

FULLERTON GEORGIANA

CONSTANCE
SHERWOOD: AN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
THE SIXTEENTH
CENTURY

Georgiana Fullerton

**Constance Sherwood:
An Autobiography of
the Sixteenth Century**

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Georgiana Fullerton Constance Sherwood: An Autobiography of the Sixteenth Century

CHAPTER I

I had not thought to write the story of my life; but the wishes of those who have at all times more right to command than occasion to entreat aught at my hands, have in a manner compelled me thereunto. The divers trials and the unlooked-for comforts which have come to my lot during the years that I have been tossed to and fro on this uneasy sea – the world – have wrought in my soul an exceeding sense of the goodness of God, and an insight into the meaning of the sentence in Holy Writ which saith, "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts like unto our thoughts." And this puts me in mind that there are sayings which are in every one's mouth, and therefore not to be lightly gainsayed, which nevertheless do not approve themselves to my conscience as wholly just and true. Of these is the common adage, "That misfortunes come not alone." For my own part, I have found that when a cross has been laid on me, it has mostly been a single one, and that other sorrows were oftentimes removed, as if to make room for it. And it has been my wont, when one trial has been passing away, to look out for the next, even as on a stormy day, when the clouds have rolled away in one direction and sunshine is breaking overhead, we see others rising in the distance. There has been no portion of my life free from some measure of grief or fear sufficient to recall the words that "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" and none so reft of consolation that, in the midst of suffering, I did not yet cry out, "The Lord is my shepherd; his rod and his staff comfort me."

I was born in the year 1557, in a very fair part of England, at Sherwood Hall, in the county of Stafford. For its comely aspect, commodious chambers, sunny gardens, and the sweet walks in its vicinity, it was as commendable a residence for persons of moderate fortune and contented minds as can well be thought of. Within and without this my paternal home nothing was wanting which might please the eye, or minister to tranquillity of mind and healthful recreation. I reckon it amongst the many favors I have received from a gracious Providence, that the earlier years of my life were spent amidst such fair scenes, and in the society of parents who ever took occasion from earthly things to lead my thoughts to such as are imperishable, and so to stir up in me a love of the Creator, who has stamped his image on this visible world in characters of so great beauty; whilst in the tenderness of those dear parents unto myself I saw, as it were, a type and representation of his paternal love and goodness.

My father was of an ancient family, and allied to such as were of greater note and more wealthy than his own. He had not, as is the manner with many squires of our days, left off residing on his own estate in order to seek after the shows and diversions of London; but had united to a great humility of mind and a singular affection for learning a contentedness of spirit which inclined him to dwell in the place assigned to him by Providence. He had married at an early age, and had ever conformed to the habits of his neighbors in all lawful and kindly ways, and sought no other labors but such as were incidental to the care of his estates, and no recreations but those of study, joined to a moderate pursuit of field-sports and such social diversions as the neighborhood afforded. His outward appearance was rather simple than showy, and his manners grave and composed. When I call to mind the singular modesty of his disposition, and the retiredness of his manners, I often marvel how the force of circumstances and the urging of conscience should have forced one so little by nature inclined to an unsettled mode of life into one which, albeit peaceful in its aims, proved so full of danger and disquiet.

My mother's love I enjoyed but for a brief season. Not that it waxed cold toward me, as happens with some parents, who look with fondness on the child and less tenderly on the maiden; but it pleased Almighty God to take her unto himself when I was but ten years of age. Her face is as present to me now as any time of my life. No limner's hand ever drew a more faithful picture than the one I have of her even now engraved on the tablet of my heart. She had so fair and delicate a complexion that I can only liken it to the leaf of a white rose with the lightest tinge of pink in it. Her hair was streaked with gray too early for her years; but this matched well with the sweet melancholy of her eyes, which were of a deep violet color. Her eyelids were a trifle thick, and so were her lips; but there was a pleasantness in her smile and the dimples about her mouth such as I have not noticed in any one else. She had a sweet womanly and loving heart, and the noblest spirit imaginable; a great zeal in the service of God, tempered with so much sweetness and cordiality that she gave not easily offence to any one, of howsoever different a way of thinking from herself; and either won them over to her faith through the suavity of her temper and the wisdom of her discourse, or else worked in them a personal liking which made them patient with her, albeit fierce with others. When I was about seven years of age I noticed that she waxed thin and pale, and that we seldom went abroad, and walked only in our own garden and orchard. She seemed glad to sit on a bench on the sunny side of the house even in summer, and on days when by reason of the heat I liked to lie down in the shade. My parents forbade me from going into the village; and, through the perverseness common to too many young people, on account of that very prohibition I longed for liberty to do so, and wearied oftentimes of the solitude we lived in. At a later period I learnt how kind had been their intent in keeping me during the early years of childhood from a knowledge of the woeful divisions which the late changes in religion had wrought in our country; which I might easily have heard from young companions, and maybe in such sort as to awaken angry feelings, and shed a drop of bitter in the crystal cup of childhood's pure faith. If we did walk abroad, it was to visit some sick persons, and carry them food or clothing or medicines, which my mother prepared with her own hands. But as she grew weaker, we went less often outside the gates, and the poor came themselves to fetch away what in her bounty she stored up for them. I did not notice that our neighbors looked unkindly on us when we were seen in the village. Children would cry out sometimes, but half in play, "Down with the Papists!" but I witnessed that their elders checked them, especially those of the poorer sort; and "God bless you, Mrs. Sherwood!" and "God save you, madam!" was often in their mouths, as she whom I loved with so great and reverent an affection passed alongside of them, or stopped to take breath, leaning against their cottage-palings.

Many childish heartaches I can even now remember when I was not suffered to join in the merry sports of the 1st of May; for then, as the poet Chaucer sings, the youths and maidens go

"To fetch the flowers fresh and branch and bloom,
And these, rejoicing in their great delight,
Eke each at other throw the blossoms bright."

I watched the merry wights as they passed our door on their way to the groves and meadows, singing mirthful carols, and bent on pleasant pastimes; and tears stood in my eyes as the sound of their voices died away in the distance. My father found me thus weeping one May-day, and carried me with him to a sweet spot in a wood, where wild-flowers grew like living jewels out of the green carpet of moss on which we sat; and there, as the birds sang from every bough, and the insects hovered and hummed over every blossom, he entertained me with such quaint and pleasant tales, and moved me to merry laughter by his witty devices; so that I set down that day in my book of memory as one of the joyfulest in all my childhood. At Easter, when the village children rolled pasch eggs down the smooth sides of the green hills, my mother would paint me some herself, and adorned them with such bright colors and rare sentences that I feared to break them with rude handling, and kept them by me throughout the year, rather as pictures to be gazed on than toys to be played with in a wanton fashion.

On the morning of the Resurrection, when others went to the top of Cannock Chase to hail the rising sun, as is the custom of those parts, she would sing so sweetly the psalm which speaketh of the heavens rejoicing and of the earth being glad, that it grieved me not to stay at home; albeit I sometimes marvelled that we saw so little company, and mixed not more freely with our neighbors.

When I had reached my ninth birthday, whether it was that I took better heed of words spoken in my hearing, or else that my parents thought it was time that I should learn somewhat of the conditions of the times, and so talked more freely in my presence, it so happened that I heard of the jeopardy in which many who held the Catholic faith were, and of the laws which were being made to prohibit in our country the practice of the ancient religion. When Protestants came to our house – and it was sometimes hard in those days to tell who were such at heart, or only in outward semblance out of conformity to the queen's pleasure – I was strictly charged not to speak in their hearing of aught that had to do with Catholic faith and worship; and I could see at such times on my mother's face an uneasy expression, as if she was ever fearing the next words that any one might utter.

In the autumn of that year we had visitors whose company was so great an honor to my parents, and the occasion of so much delight to myself, that I can call to mind every little circumstance of their brief sojourn under our roof, even as if it had taken place but yesterday. This visit proved the first step toward an intimacy which greatly affected the tenor of my life, and prepared the way for the direction it was hereafter to take.

These truly honorable and well-beloved guests were my Lady Mouteagle and her son Mr. James Labourn, who were journeying at that time from London, where she had been residing at her son-in-law the Duke of Norfolk's house, to her seat in the country; whither she was carrying the three children of her daughter, the Duchess of Norfolk, and of that lady's first husband, the Lord Dacre of the North. The eldest of these young ladies was of about my own age, and the others younger.

The day on which her ladyship was expected, I could not sit with patience at my tambour-frame, or con my lessons, or play on the virginals; but watched the hours and the minutes in my great desire to see these noble wenches. I had not hitherto consorted with young companions, save with Edmund and John Genings, of whom I shall have occasion to speak hereafter, who were then my playmates, as at a riper age friends. I thought, in the quaint way in which children couple one idea with another in their fantastic imaginations, that my Lady Mouteagle's three daughters would be like the three angels, in my mother's missal, who visited Abraham in his tent.

I had craved from my mother a holiday, which she granted on the score that I should help her that forenoon in the making of the pasties and jellies, which, as far as her strength allowed, she failed not to lend a hand to; and also she charged me to set the bed-chambers in fair order, and to gather fresh flowers wherewith to adorn the parlor. These tasks had in them a pleasantness which whiled away the time, and I alternated from the parlor to the store-room, and the kitchen to the orchard, and the poultry-yard to the pleasure-ground, running as swiftly from one to the other, and as merrily, as if my feet were keeping time with the glad beatings of my heart. As I passed along the avenue, which was bordered on each side by tall trees, ever and anon, as the wind shook their branches, there fell on my head showers of red and gold-colored leaves, which made me laugh; so easy is it for the young to find occasion of mirth in the least trifle when their spirits are lightsome, as mine were that day. I sat down on a stone bench on which the western sun was shining, to bind together the posies I had made; the robins twittered around me; and the air felt soft and fresh. It was the eve of Martinmas-day – Hallowtide Summer, as our country folk call it. As the sun was sinking behind the hills, the tread of horses' feet was heard in the distance, and I sprang up on the bench, shading my eyes with my hand to see the approach of that goodly travelling-party, which was soon to reach our gates. My parents came out of the front door, and beckoned me to their side. I held my posies in my apron, and forgot to set them down; for the first sight of my Lady Mouteagle, as she rode up the avenue with her son at her side, and her three grand-daughters with their attendants, and many richly-attired serving-men beside, filled me with awe. I wondered if her majesty had looked more grand on the day

that she rode into London to be proclaimed queen. The good lady sat on her palfry in so erect and stately a manner, as if age had no dominion over her limbs and her spirits; and there was something so piercing and commanding in her eye, that it at once compelled reverence and submission. Her son had somewhat of the same nobility of mien, and was tall and graceful in his movements; but behind her, on her pillion, sat a small counterpart of herself, inasmuch as childhood can resemble old age, and youthful loveliness matronly dignity. This was the eldest of her ladyship's grand-daughters, my sweet Mistress Ann Dacre. This was my first sight of her who was hereafter to hold so great a place in my heart and in my life. As she was lifted from the saddle, and stood in her riding-habit and plumed hat at our door, making a graceful and modest obeisance to my parents, one step retired behind her grandam, with a lovely color tinging her cheeks, and her long lashes veiling her sweet eyes, I thought I had never seen so fair a creature as this high-born maiden of my own age; and even now that time, as it has gone by, has shown me all that a court can display to charm the eyes and enrapture the fancy, I do not gainsay that same childish thought of mine. Her sisters, pretty prattlers then, four and six years of age, were led into the house by their governess. But ere our guests were seated, my mother bade me kiss my Lady Mounteagle's hand and commend myself to her goodness, praying her to be a good lady to me, and overlook, out of her great indulgence, my many defects. At which she patted me on the cheek, and said, she doubted not but that I was as good a child as such good parents deserved to have; and indeed, if I was as like my mother in temper as in face, I must needs be such as her hopes and wishes would have me. And then she commanded Mistress Ann to salute me; and I felt my cheeks flush and my heart beat with joy as the sweet little lady put her arms round my neck, and pressed her lips on my cheek.

