. Hopton was about to withdraw, but Walsingham, who looked pale and tired, after casting a glance round the inhospitable apartment, requested him to show him some more habitable chamber where he could converse with his nephew. Accordingly the Lieutenant led the way to a room adjoining the Council Chamber, where after kindling some logs upon the hearth he left us alone.

I was astonished to perceive the change that had come over my uncle during the last five months. The poor man had aged greatly, his features were sunken and haggard, his dress, richly embroidered with gold, hung about his emaciated form. He seated himself before the fire, and held out his hands to the grateful warmth. For some time he neither looked at nor spoke to me. At length I said: "Are you ill, uncle?"

(To be continued.)