Presently we all withdrew to our chambers until such time as supper was served, at which meal the young ladies were present; and I marvelled to see how becomingly even the youngest of them, who was but a chit, knew how to behave herself, never asking for anything, or forgetting to give thanks in a pretty manner when she was helped. For the which my mother greatly commended their good manners; and her ladyship said, "In truth, good Mistress Sherwood, I carry a strict hand over them, never suffering their faults to go unchastised, nor permitting such liberties as many do to the ruin of their children." I was straightway seized with a great confusion and fear that this was meant as a rebuke to me, who, not being much used to company, and something overindulged by my father, by whose side I was seated, had spoken to him more than once that day at table, and had also left on my plate some victuals not to my liking; which, as I learnt at another time from Mistress Ann, was an offence for which her grandmother would have sharply reprehended her. I ventured not again to speak in her presence, and scarcely to raise my eyes toward her.

The young ladies withdrew early to bed that night, and I had but little speech with them. Before they left the parlor, Mistress Ann took her sisters by the hand, and all of them, kneeling at their grandmother's feet, craved her blessing. I could see a tear in her eye as she blessed them; and when she laid her hand on the head of the eldest of her grand-daughters, it lingered there as if to call down upon her a special benison. The next day my Lady Mounteagle gave permission for Mistress Ann to go with me into the garden, where I showed her my flowers and the young rabbits that Edmund Genings and his brother, my only two playmates, were so fond of; and she told me how well pleased she was to remove from London unto her grandmother's seat, where she would have a garden and such pleasant pastimes as are enjoyed in the country.

"Prithee, Mistress Ann," I said, with the unmannerly boldness with which children are wont to question one another, "have you not a mother, that you live with your grandam?"

"I thank God that I have," she answered; "and a good mother she is to me; but by reason of her having lately married the Duke of Norfolk, my grandmother has at the present time the charge of us."

"And do you greatly love my Lady Mounteagle?" I asked, misdoubting in my folly that a lady of so grave aspect and stately carriage should be loved by children.

"As greatly as heart can love," was her pretty answer.

"And do you likewise love the Duke of Norfolk, Mistress Ann?" I asked again.

"He is my very good lord and father," she answered; "but my knowledge of his grace has been so short, I have scarce had time to love him yet."

"But I have loved you in no time," I cried, and threw my arms round her neck. "Directly I saw you, I loved you, Mistress Ann."

"Mayhap, Mistress Constance," she said, "it is easier to love a little girl than a great duke."

"And who do you affection beside her grace your mother, and my lady your grandam, Mistress Ann?" I said, again returning to the charge; to which she quickly replied:

"My brother Francis, my sweet Lord Dacre."

"Is he a child?" I asked.

"In truth, Mistress Constance," she answered, "he would not be well pleased to be called so; and yet methinks he is but a child, being not older, but rather one year younger than myself, and my dear playmate and gossip."

"I wish I had a brother or a sister to play with me," I said; at which Mistress Ann kissed me and said she was sorry I should lack so great a comfort, but that I must consider I had a good father of my own, whereas her own was dead; and that a father was more than a brother.

In this manner we held discourse all the morning, and, like a rude imp, I questioned the gracious young lady as to her pastimes and her studies and the tasks she was set to; and from her innocent conversation I discovered, as children do, without at the time taking much heed, but yet so as to remember it afterward, what especial care had been taken by her grandmother – that religious and discreet lady – to instill into her virtue and piety, and in using her, beside saying her prayers, to bestow alms with her own hands on prisoners and poor people; and in particular to apply herself to the cure of diseases and wounds, wherein she herself had ever excelled. Mistress Ann, in her childish but withal thoughtful way, chide me that in my own garden were only seen flowers which pleased the senses by their bright colors and perfume, and none of the herbs which tend to the assuagement of pain and healing of wounds; and she made me promise to grow some against the time of her next visit. As we went through the kitchen-garden, she plucked some rosemary and lavender and rue, and many other odoriferous herbs; and sitting down on a bench, she invited me to her side, and discoursed on their several virtues and properties with a pretty sort of learning which was marvellous in one of her years. She showed me which were good for promoting sleep, and which for cuts and bruises, and of a third she said it eased the heart.

"Nay, Mistress Ann," I cried, "but that must be a heartsease;" at which she smiled, and answered:

"My grandam says the best medicines for uneasy hearts are the bitter herb confession and the sweet flower absolution."

"Have you yet made your first communion, Mistress Ann?" I asked in a low voice, at which question a bright color came into her cheek, and she replied:

"Not yet; but soon I may. I was confirmed not long ago by the good Bishop of Durham; and at my grandmother's seat I am to be instructed by a Catholic priest who lives there."

"Then you do not go to Protestant service?" I said.

"We did," she answered, "for a short time, whilst we stayed at the Charterhouse; but my grandam has understood that it is not lawful for Catholics, and she will not be present at it herself, or suffer us any more to attend it, neither in her own house nor at his grace's."

While we were thus talking, the two little ladies, her sisters, came from the house, having craved leave from the governess to run out into the garden. Mistress Mary was a pale delicate child, with soft loving blue eyes; and Mistress Bess, the youngest, a merry imp, whose rosy cheeks and dimpling smiles were full of glee and merriment.

"What ugly sober flowers are these, Nan, that thou art playing with?" she cried, and snatched at the herbs in her sister's lap. "When I marry my Lord William Howard, I'll wear a posy of roses and carnations."

"When I am married," said little Mistress Mary, "I will wear nothing but lilies."

"And what shall be thy posy, Nan?" said the little saucy one again, "when thou dost wed my Lord Surrey?"

"Hush, hush, madcaps!" cried Mistress Ann. "If your grandam was to hear you, I doubt not but the rod would be called for."

Mistress Mary looked round affrighted, but little Mistress Bess said in a funny manner, "Prithee, Nan, do rods then travel?"

"Ay; by that same token, Bess, that I heard my lady bid thy nurse take care to carry one with her."

"It was nurse told me I was to marry my Lord William, and Madge my Lord Thomas, and thee, Nan, my Lord Surrey, and brother pretty Meg Howard," said the little lady, pouting; "but I won't tell grandam of it an it would be like to make her angry."

"I would be a nun!" Mistress Mary cried.

"Hush!" her elder sister said; "that is foolish talking, Madge; my grandmother told me so when I said the same thing to her a year ago. Children do not know what Almighty God intends them to do. And now methinks I see Uncle Labourn making as if he would call us to the house, and there are the horses coming to the door. We must needs obey the summons. Prithee, Mistress Constance, do not forget me."

Forget her! No. From that day to this years have passed over our heads and left deep scars on our hearts. Divers periods of our lives have been signalized by many a strange passage; we have rejoiced, and, oftener still, wept together; we have met in trembling, and parted in anguish; but through sorrow and through joy, through evil report and good report, in riches and in poverty, in youth and in age, I have blessed the day when first I met thee, sweet Ann Dacre, the fairest, purest flower which ever grew on a noble stem.

CHAPTER II

A year elapsed betwixt the period of the so brief, but to me so memorable, visit of the welcomest guests our house ever received – to wit, my Lady Mounteagle and her grand-daughters – and that in which I met with an accident, which compelled my parents to carry me to Lichfield for chirurgical advice. Four times in the course of that year I was honored with letters writ by the hand of Mistress Ann Dacre; partly, as the gracious young lady said, by reason of her grandmother's desire that the bud acquaintanceship which had sprouted in the short-lived season of the aforesaid visit should, by such intercourse as may be carried on by means of letters, blossom into a flower of true friendship; and also that that worthy lady and my good mother willed such a correspondence betwixt us as would serve to the sharpening of our wits, and the using our pens to be good servants to our thoughts. In the course of this history I will set down at intervals some of the letters I received at divers times from this noble lady; so that those who read these innocent pictures of herself, portrayed by her own hand, may trace the beginnings of those virtuous inclinations which at an early age were already working in her soul, and ever after appeared in her.

On the 15th day of January of the next year to that in which my eyes had feasted on this creature so embellished with rare endowments and accomplished gracefulness, the first letter I had from her came to my hand; the first link of a chain which knit together her heart and mine through long seasons of absence and sore troubles, to the great comforting, as she was often pleased to say, of herself, who was so far above me in rank, whom she chose to call her friend, and of the poor friend and servant whom she thus honored beyond her deserts. In as pretty a handwriting as can well be thought of, she thus wrote:

"MY SWEET MISTRESS CONSTANCE,

– Though I enjoyed your company but for the too brief time during which we rested under your honored parents' roof, I retain so great a sense of the contentment I received therefrom, and so lively a remembrance of the converse we held in the grounds adjacent to Sherwood Hall, that I am better pleased than I can well express that my grandmother bids me sit down and write to one whom to see and to converse with once more would be to me one of the chiefest pleasures in life. And the more welcome is this command by reason of the hope it raises in me to receive in return a letter from my well-beloved Mistress Constance, which will do my heart more good than anything else that can happen to me. 'Tis said that marriages are made in heaven. When I asked my grandam if it were so, she said, 'I am of opinion, Nan, they are made in many more places than one; and I would to God none were made but such as are agreed upon in so good a place.' But methinks some friendships are likewise made in heaven; and if it be so, I doubt not but that when we met, and out of that brief meeting there arose so great and sudden a liking in my heart for you, Mistress Constance, – which, I thank God, you were not slow to reciprocate, – that our angels had met where we hope one day to be, and agreed together touching that matter.

"It suits ill a bad pen like mine to describe the fair seat we reside in at this present time – the house of Mr. James Labourn, which he has lent unto my grandmother. 'Tis most commodious and pleasant, and after long sojourn in London, even in winter, a terrestrial paradise. But, like the garden of Eden, not without dangers; for the too much delight I took in out-of-doors pastimes – and most of all on the lake when it was frozen, and we had merry sports upon it, to the neglect of my lessons, not heeding the lapse of time in the pursuit of pleasure – brought me into

trouble and sore disgrace. My grandmother ordered me into confinement for three days in my own chamber, and I saw her not nor received her blessing all that time; at the end of which she sharply reproved me for my fault, and bade me hold in mind that 'twas when loitering in a garden Eve met the tempter, and threatened further and severe punishment if I applied not diligently to my studies. When I had knelt down and begged pardon, promising amendment, she drew me to her and kissed me, which it was not her wont often to do. 'Nan,' she said, 'I would have thee use thy natural parts, and improve thyself in virtue and learning; for such is the extremity of the times, that ere long it may be that many first shall be last and many last shall be first in this realm of England. But virtue and learning are properties which no man can steal from another; and I would fain see thee endowed with a goodly store of both. That great man and true confessor, Sir Thomas More, had nothing so much at heart as his daughter's instruction; and Mistress Margaret Roper, once my sweet friend, though some years older than my poor self, who still laments her loss, had such fine things said of her by the greatest men of this age, as would astonish thee to hear; but they were what she had a right to and very well deserved. And the strengthening of her mind through study and religious discipline served her well at the time of her great trouble; for where other women would have lacked sense and courage how to act, she kept her wits about her, and ministered such comfort to her father, remaining near him at the last, and taking note of his wishes, and finding means to bury him in a Christian manner, which none other durst attempt, that she had occasion to thank God who gave her a head as well as a heart. And who knows, Nan, what may befall thee, and what need thou mayst have of the like advantages?'

"My grandmother looked so kindly on me then, that, albeit abashed at the remembrance of my fault, I sought to move her to further discourse; and knowing what great pleasure she had in speaking of Sir Thomas More, at whose house in Chelsea she had oftentimes been a visitor in her youth, I enticed her to it by cunning questions touching the customs he observed in his family.

"'Ah, Nan!' she said, that house was a school and exercise of the Christian religion. There was neither man nor woman in it who was not employed in liberal discipline and fruitful reading, although the principal study was religion. There was no quarrelling, not so much as a peevish word to be heard; nor was any one seen idle; all were in their several employs: nor was there wanting sober mirth. And so well-managed a government Sir Thomas did not maintain by severity and chiding, but by gentleness and kindness.'

"Methought as she said this, that my dear grandam in that matter of chiding had not taken a leaf out of Sir Thomas's book; and there was no doubt a transparency in my face which revealed to her this thought of mine; for she straightly looked at me and said, 'Nan, a penny for thy thoughts!' at the which I felt myself blushing, but knew nothing would serve her but the truth; so I said, in as humble a manner as I could think of, 'An if you will excuse me, grandam, I thought if Sir Thomas managed so well without chiding, that you manage well with it.' At the which she gave me a light nip on the forehead, and said, 'Go to, child; dost think that any but saints can rule a household without chiding, or train children without whipping? Go thy ways, and mend them too, if thou wouldst escape chastisement; and take with thee, Nan, the words of one whom we shall never again see the like of in this poor country, which he used to his wife or any of his children if they were diseased or troubled, "We must not look at our pleasures to go to heaven in feather-beds, or to be carried up thither even by the chins."' And so she dismissed me; and I have

here set down my fault, and the singular goodness showed me by my grandmother when it was pardoned, not thinking I can write anything better worth notice than the virtuous talk with which she then favored me.

"There is in this house a chapel very neat and rich, and an ancient Catholic priest is here, who says mass most days; at the which we, with my grandmother, assist, and such of her servants as have not conformed to the times; and this good father instructs us in the principles of Catholic religion. On the eve of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, my lady stayed in the chapel from eight at night till two in the morning; but sent us to bed at nine, after the litanies were said, until eleven, when there was a sermon, and at twelve o'clock three masses said, which being ended we broke our fast with a mince-pie, and went again to bed. And all the Christmas-time we were allowed two hours after each meal for recreation, instead of one. At other times, we play not at any game for money; but then we had a shilling a-piece to make us merry; which my grandmother says is fitting in this time of mirth and joy for his birth who is the sole origin and spring of true comfort. And now, sweet Mistress Constance, I must bid you farewell; for the greatest of joys has befallen me, and a whole holiday to enjoy it. My sweet Lord Dacre is come to pay his duty to my lady and tarry some days here, on his way to Thetford, the Duke of Norfolk's seat, where his grace and the duchess my good mother have removed. He is a beauty, Mistress Constance; and nature has so profusely conferred on him privileges, that when her majesty the queen saw him a short time back on horseback, in the park at Richmond, she called him to her carriage-door and honored him with a kiss, and the motto of the finest boy she ever beheld. But I may not run on in this fashion, letting my pen outstrip modesty, like a foolish creature, making my brother a looking-glass and continual object for my eyes; but learn to love him, as my grandam says, in God, of whom he is only borrowed, and not so as to set my heart wholly on him. So beseeching God bless you and yours, good Mistress Constance, I ever remain, your loving friend and humble servant,

"ANN DACRE."

Oh, how soon were my Lady Mounteagle's words exalted in the event! and what a sad brief note was penned by that affectionate sister not one month after she writ those lines, so full of hope and pleasure in the prospect of her brother's sweet company! For the fair boy that was the continual object of her eyes and the dear comfort of her heart was accidentally slain by the fall of a vaulting horse upon him at the duke's house at Thetford.

"MY GOOD MISTRESS CONSTANCE"

(she wrote, a few days after his lamentable death), – "The lovingest brother a sister ever had, and the most gracious creature ever born, is dead; and if it pleased God I wish I were dead too, for my heart is well-nigh broken. But I hope in God his soul is now in heaven, for that he was so young and innocent; and when here, a short time ago, my grandmother procured that he should for the first, and as it has pleased God also for the only and the last, time, confess and be absolved by a Catholic priest, in the which the hand of Providence is visible to our great comfort, and reasonable hope of his salvation. Commending him and your poor friend, who has great need of them, to your good prayers, I remain your affectionate and humble servant,

"ANN DACRE."

In that year died also, in childbirth, her grace the Duchess of Norfolk, Mistress Ann's mother; and she then wrote in a less passionate, but withal less comfortable, grief than at her brother's loss, and, as I have heard since, my Lady Mounteagle had her death-blow at that time, and never lifted up

her head again as heretofore. It was noticed that ever after she spent more time in prayer and gave greater alms. Her daughter, the duchess, who at the instance of her husband had conformed to the times, desired to have been reconciled on her deathbed by a priest, who for that end was conducted into the garden, yet could not have access unto her by reason of the duke's vigilance to hinder it, or at least of his continual presence in her chamber at the time. And soon after, his grace, whose wards they were, sent for his three step-daughters to the Charterhouse; the parting with which, and the fears she entertained that he would have them carried to services and sermons in the public churches, and hinder them in the exercise of Catholic faith and worship, drove the sword yet deeper through my Lady Mounteagle's heart, and brought down her gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, notwithstanding that the duke greatly esteemed and respected her, and was a very moral nobleman, of exceeding good temper and moderate disposition. But of this more anon, as 'tis my own history I am writing, and it is meet I should relate in the order of time what events came under my notice whilst in Lichfield, whither my mother carried me, as has been aforesaid, to be treated by a famous physician for a severe hurt I had received. It was deemed convenient that I should tarry some time under his care; and Mr. Genings, a kinsman of her own, who with his wife and children resided in that town, one of the chieftest in the county, offered to keep me in their house as long as was convenient thereunto a kindness which my parents the more readily accepted at his hands from their having often shown the like unto his children when the air of the country was desired for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Genings were of the religion by law established. He was thought to be Catholic at heart; albeit he was often heard to speak very bitterly against all who obeyed not the queen in conforming to the new mode of worship, with the exception, indeed, of my mother, for whom he had always a truly great affection. This gentleman's house was in the close of the cathedral, and had a garden to it well stored with fair shrubs and flowers of various sorts. As I lay on a low settle near the window, being forbid to walk for the space of three weeks, my eyes were ever straying from my sampler to the shade and sunshine out of doors. Instead of plying at my needle, I watched the bees at their sweet labor midst the honeysuckles of the porch, or the swallows darting in and out of the eaves of the cathedral, or the butterflies at their idle sports over the beds of mignonette and heliotrope under the low wall, covered with ivy, betwixt the garden and the close. Mr. Genings had two sons, the eldest of which was some years older and the other younger than myself. The first, whose name was Edmund, had been weakly when a child, and by reason of this a frequent sojourner at Sherwood Hall, where he was carried for change of air after the many illnesses incident to early age. My mother, who was some years married before she had a child of her own, conceived a truly maternal affection for this young kinsman, and took much pains with him both as to the care of his body and the training of his mind. He was an apt pupil, and she had so happy a manner of imparting knowledge, that he learnt more, as he has since said, in those brief sojourns in her house than at school from more austere masters. After I came into the world, he took delight to rock me in my cradle, or play with me as I sat on my mother's knee; and when I first began to walk, he would lead me by the hand into the garden, and laugh to see me clutch marigolds or cry for a sunflower.

"I warrant thou hast an eye to gold, Con," he would say; "for 'tis the yellow flowers that please thee best."

There is an old hollow tree on the lawn at Sherwood Hall where I often hid from him in sport, and he would make pretence to seek me elsewhere, till a laugh revealed me to him, and a chase ensued down the approach or round the maze. He never tired of my petulance, or spoke rude words, as boys are wont to do; and had a more serious and contemplative spirit than is often seen in young people, and likewise a singular fancy for gazing at the sky when glowing with sunset hues or darkened by storms, and most of all when studded at night with stars. On a calm clear night I have noticed him for a length of time, forgetting all things else, fix his eyes on the heavens, as if reading the glory of the Lord therein revealed.

My parents did not speak to him of Catholic faith and worship, because Mr. Genings, before he suffered his sons to stay in their house, had made them promise that no talk of religion should be ministered to them in their childhood. It was a sore trial to my mother to refrain, as the Psalmist saith, from good words, which were ever rising from her heart to her lips, as pure water from a deep spring. But she instructed him in many things which belong to gentle learning, and in French, which she knew well; and taught him music, in which he made great progress. And this wrought with his father to the furtherance of these his visits to us. I doubt not but that, when she told him the names of the heavenly luminaries, she inwardly prayed he might one day shine as a star in the kingdom of God; or when she discoursed of flowers and their properties, that he should blossom as a rose in the wilderness of this faithless world; or whilst guiding his hands to play on the clavichord, that he might one day join in the glorious harmony of the celestial choirs. Her face itself was a preachment, and the tones of her voice, and the tremulous sighs she breathed when she kissed him or gave him her blessing, had, I ween, a privilege to reach his heart, the goodness of which was readable in his countenance. Dear Edmund Genings, thou wert indeed a brother to me in kind care and companionship whilst I stayed in Lichfield that never-to-be-forgotten year! How gently didst thou minister to the sick child, for the first time tasting the cup of suffering; now easing her head with a soft pillow, now strewing her couch with fresh-gathered flowers, or feeding her with fruit which had the bloom on it, or taking her hand and holding it in thine own to cheer her to endurance! Thou wert so patient and so loving, both with her who was a great trouble to thee and oftentimes fretful with pain, and likewise with thine own little brother, an angel in beauty and wit, but withal of so petulant and froward a disposition that none in the house durst contradict him, child as he was; for his parents were indeed weak in their fondness for him. In no place and at no time have I seen a boy so indulged and so caressed as this John Genings. He had a pretty wilfulness and such playful ways that his very faults found favor with those who should have corrected them, and he got praise where others would have met with chastisement. Edmund's love for this fair urchin was such as is seldom seen in any save in a parent for a child. It was laughable to see the lovely imp governing one who should have been his master, but through much love was his slave, and in a thousand cunning ways, and by fanciful tricks, constraining him to do his bidding. Never was a more wayward spirit enclosed in a more winsome form than in John Genings. Never did childish gracefulness rule more absolutely over superior age, or love reverse the conditions of ordinary supremacy, than in the persons of these two brothers.

A strange thing occurred at that time, which I witnessed not myself, and on which I can give no opinion, but as a fact will here set it down, and let such as read this story deem of it as they please. One night that, by reason of the unwonted chilliness of the evening, such as sometimes occurs in our climate even in summer, a fire had been lit in the parlor, and the family were gathered round it, Edmund came of a sudden into the room, and every one took notice that his face was very pale. He seemed in a great fear, and whispered to his mother, who said aloud – "Thou must have been asleep, and art still dreaming, child." Upon which he was very urgent for her to go into the garden, and used many entreaties thereunto. Upon which, at last, she rose and followed him. In another moment she called for her husband, who went out, and with him three or four other persons that were in the room, and I remained alone for the space of ten or fifteen minutes. When they returned, I heard them speaking with great fear and amazement of what they had seen; and Edmund Genings has often since described to me what he first, and afterward all the others, had beheld in the sky. He was gazing at the heavens, as was his wont, when a strange spectacle appeared to him in the air. As it were, a number of armed men with weapons, killing and murdering others that were disarmed, and great store of blood running everywhere about them. His parents and those with them witnessed the same thing, and a great fear fell upon them all. I noticed that all that evening they seemed scared, and could not speak of this appearance in the sky without shuddering. But one that was more bold than the rest took heart, and cried, "God send it does not forbode that the Papists will murder us all in our beds!" And Mistress Genings, whose mother was a French Huguenot, said, "Amen!" I marked that her husband

and one or two more of the company groaned, and one made, as if unwittingly, the sign of the cross. There were some I know in that town, nay and in that house, that were at heart of the old religion, albeit, by reason of the times, they did not give over attending Protestants' worship.

A few days later I was sitting alone, and had a long fit of musing over the many new thoughts that were crowding into my mind, as yet too childish to master them, when Edmund came in, and I saw he had been weeping. He said nothing at first, and made believe he was reading; but I could see tears trickling down through his fingers as he covered his face with his hands. Presently he looked up and cried out,

"Cousin Constance, Jack is going away from us."

"And if it please God, not for a long time," I answered; for it grieved me to see him sad.

"Nay, but he is going for many years, I fear," Edmund said. "My uncle, Jean de Luc, has asked for him to be brought up in his house at La Rochelle. He is his godfather, and has a great store of money, which he says he will leave to Jack. Alack! cousin Constance, I would that there was no such thing in the world as money, and no such country as France. I wish we were all dead." And then he fell to weeping again very bitterly.

I told him in a childish manner what my mother was wont to say to me when any little trouble fell to my lot – that we should be patient, and offer up our sufferings to God.

"But I can do nothing now for Jack," he cried. "It was my first thought at waking and my last at night, how to please the dear urchin; but now 'tis all over."

"Oh, but Edmund," I cried, "an if you were to be as good as the blessed saints in heaven, you could do a great deal for Jack."

"How so, cousin Constance?" he asked, not comprehending my meaning; and thereupon I answered:

"When once I said to my sweet mother, 'It grieves me, dear heart, that I can give thee nothing, who gives me so much,' she bade me take heed that every prayer we say, every good work we do, howsoever imperfect, and every pain we suffer, may be offered up for those we love; and so out of poverty, and weakness, and sorrow, we have wherewith to make precious and costly and cheerful gifts."

I spoke as a child, repeating what I had heard; but he listened not as a child. A sudden light came into his eyes, and methinks his good angel showed him in that hour more than my poor lips could utter.

"If it be as your sweet mother says," he joyfully cried, "we are rich indeed; and, even though we be sinners and not saints, we have somewhat to give, I ween, if it be only our heartaches, cousin Constance, so they be seasoned with prayers."

The thought which in my simplicity I had set before him took root, as it were, in his mind. His love for a little child had prepared the way for it; and the great brotherly affection which had so long dwelt in his heart proved a harbinger of the more perfect gift of charity; so that a heavenly message was perchance conveyed to him that day by one who likewise was a child, even as the word of the Lord came to the prophet through the lips of the infant Samuel. From that time forward he bore up bravely against his grief; which was the sharper inasmuch that he who was the cause of it showed none in return, but rather joy in the expectancy of the change which was to part them. He would still be a-prattling on it, and telling all who came in his way that he was going to France to a good uncle; nor ever intended to return, for his mother was to carry him to La Rochelle, and she should stay there with him, he said, and not come back to ugly Lichfield.

"And art thou not sorry, Jack," I asked him one day, "to leave poor Edmund, who loves thee so well?"

The little madcap was coursing round the room, and cried, as he ran past me, for he had more wit and spirit than sense or manners:

"Edmund must seek after me, and take pains to find me, if so be he would have me."

These words, which the boy said in his play, have often come back to my mind since the two brothers have attained unto a happy though dissimilar end.

When the time had arrived for Mistress Genings and her youngest son to go beyond seas, as I was now improved in health and able to walk, my father fetched me home, and prevailed on Mr. Genings to let Edmund go back with us, with the intent to divert his mind from his grief at his brother's departure.

I found my parents greatly disturbed at the news they had had touching the imprisonment of thirteen priests on account of religion, and of Mr. Orton being likewise arrested, who was a gentleman very dear to them for his great virtues and the steadfast friendship he had ever shown to them.

My mother questioned Edmund as to the sign he had seen in the heavens a short time back, of which the report had reached them; and he confirming the truth thereof, she clasped her hands and cried:

"Then I fear me much this forebodes the death of these blessed confessors, Father Weston and the rest."

Upon which Edmund said, in a humble manner:

"Good Mistress Sherwood, my dear mother thought it signified that those of your religion would murder in their beds such as are of the queen's religion; so maybe in both cases there is naught to apprehend."

"My good child," my mother answered, "in regard of those now in durance for their faith, the danger is so manifest, that if it please not the Almighty to work a miracle for their deliverance, I see not how they may escape."

After that we sat awhile in silence; my father reading, my mother and I working, and Edmund at the window intent as usual upon the stars, which were shining one by one in the deep azure of the darkening sky. As one of greater brightness than the rest shone through the branches of the old tree, where I used to hide some years before, he pointed to it, and said to me, who was sitting nearest to him at the window:

"Cousin Constance, think you the Star of Bethlehem showed fairer in the skies than yon bright star that has just risen behind your favorite oak? What and if that star had a message for us!"

My father heard him, and smiled. "I was even then," he said, "reading the words of one who was led to the true religion by the contemplation of the starry skies. In a Southern clime, where those fair luminaries shine with more splendor than in our Northern heavens, St. Augustine wrote thus;" and then he read a few sentences in Latin from the book in his hand, – "Raising ourselves up, we passed by degrees through all things bodily, even the very heavens, whence sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth. Yea, we soared yet higher by inward musing and discourse and admiring of God's works, and we came to our own minds and went beyond them, so as to arrive at that region of never-failing plenty where thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth." These words had a sweet and solemn force in them which struck on the ear like a strain of unearthly music, such as the wind-harp wakes in the silence of the night. In a low voice, so low that it was like the breathing of a sigh, I heard Edmund say, "What is truth?" But when he had uttered those words, straightway turning toward me as if to divert his thoughts from that too pithy question, he cried: "Prithee, cousin Constance, hast thou ended reading, I warrant for the hundredth time, that letter in thine hand? and hast thou not a mind to impart to thy poor kinsman the sweet conceits I doubt not are therein contained?" I could not choose but smile at his speech; for I had indeed feasted my eyes on the handwriting of my dear friend, now no longer Mistress Dacre, and learnt off, as it were by heart, its contents. And albeit I refused at first to comply with his request, which I had secretly a mind to; no sooner did he give over the urging of it than I stole to his side, and, though I would by no means let it out of my hand, and folded down one side of the sheet to hide what was private in it, I offered to read such parts aloud as treated of matters which might be spoken of without hindrance.

With a smiling countenance, then, he set himself to listen, and I to be the mouthpiece of the dear writer, whose wit was so far in advance of her years, as I have since had reason to observe, never having met at any time with one in whom wisdom put forth such early shoots.

"DEAR MISTRESS CONSTANCE"

(thus the sweet lady wrote), – "Wherefore this long silence and neglect of your poor friend? An if it be true, which pains me much to hear, that the good limb which, together with its fellow, like two trusty footmen, carried you so well and nimbly along the alleys of your garden this time last year, has, like an arrant knave, played fast and loose, and failed in its good service, – wherein, I am told, you have suffered much inconvenience, – is it just that that other servant, your hand, should prove rebellious too, refuse to perform its office, and write no more letters at your bidding? For I'll warrant 'tis the hand is the culprit, not the will; which nevertheless should be master, and compel it to obedience. So, an you love me, chide roundly that contumacious hand, which fails in its duty, which should not be troublesome, if you but had for me one-half of the affection I have for you. And indeed, Mistress Constance, a letter from you would be to me, at this time, the welcomest thing I can think of; for since we left my grandmother's seat, and came to the Charterhouse, I have new friends, and many more and greater than I deserve or ever thought to have; but, by reason of difference of age or of religion, they are not such as I can well open my mind to, as I might to you, if it pleased God we should meet again. The Duke of Norfolk is a very good lord and father to me; but when there are more ways of thinking than one in a house, 'tis no easy matter to please all which have a right to be considered; and, in the matter of religion, 'tis very hard to avoid giving offence. But no more of this at present; only I would to God Mr. Fox were beyond seas, and my lady of Westmoreland at her home in the North; and that we had no worse company in this house than Mr. Martin, my Lord Surrey's tutor, who is a gentleman of great learning and knowledge, as every one says, and of extraordinary modesty in his behavior. My Lord Surrey has a truly great regard for him, and profits much in his learning by his means. I notice he is Catholic in his judgment and affections; and my lord says he will not stay with him, if his grace his father procures ministers to preach to his household and family, and obliges all therein to frequent Protestant service. I wish my grandmother was in London; for I am sometimes sore troubled in my mind touching Catholic religion and conforming to the times, of which an abundance of talk is ministered unto us, to my exceeding great discomfort, by my Lady Westmoreland, his grace's sister, and others also. An if I say aught thereon to Mistress Fawcett (a grave and ancient gentlewoman, who had the care of my Lord Surrey during his infancy, and is now set over us his grace's wards), and of misliking the duke's ministers and that pestilent Mr. Fox – (I fear me, Mistress Constance, I should not have writ that unbecoming word, and I will e'en draw a line across it, but still as you may read it for indeed 'tis what he is; but 'tis from himself I learnt it, who in his sermons calls Catholic religion a pestilent idolatry, and Catholic priests pestilent teachers and servants of Antichrist, and the holy Pope at Rome the man of sin) she grows uneasy, and bids me be a good child to her, and not to bring her into trouble with his grace, who is indeed a very good lord to us in all matters but that one of compelling us to hear sermons and the like. My Lord Surrey mislikes all kinds of sermons, and loves Mr. Martin so well, that he stops his ears when Mr. Fox preaches on the dark midnight of papacy and the dawn of the gospel's restored light. And it angers him, as well it should, to hear him call his majesty King Philip of Spain, who is his own godfather, from whom he received his

name, a wicked popish tyrant and a son of Antichrist. My Lady Margaret, his sister, who is a year younger than himself, and has a most admirable beauty and excellent good nature, is vastly taken with what she hears from me of Catholic religion; but methinks this is partly by reason of her misliking Mr. Fulk and Mr. Clarke's long preachments, which we are compelled to hearken to; and their fashion of spending Sunday, which they do call the Sabbath-day, wherein we must needs keep silence, and when not in church sit still at home, which to one of her lively disposition is heavy penance. Methinks when Sunday comes we be all in disgrace; 'tis so like a day of correction. My Lord Surrey has more liberty; for Mr. Martin carries him and his brothers after service into the pleasant fields about Westminster Abbey and the village of Charing Cross, and suffers them to play at ball under the trees, so they do not quarrel amongst themselves. My Lord Henry Howard, his grace's brother, always maintains and defends the Catholic religion against his sister of Westmoreland; and he spoke to my uncles Leonard, Edward, and Francis, and likewise to my aunt Lady Montague, that they should write unto my grandmother touching his grace bringing us up as Protestants. But the Duke of Norfolk, Mrs. Fawcett says, is our guardian, and she apprehends he is resolved that we shall conform to the times, and that no liberty be allowed us for the exercise of Catholic religion."

At this part of the letter I stopped reading; and Edmund, turning to my father, who, though he before had perused it, was also listening, said: "And if this be liberty of conscience, which Protestants speak of, I see no great liberty and no great conscience in the matter."

His cheek flushed as he spoke, and there was a hoarseness in his voice which betokened the working of strong feelings within him. My father smiled with a sort of pitiful sadness, and answered:

"My good boy, when thou art somewhat further advanced in years, thou wilt learn that the two words thou art speaking of are such as men have abused the meaning of more than any others that can be thought of; and I pray to God they do not continue to do so as long as the world lasts. It seems to me that they mostly mean by 'liberty' a freedom to compel others to think and to act as they have themselves a mind to; and by 'conscience' the promptings of their own judgments moved by their own passions."

"But 'tis hard," Edmund said, "'tis at times very hard, Mr. Sherwood, to know whereunto conscience points, in the midst of so many inward clamors as are raised in the soul by conflicting passions of dutiful affection and filial reverence struggling for the mastery. Ay, and no visible token of God's will to make that darkness light. 'Tis that," he cried, more moved as he went on, "that makes me so often gaze upward. Would to God I might see a sign in the skies! for there are no sign-posts on life's path to guide us on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem, which our ministers speak of."

"If thou diligently seekest for sign-posts, my good boy," my father answered, "fear not but that he who said, 'Seek, and you shall find,' will furnish thee with them. He has not left himself without witnesses, or his religion to be groped after in hopeless darkness, so that men may not discern, even in these troublous times, where the truth lies, so they be in earnest in their search after it. But I will not urge thee by the cogency of arguments, or be drawn out of the reserve I have hitherto observed in these matters, which be nevertheless the mightiest that can be thought of as regards the soul's health."

And so, breaking off this discourse, he walked out upon the terrace; and I withdrew to the table, where my mother was sitting, and once more conned over the last pages of *my lady's* letter, which, when the reader hath read, he will perceive the writer's rank and her right to be thus titled.

"And now, Mistress Constance, I must needs inform you of a matter I would not leave you ignorant of, so that you should learn from strangers what so nearly concerns one whom you have a friendship to – and that is my betrothal with my Lord Surrey. The ceremony was public, inasmuch as was needful for the solemnising of

a contract which is binding for life – 'until death us do part,' as the marriage service hath it. How great a change this has wrought in my thoughts, none knows but myself; for though I be but twelve years of age (for his grace would have the ceremony to take place on my birthday), one year older than yourself, and so lately a child that not a very long time ago my grandmother would chastise me with her own hands for my faults, I now am wedded to my young lord, and by his grace and all the household titled Countess of Surrey! And I thank God to be no worse mated; for my lord, who is a few months younger than me, and a very child for frolicsome spirits and wild mirth, has, notwithstanding, so great a pleasantness of manners and so forward a wit, that one must needs have pleasure in his company; and I only wish I had more of it. Whilst we were only friends and playmates, I used to chide and withstand him, as one older and one more staid and discreet than himself; but, ah me! since we have been wedded, 'tis grand to hear him discourse on the duty of wives, and quote the Bible to show they must obey their husbands. He carries it in a very lordly fashion; and if I comply not at once with his commands, he cries out what he has heard at the play-house:

'Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she's froward, peevish sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy, or sway,
Where they are bound to serve, love, and obey.'

He has a most excellent memory. If he has but once heard out of any English or Latin book so much read as is contained in a leaf, he will forthwith perfectly repeat it. My Lord Henry, his uncle, for a trial, invented twenty long and difficult words a few days back, which he had never seen or heard before; yet did he recite them readily, every one in the same order as they were written, having only once read them over. But, touching that matter of obedience, which I care not to gainsay, 'tis not easy at present to obey my lord my husband, and his grace his father, and Mistress Fawcett, too, who holds as strict a hand over the Countess of Surrey as over Mistress Ann Dacre; for the commands of these my rulers do not at all times accord: but I pray to God I may do my duty, and be a good wife to my lord; and I wish, as I said before, my grandmother had been here, and that I had been favored with her good counsel, and had had the benefit of shrift and spiritual advice ere I entered on this stage of my life, which is so new to me, who was but a child a few weeks ago, and am yet treated as such in more respects than one.

"My lord has told me a secret which Higford, his father's servant, let out to him; and 'tis something so weighty and of so great import, that since he left me my thoughts have been truants from my books, and Monsieur Sebastian, who comes to practice us on the lute, stopped his ears, and cried out that the Signora Contessa had no mercy on him, so to murder his compositions. 'Tis not the part of a true wife to reveal her husband's secrets, or else I would tell you, Mistress Constance, this great

news, which I can with trouble keep to myself; and I shall not be easy till I have seen my lord again, which should be when we walk in the garden this evening; but I pray to God he may not be off instead to the Mall, to play at kittlepins; for then I have small chance to get speech with him to-day. Mr. Martin is my very good friend, and reminds the earl of his duty to his lady; but if my lord comes at his bidding, when he would be elsewhere than in my company, 'tis little contentment I have in his visits.

"'Tis yesterday I writ thus much, and now 'tis the day to send this letter; and I saw not my lord last night by reason of his grandfather my Lord Arundel sending to fetch me unto his house in the Strand. His goodness to me is so great, that nothing more can be desired; and his daughter my Lady Lumley is the greatest comfort I have in the world. She showed me a fair picture of my lord's mother, who died the day he was born, not then full seventeen years of age. She was of so amiable a disposition, so prudent, virtuous, and religious, that all who knew her could not but love and esteem her. And I read a letter which this sweet lady had written in Latin to her father on his birthday, to his great contentment, who had procured her to be well instructed in that language, as well as in her own and in all commendable learning. Then I played at primero with my Lord Arundel and my Lady Lumley and my uncle Francis. The knave of hearts was fixed upon for the quinola, and I won the flush. My uncle Francis cried the winning card should be titled Dudley. 'Not so,' quoth the earl; 'the knave that would match with the queen in the suit of hearts should never win the game.' And further talk ensued; from which I learnt that my Lord Arundel and the Duke of Norfolk mislike my Lord Leicester, and would not he should marry the queen; and my uncle laughed, and said, 'My lord, no good Englishman is there but must be of your lordship's mind, though none have so good reason as yourself to hinder so base a contract; for if my Lord of Leicester should climb unto her majesty's throne, beshrew me if he will not remember the box on the ear your lordship ministered to him some time since;' at which the earl laughed, too; but my Lady Lumley cried, 'I would to God my brother of Norfolk were rid of my Lord Leicester's friendship, which has, I much fear me, more danger in it than his enmity. God send he does not lead his grace into troubles greater than can well be thought of!' Alack, Mistress Constance, what uneasy times are these which we have fallen on! for methinks 'troubles' is the word in every one's mouth. As I was about to step into the chair at the hall-door at Arundel House, I heard one of my lord's guard say to another, 'I trust the white horse will be in quiet, and so we shall be out of trouble.' I have asked Mr. Martin what these words should mean; whereupon he told me the white horse, which indeed I might have known, was the Earl of Arundel's cognisance; and that the times were very troublesome, and plots were spoken of in the North anent the Queen of Scots, her majesty the queen's cousin, who is at Chatesworth; and when he said that, all of a sudden I grew red, and my cheeks burned like two hot coals; but he took no heed, and said, 'A true servant might well wish his master out of trouble, when troubles were so rife.' And now shame take me for taking up so much of your time, which should be spent in more profitable ways than the reading of my poor letters; and I must needs beg you to write soon, and hold me as long as I have held you, and love me, sweet one, as I love you. My Lady Margaret, who is in a sense twice my sister, says she is jealous of Mistress Constance Sherwood, and would steal away my heart from her; but, though she is a winsome and cunning thief in such matters, I warrant you she shall fail therein. And so, commending myself to your good prayers, I remain

"Your true friend and loving servant,

"ANN SURREY."

As I finished and was folding up my letter the clock struck nine. It was waning darker without by reason of a cloud which had obscured the moon. I heard my father still pacing up and down the gravel-walk, and ever and anon staying his footsteps awhile, as if watching. After a short space the moon shone out again, and I saw the shadows of two persons against the wall of the kitchen garden. Presently the hall-door was fastened and bolted, as I knew by the rattling of the chain which hung across it. Then my father looked in at the door and said, "'Tis time, goodwife, for young folks to be abed." Upon which my mother rose and made as if she was about to withdraw to her bed-chamber. Edmund followed us up stairs, and, wishing us both good-night, went into the closet where he slept. Then my mother, taking me by the hand, led me into my father's study.

CHAPTER III

As I entered the library, which my father used for purposes of business as well as of study, I saw a gentleman who had often been at our house before, and whom I knew to be a priest, though he was dressed as a working-man of the better sort and had on a riding coat of coarse materials. He beckoned me to him, and I, kneeling, received his blessing.

"What, up yet, little one?" he said; "and yet thou must bestir thyself betimes to-morrow for prayers. These are not days in which priests may play the sluggard and be found abed when the sun rises."

"At what hour must you be on foot, reverend father?" my mother asked, as sitting down at a table by his side she filled his plate with whatever might tempt him to eat, the which he seemed little inclined to.

"Before dawn, good Mrs. Sherwood," he answered; "and across the fields into the forest before ever the laboring men are astir; and you know best when that is."

"An if it be so, which I fear it must," my father said, "we must e'en have the chapel ready by two o'clock. And, goodwife, you should presently get that wench to bed."

"Nay, good mother," I cried, and threw my arms round her waist, "prithee let me sit up to-night; I can lie abed all to-morrow." So wistfully and urgently did I plead, that she, who had grown of late somewhat loth to deny any request of mine, yielded to my entreaties, and only willed that I should lie down on a settle betwixt her chair and the chimney, in which a fagot was blazing, though it was summer-time, but the weather was chilly. I gazed by turns on my mother's pale face and my father's, which was thoughtful, and on the good priest's, who was in an easy-chair, wherein they had compelled him to sit, opposite to me on the other side of the chimney. He looked, as I remember him then, as if in body and in mind he had suffered more than he could almost bear.

After some discourse had been ministered betwixt him and my father of the journey he had been taking, and the friends he had seen since last he had visited our house, my mother said, in a tremulous voice, "And now, good Mr. Mush, an if it would not pain you too sorely, tell us if it be true that your dear daughter in Christ, Mrs. Clitherow, as indeed won the martyr's crown, as some letters from York reported to us a short time back?"

Upon this Mr. Mush raised his head, which had sunk on his breast, and said, "She that was my spiritual daughter in times past, and now, as I humbly hope, my glorious mother in heaven, the gracious martyr Mrs. Clitherow, has overcome all her enemies, and passed from this mortal life with rare and marvellous triumph into the peaceable city of God, there to receive a worthy crown of endless immortality and joy." His eye, that had been before heavy and dim, now shone with sudden light, and it seemed as if the cord about his heart was loosed, and his spirit found vent at last in words after a long and painful silence. More eloquent still was his countenance than his words as he exclaimed, "Torments overcame her not, nor the sweetness of life, nor her vehement affection for husband and children, nor the flattering allurements and deceitful promises of the persecutors. Finally, the world, the flesh, and the devil overcame her not. She, a woman, with invincible courage entered combat against them all, to defend the ancient faith, wherein both she and her enemies were baptized and gave their promise to God to keep the same until death. O sacred martyr!" and, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, the good father went on, "remember me, I beseech thee humbly, in thy perfect charity, whom thou hast left miserable behind thee, in time past thy unworthy father and now most unworthy servant, made ever joyful by thy virtuous life, and now lamenting thy death and thy absence, and yet rejoicing in thy glory."

A sob burst from my mother's breast, and she hid her face against my father's shoulder. There was a brief silence, during which many quickly-rising thoughts passed through my mind. Of Daniel in the lions' den, and the Machabees and the early Christians; and of the great store of blood which

had been shed of late in this our country, and of which amongst the slain were truly martyrs, and which were not; of the vision in the sky which had been seen at Lichfield; and chiefly of that blessed woman Mrs. Clitherow, whose virtue and good works I had often before heard of, such as serving the poor and harboring priests, and loving God's Church with a wonderful affection greater than can be thought of. Then I heard my father say, "How was it at the last, good Mr. Mush?" I oped my eyes, and hung on the lips of the good priest even as if to devour his words as he gave utterance to them.

"She refused to be tried by the country," he answered, in a tremulous voice; "and so they murdered her."

"How so?" my mother asked, shading her eyes with her hand, as if to exclude the mental sight of that which she yet sought to know.

"They pressed her to death," he slowly uttered; "and the last words she was heard to say were 'Jesu, Jesu, Jesu! have mercy on me!' She was in dying about a quarter of an hour, and then her blessed spirit was released and took its flight to heaven. May we die the death of the righteous, and may our last end be like hers!"

Again my mother hid her face in my father's bosom, and methought she said not "Amen" to that prayer; but turning to Mr. Mush with a flushed cheek and troubled eye, she asked, "And why did the blessed Mrs. Clitherow refuse to be tried by the country, reverend father, and thereby subject herself to that lingering death?"

"These were her words when questioned and urged on that point," he answered, "which sufficiently clear her from all accusation of obstinacy or desperation, and combine the rare discretion and charity which were in her at all times: 'Alas!' quoth she, 'if I should have put myself on the country, evidence must needs have come against me touching my harboring of priests and the holy sacrifice of the mass in my house, which I know none could give but only my children and servants; and it would have been to me more grievous than a thousand deaths if I should have seen any of them brought forth before me, to give evidence against me in so good a cause and be guilty of my blood; and, secondly,' quoth she, 'I know well the country must needs have found me guilty to please the council, who so earnestly seek my blood, and then all they had been accessory to my death and damnably offended God. I therefore think, in the way of charity, for my part to hinder the country from such a sin; and seeing it must needs be done, to cause as few to do it as might be; and that was the judge himself.' So she thought, and thereupon she acted, with that single view to God's glory and the good of men's souls that was ever the passion of her fervent spirit."

"Her children?" my mother murmured in a faint voice, still hiding her face from him. "That little Agnes you used to tell us of, that was so dear to her poor mother, how has it fared with her?"

Mr. Mush answered, "Her *happy* mother sent her hose and shoes to her daughter at the last, signifying that she should serve God and follow her steps of virtue. She was committed to ward because she would not betray her mother, and there whipped and extremely used for that she would not go to the church and hear a sermon. When her mother was murdered, the heretics came to her and said that unless she would go to the church, her mother should be put to death. The child, thinking to save the life of her who had given her birth, went to a sermon, and thus they deceived her."

"God forgive them!" my father ejaculated; and I, creeping to my mother's side, threw my arms about her neck, upon which she, caressing me, said:

"Now thou wilt be up to their deceits, Conny, if they should practice the same arts on thee."

"Mother," I cried, clinging to her, "I will go with thee to prison and to death; but to their church I will not go who love not our Blessed Lady."

"So help thee God!" my father cried, and laid his hand on my head.

"Take heart, good Mrs. Sherwood," Mr. Mush said to my mother, who was weeping; "God may spare you such trials as those which that sweet saint rejoiced in, or he can give you a like strength to hers. We have need in these times to bear in mind that comfortable saying of holy writ, 'As your day shall your strength be.'"

"'Tis strange," my father observed, "how these present troubles seem to awake the readiness, nay the wish, to suffer for truth's sake. It is like a new sense in a soul heretofore but too prone to eschew suffering of any sort: 'tis even as the keen breezes of our own Cannock Chase stimulate the frame to exertions which it would shrink from in the duller air of the Trent Valley."

"Ah! and is it even so with you, my friend?" exclaimed Mr. Mush. "From my heart I rejoice at it: such thoughts are oftentimes forerunners of God's call to a soul marked out for his special service."

My mother, against whom I was leaning since mention had been made of Mrs. Clitherow's daughter, began to tremble; and rising said she would go to the chapel to prepare for confession. Taking me by the hand, she mounted the stairs to the room which was used as such since the ancient faith had been proscribed. One by one that night we knelt at the feet of the good shepherd, who, like his Lord, was ready to lay down his life for his sheep, and were shriven. Then, at two of the clock, mass was said, and my parents and most of our servants received, and likewise some neighbors to whom notice had been sent in secret of Mr. Mush's coming. When my mother returned from the altar to her seat, I marvelled at the change in her countenance. She who had been so troubled before the coming of the Heavenly Guest into her breast, wore now so serene and joyful an aspect, that the looking upon her at that time wrought in me a new and comfortable sense of the greatness of that divine sacrament. I found not the thought of death frighten me then; for albeit on that night I for the first time fully arrived at the knowledge of the peril and jeopardy in which the Catholics of this land do live; nevertheless this knowledge awoke in me more exultation than fear. I had seen precautions used, and reserves maintained, of which I now perceived the cause. For some time past my parents had prepared the way for this no-longer-to-be-deferred enlightenment. The small account they had taught me to make of the wealth and comforts of this perishable world, and the histories they had recounted to me of the sufferings of Christians in the early times of the Church, had been directed unto this end. They had, as it were, laid the wood on the altar of my heart, which they prayed might one day burn into a flame. And now when, by reason of the discourse I had heard touching Mrs. Clitherow's blessed but painful end for harboring of priests in her house, and the presence of one under our roof, I took heed that the danger had come nigh unto our own doors, my heart seemed to beat with a singular joy. Childhood sets no great store on life: the passage from this world to the next is not terrible to such as have had no shadows cast on their paths by their own or others' sins. Heaven is not a far-off region to the pure in heart; but rather a home, where God, as St. Thomas sings,

"Vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in patria."

But, ah me! how transient are the lights and shades which flit across the childish mind! and how mutable the temper of youth, never long impressed by any event, however grave! Not many days after Mr. Mush's visit to our house, another letter from the Countess of Surrey came into my hand, and drove from my thoughts for the time all but the matters therein disclosed.

"SWEET MISTRESS CONSTANCE"

(my lady wrote), – "In my last letter I made mention, in an obscure fashion, of a secret which my lord had told me touching a matter of great weight which Higford, his grace's steward, had let out to him; and now that the whole world is speaking of what was then in hand, and that troubles have come of it, I must needs relieve my mind by writing thereof to her who is the best friend I have in the world, if I may judge by the virtuous counsel and loving words her letters do contain. 'Tis like you have heard somewhat of that same matter, Mistress Constance; for much talk has been ministered anent it since I wrote, amongst people of all sorts, and with various intents to the hindering or the promoting thereof. I mean touching the marriage of his grace the Duke of Norfolk with the Queen of Scots, which is much desired by

some, and very little wished for by others. My lord, as is reasonable in one of his years and of so noble a spirit, and his sister, who is in all things the counterpart of her brother, have set their hearts thereon since the first inkling they had of it; for this queen had so noted a fame for her excellent beauty and sweet disposition that it has wrought in them an extraordinary passionate desire to title her mother, and to see their father so nobly mated, though not more than he deserves; for, as my lord says, his grace's estate in England is worth little less than the whole realm of Scotland, in the ill state to which the wars have reduced it; and when he is in his own tennis-court at Norwich, he thinks himself as great as a king.

"As a good wife, I should wish as my lord does; and indeed this marriage, Mistress Constance, would please me well; for the Queen of Scots is Catholic, and methinks if his grace were to wed her, there might arise some good out of it to such as are dependent on his grace touching matters of religion; and since Mr. Martin has gone beyond seas, 'tis very little I hear in this house but what is contrary to the teaching I had at my grandmother's. My lord saith this queen's troubles will be ended if she doth marry his grace, for so Higford has told him; but when I spoke thereof to my Lady Lumley, she prayed God his grace's might not then begin, but charged me to be silent thereon before my Lord Arundel, who has greatly set his heart on this match. She said words were in every one's mouth concerning this marriage which should never have been spoken of but amongst a few. 'Nan,' quoth she, 'if Phil and thou do let your children's tongues wag anent a matter which may well be one of life and death, more harm may come of it than can well be thought of.' So prithe, Mistress Constance, do you be silent as the grave on what I have herein written, if so be you have not heard of it but from me. My lord had a quarrel with my Lord Essex, who is about his own age, anent the Queen of Scots, a few days since, when he came to spend his birthday with him; for my lord was twelve years old last week, and I gave him a fair jewel to set in his cap, for a love-token and for remembrance. My lord said that the Queen of Scots was a lady of so great virtue and beauty that none else could be compared with her; upon which my lord of Essex cried it was high treason to the queen's majesty to say so, and that if her grace held so long a time in prison one who was her near kinswoman, it was by reason of her having murdered her husband and fomented rebellion in this kingdom of England, for the which she did deserve to be extremely used. My lord was very wroth at this, and swore he was no traitor, and that the Queen of Scots was no murtheress, and he would lay down his head on the block rather than suffer any should style her such; upon which my lord of Essex asked, 'Prithee, my Lord Surrey, were you at Thornham last week when the queen's majesty was on a visit to your grandfather, my Lord Arundel?' 'No,' cried my lord, 'your lordship being there yourself in my Lord Leicester's suite, must needs have noticed I was absent; for if I had been present, methinks 'tis I and not your lordship would have waited behind her majesty's chair at table and held a napkin to her.' 'And if you had, my lord,' quoth my Lord Essex, waxing hot in his speech, 'you would have noticed how her grace's majesty gave a nip to his grace your father, who was sitting by her side, and said she would have him take heed on what pillow he rested his head.' 'And I would have you take heed,' cries my lord, 'how you suffer your tongue to wag in an unseemly manner anent her grace's majesty and his grace my father and the Queen of Scots, who is kinswoman to both, and even now a prisoner, which should make men careful how they speak of her who cannot speak in her own cause; for it is a very inhuman part, my lord, to tread on such as misfortune has cast down.' There was a nobleness in these words such as I have often taken note

of in my lord, though so young, and which his playmate yielded to; so that nothing more was said at that time anent those matters, which indeed do seem too weighty to be discoursed upon by young folks. But I have thought since on the lines which 'tis said the queen's majesty wrote when she was herself a prisoner, which begin,

'O Fortune! how thy restless, wavering state
Hath fraught with cares my troubled wit;
Witness this present prison, whither fate
Could bear me, and the joys I quit' —

and wondered she should have no greater pity on those in the same plight, as so many be at this time. Ah me! I would not keep a bird in a cage an I could help it, and 'tis sad men are not more tender of such as are of a like nature with themselves!

"My lord was away some days after this at Oxford, whither he had been carried to be present at the queen's visit, and at the play of *Palamon and Arcite*, which her majesty heard in the common hall of Christ's Church. One evening, as my lady Margaret and I (like two twin cherries on one stalk, my lord would say, for he is mightily taken with the stage-plays he doth hear, and hath a trick of framing his speech from them) were sitting at the window near unto the garden practising our lutes and singing madrigals, he surprised us with his sweet company, in which I find an ever increasing content, and cried out as he approached, 'Ladies, I hold this sentence of the poet as a canon of my creed, that whom God loveth not, they love not music.' And then he said that albeit Italian was a very harmonious and sweet language which pleasantly tickleth the ear, he for his part loved English best, even in singing. Upon which, finding him in the humor for discreet and sensible conversation, which, albeit he hath good parts and a ready wit, is not always the case, by reason of his being, as boys mostly are, prone to wagging, I took occasion to relate what I had heard my Lord of Arundel say touching his visit to the court of Brussels, when the Duchess of Parma invited him to a banquet to meet the Prince of Orange and most of the chief courtiers. The discourse was carried on in French; but my lord, albeit he could speak well in that language, nevertheless made use of an interpreter. At the which the Prince of Orange expressed his surprise to Sir John Wilson, who was present, that an English nobleman of so great birth and breeding should be ignorant of the French tongue, which the earl presently hearing, said, 'Tell the prince that I like to speak in that language in which I can best utter my mind and not mistake.' And I perceive, my lord,' I said, 'that you are of a like mind with his lordship, and no lover of new-fangled and curious terms.'

"Upon which my dear earl laughed, and related unto us how the queen had been pleased to take notice of him at Oxford, and spoke merrily to him of his marriage. 'And prithee, Phil, what were her highness's words?' quoth his prying sister, like a true daughter of Eve. At which my lord stroked his chin, as if to smooth his beard which is still to come, and said her majesty had cried, 'God's pity, child, thou wilt tire of thy wife afore you have both left the nursery.' 'Alack,' cried Meg, 'if any but her highness had said it, thy hand would have been on thy sword, brother, and I'll warrant thou didst turn as red as a turkey-cock, when her majesty thus titled thee a baby. Nay, do not frown, but be a good lord to us, and tell Nan and me if the queen said aught else.' Then my lord cleared his brow, and related how in the hunting scene in the play, when the cry of the hounds was heard outside the stage,

which was excellently well imitated, some scholars who were seated near him, and he must confess himself also, did shout, 'There, there – he's caught, he's caught!' upon which her grace's majesty laughed, and merrily cried out from her box, 'Those boys in very troth are ready to leap out of the windows!' 'And had you such pleasant sports each day, brother?' quoth our Meg. 'No, by my troth,' my lord answered; 'the more's the pity; for the next day there was a disputation held in physic and divinity from two to seven; and Dr. Westphaling held forth at so great length that her majesty sent word to him to end his discourse without delay, to the great relief and comfort of all present. But he would not give over, lest, having committed all to memory, he should forget the rest if he omitted any part of it, and be brought to shame before the university and the court.' 'What said her highness when she saw he heeded not her commands?' Meg asked. 'She was angered at first,' quoth my lord, 'that he durst go on with his discourse when she had sent him word presently to stop, whereby she had herself been prevented from speaking, which the Spanish Ambassador had asked her to do; but when she heard the reason it moved her to laughter, and she titled him a parrot.'

""And spoke not her majesty at all?" I asked; and my lord said, 'She would not have been a woman, Nan, an she had held her tongue after being once resolved to use it. She made the next day an oration in Latin, and stopped in the midst to bid my Lord Burleigh be seated, and not to stand painfully on his gouty feet. Beshrew me, but I think she did it to show the poor dean how much better her memory served her than his had done, for she looked round to where he was standing ere she resumed her discourse. And now, Meg, clear thy throat and tune thy pipe, for not another word will I speak till thou hast sung that ditty good Mr. Martin set to music for thee.' I have set it down here, Mistress Constance, with the notes as she sung it, that you may sing it also; and not like it the less that my quaint fancy pictures the maiden the poet sings of, in her 'frock of frolic green,' like unto my sweet friend who dwells not far from one of the fair rivers therein named.

A knight, as antique stories tell,
A daughter had named Dawsabel,
A maiden fair and free;
She wore a frock of frolic green,
Might well become a maiden queen,
Which seemly was to see.

The silk well could she twist and twine,
And make the fine March pine,
And with the needle work;
And she could help the priest to say
His matins on a holy day,
And sing a psalm in kirk.

Her features all as fresh above
As is the grass that grows by Dove,
And lythe as lass of Kent;
Her skin as soft as Leinster wool,
And white as snow on Penhisk Hull,
Or swan that swims on Trent.

This maiden on a morn betime
Goes forth when May is in its prime,
To get sweet setywall,
The honeysuckle, the hurlock,
The lily and the lady-smock,
To deck her father's hall.

"Ah," cried my lord, when Meg had ended her song, beshrew me, if Monsieur Sebastian's madrigals are one-half so dainty as this English piece of harmony.' And then, – for his lordship's head is at present running on pageants such as he witnessed at Nonsuch and at Oxford, – he would have me call into the garden Madge and Bess, whilst he fetched his brothers to take part in a May game, not indeed in season now, but which, he says, is too good sport not to be followed all the year round. So he must needs dress himself as Robin Hood, with a wreath on his head and a sheaf of arrows in his girdle, and me as Maid Marian; and Meg, for that she is taller by an inch than any of us, though younger than him and me, he said should play Little John, and Bess Friar Tuck, for that she looks so gleesome and has a face so red and round. 'And Tom,' he cried, 'thou needst not be at pains to change thy name, for we will dub thee Tom the piper.' 'And what is Will to be?' asked my Lady Bess, who, since I be titled Countess of Surrey, must needs be styled My Lady William Howard.' 'Why, there's only the fool left,' quoth my lord, 'for thy sweetheart to play, Bess.' At the which her ladyship and his lordship too began to stamp and cry, and would have sobbed outright, but sweet Madge, whose face waxes so white and her eyes so large and blue that methinks she is more like to an angel than a child, put out her little thin hands with a pretty gesture, and said, 'I'll be the fool, brother Surrey, and Will shall be the dragon, and Bess ride the hobby-horse, an it will please her.' 'Nay, but she is Friar Tuck,' quoth my lord, 'and should not ride.' 'And prithee wherefore no?' cried the forward imp, who, now she no more fears her grandam's rod, has grown very saucy and bold; 'why should not the good friar ride, an it doth pleasure him?'

"At the which we laughed and fell to acting our parts with no little merriment and noise, and sundry reprehensions from my lord when we mistook our postures or the lines he would have us to recite. And at the end he set up a pole on the grass-plot for the Maying, and we danced and sung around it to a merry tune, which set our feet flying in time with the music:

Now in the month of maying,
When the merry lads are playing,
Fa, la, la.

Each with his bonny lasse,
Upon the greeny grasse,
Fa, la, la.

Madge was not strong enough to dance, but she stole away to gather white and blue violets, and made a fair garland to set on my head, to my lord's great content, and would have me unloose my hair on my shoulders, which fell nearly to my feet, and waved in the wind in a wild fashion; which he said was beseeeming for a bold outlaw's

bride, and what he had seen in the Maid Marian, who had played in the pageant at Nonsuch. Mrs. Fawcett misdoubted that this sport of ours should be approved by Mr. Charke, who calls all stage-playing Satan's recreations, and a sure road unto hell; and that we shall hear on it in his next preachment; for he has held forth to her at length on that same point, and upbraided her for that she did suffer such foolish and profane pastimes to be carried on in his grace's house. Ah me! I see no harm in it; and if, when my lord visits me, I play not with him as he chooses, 'tis not a thing to be expected that he will come only to sing psalms or play chess, which Mr. Charke holds to be the only game it befits Christians to entertain themselves with. 'Tis hard to know what is right and wrong when persons be of such different minds, and no ghostly adviser to be had, such as I was used to at my grandmother's house.

"All, Mistress Constance! when I last wrote unto you I said troubles was the word in every one's mouth, and ere I had finished this letter – which I was then writing, and have kept by me ever since – what, think you, has befallen us? 'Tis anent the marriage of his grace with the Queen of Scots; which I now do wish it had pleased God none had ever thought of. Some weeks since my lord had told me, with great glee, that the Spanish ambassador was about to petition her majesty the queen for the release of her highness's cousin; and Higford and Bannister, and the rest of his grace's household – whom, since Mr. Martin went beyond seas, my lord spends much of his time with, and more of it methinks than is beseeeming or to the profit of his manners and advancement of his behavior – have told him that this would prepare the way for the greatly-to-be-desired end of his grace's marriage with that queen; and my lord was reckoning up all the fine sports and pageants and noble entertainments would be enacted at Kenninghall and Thetford when that right princely wedding should take place; and how he should himself carry the train of the queen-duchess when she went into church; who was the fairest woman, he said, in the whole world, and none ever seen to be compared with her since the days of Grecian Helen. But when, some days ago, I questioned my lord touching the success of the ambassador's suits, and the queen's answer thereto, he said: 'By my troth, Nan, I understand that her highness sent away the gooseman, for so she entitled Senor Guzman, with a flea in his ear; for she said he had come on a fool's errand, and gave him for her answer that she would advise the Queen of Scots to bear her condition with less impatience, or she might chance to find some of those on whom she relied shorter by a head.' Oh, my lord,' I cried; 'my dear Phil! God send she was not speaking of his grace your father!' 'Nan,' quoth he, 'she looked at his grace the next day with looks of so great anger and disdain, that my lord of Leicester – that false and villainous knave – gave signs of so great triumph as if his grace was even on his way to the Tower. Beshrew me, if I would not run my rapier through his body if I could!' 'And where is his grace at present?' I asked. 'He came to town night,' quoth my lord, 'with my Arundel, and this morning went Kenninghall.' After this for some days I heard no more, for a new tutor came to my lord, who suffers him not to stay in the waiting-room with his grace's gentlemen, and keeps so strict a hand over him touching his studies, that in his brief hours of recreation he would rather play at quoits, and other active pastimes, than converse with his lady. Alack! I wish he were a few years older, and I should have more comfort of him than now, when I must needs put up with his humors, which be as changeful, by reason of his great youth, as the lights and shades on the grass 'neath an aspen-tree. I must be throwing a ball for hours, or learning a stage-part, when I would fain speak of the weighty matters which be on hand, such as I have told you of. Howsoever, as good luck would have it, my Lady Lumley sent

for me to spend the day with her; and from her ladyship I learnt that his grace had written to the queen that he had withdrawn from the court because of the pain he felt at her displeasure, and his mortification at the treatment he had been subjected to by the insolence of his foes, by whom he has been made a common table talk; and that her majesty had laid upon him her commands straightway to return to court. That was all was known that day; but at the very time that I was writing the first of these woeful tidings to you, Mistress Constance, his grace – whom I now know that I do love dearly, and with a true daughter's heart, by the dreadful fear and pain I am in – was arrested at Burnham, where he had stopped on his road to Windsor, and committed to the Tower. Alack! alack! what will follow? I will leave this my letter open until I have further news to send.

"His grace was examined this day before my Lord-keeper Bacon, and my Lords Northampton, Sadler, Bedford, and Cecil; and they have reported to her majesty that the duke had not put himself under penalty of the law by any overt act of treason, and that it would be difficult to convict him without this. My Lord of Arundel, at whose house I was when these tidings came, said her majesty was so angered at this judgment, that she cried out in a passion, 'Away! what the law fails to do my authority shall effect;' and straightway fell into a fit, her passion was so great; and they were forced to apply vinegar to restore her. I had a wicked thought come into my mind, Mistress Constance, that I should not have been concerned if the queen's majesty had died in that fit, which I befear me was high treason, and a mortal sin, to wish for one to die in a state of sin. But, alack! since I have left going to shrift I find it hard to fight against bad thoughts and naughty tempers; and when I say my prayers, and the old words come to my lips, which the preachments I hear do contradict, I am sometimes well-nigh tempted to give over praying at all. But I pray to God I may never be so wicked; and though I may not have my beads (which were taken from me), that the good Bishop of Durham gave me when I was confirmed, I use my fingers in their stead; and whilst his grace was at the Tower I did say as many 'Hail Maries' in one day as I ever did in my life before; and promised him, who is God's own dear Son and hers, if his grace came out of prison, never to be a day of my life without saying a prayer, or giving an alms, or doing a good turn to those which be in the same case, near at hand or throughout the world; and I ween there are many such of all sorts at this time.

"Your loving servant to command, whose heart is at present heavier than her pen,

"ANN SURREY."

"P. S. My Lord of Westmoreland has left London, and his lady is in a sad plight. I hear such things said on all sides touching Papists as I can scarce credit, and I pray to God they be not true. But an if they be so bad as some do say, why does his grace run his head into danger for the sake of the Popish queen, as men do style her? They have arrested Higford and Bannister last night, and they are to taste of the rack to-day, to satisfy the queen, who is so urgent on it. My lord is greatly concerned thereat, and cried when he spoke of it, albeit he tried to hide his tears. I asked him to show me what sort of pain it was; whereupon he twisted my arm till I cried out and bade him desist. God help me! I could not have endured the pain an instant longer; and if they have naught to tell anent these plots and against his grace, they needs must speak what is false when under the rack. Oh, 'tis terrible to think what men do suffer and cause others to suffer!"

This letter came into my hand on a day when my father had gone into Lichfield touching some business; and he brought with it the news of a rising in the north, and that his Grace of Northumberland and my Lord of Westmoreland had taken arms on hearing of the Duke of Norfolk's arrest; and the Catholics, under Mr. Richard Norton and Lord Latimer, had joined their standard, and were bearing the cross before the insurgents. My father was sore cast down at these tidings; for he looked for no good from what was rebellion against a lawful sovereign, and a consorting with troublesome spirits, swayed by no love of our holy religion but rather contrary to it, as my Lord of Westmoreland and some others of those leading lords. And he hence foreboded fresh trials to all such as were of the ancient faith all over England; which was not long in accruing even in our own case; for a short time after, we were for the first time visited by pursuivants, on a day and in such a manner as I will now briefly relate.

CHAPTER IV

On the Sunday morning which followed the day on which the news had reached us of the rising in Northumberland, I went, as was my wont, into my mother's dressing-room, to crave her blessing, and I asked of her if the priest who came to say mass for us most Sundays had arrived. She said he had been, and had gone away again, and that she greatly feared we should have no prayers that day, saving such as we might offer up for ourselves; "together," she added after a pause, "with a bitter sacrifice of tears and of such sufferings as we have heard of, but as yet not known the taste of ourselves."

Again I felt in my heart a throbbing feeling, which had in it an admixture of pain and joy – made up, I ween, of conflicting passions – such as curiosity feeding on the presentment of an approaching change; of the motions of grace in a soul which faintly discerns the happiness of suffering for conscience sake; and the fear of suffering natural to the human heart.

"Why are we to have no mass, sweet mother?" I asked, encircling her waist in my arms; "and wherefore has good Mr. Bryan gone away?"

"We received advice late last evening," she answered, "that the queen's pursuivants have orders to search this day the houses of the most noted recusants in this neighborhood; and 'tis likely they may begin with us, who have never made a secret of our faith, and never will."

"And will they kill us if they come?" I asked, with that same trembling eagerness I have so often known since when danger was at hand.

"Not now, not to-day, Conny," she answered; "but I pray to God they do not carry us away to prison; for since this rising in the north, to be a Catholic and a traitor is one and the same in their eyes who have to judge us. We must needs hide our books and church furniture; so give me thy beads, sweet one, and the cross from thy neck."

I waxed red when my mother bade me unloose the string, and tightly clasped the cross in both my hands "Let them kill me, mother," I cried; "but take not off my cross."

"Maybe," she said, "the queen's officers would trample on it, and injure their own souls in dishonoring a holy symbol." And as she spoke she took it from me, and hid it in a recess behind the chimney; which no sooner was done, than we heard a sound of horses' feet in the approach; and going to the window, I cried out, "Here is a store of armed men on horseback!" Ere I had uttered the words, one of them had dismounted and loudly knocked at the door with his truncheon; upon which my mother, taking me by the hand, went down stairs into the parlor where my father was. It seemed as if those knocks had struck on her heart, so great a trembling came over her. My father bade the servants throw open the door; and the sheriff came in, with two pursuivants and some more men with him, and produced a warrant to search the house; which my father having read, he bowed his head, and gave orders not to hinder them in their duty. He stood himself the while in the hall, his face as white as a smock, and his teeth almost running through his lips.

One of the men came into the library, and pulling down the books, scattered them on the floor, and cried:

"Look ye here, sirs, what Popish stuff is this, fit for the hangman's burning!" At the which another answered:

"By my troth, Sam, I misdoubt that thou canst read. Methinks thou dost hunt Popery as dogs do game, by the scent. Prithce spell me the title of this volume."

"I will have none of thy gibing, Master Sevenoaks," returned the other. "Whether I be a scholar or not, I'll warrant no honest gospeller wrote on those yellow musty leaves, which be two hundred years old, if they be a day."

"And I'll warrant thee in that credence, Master Samuel, by the same token that the volume in thy hand is a treatise on field-sports, writ in the days of Master Caxton; a code of the laws to be observed in the hunting and killing of deer, which I take to be no Popish sport, for our most gracious

queen – God save her majesty! – slew a fat buck not long ago in Windsor Forest with her own hand, and remembered his grace of Canterbury with half her prey;" and so saying, he drew his comrade from the room; I ween with the intent to save the books from his rough handling, for he seemed of a more gentle nature than the rest and of a more moderate disposition.

When they had ransacked all the rooms below, they went upstairs, and my father followed. Breaking from my mother's side, who sat pale and still as a statute, unable to move from her seat, I ran after him, and on the landing-place I heard the sheriff say somewhat touching the harboring of priests; to the which he made answer that he was ready to swear there was no priest in the house. "Nor has been?" quoth the sheriff; upon which my father said:

"Good sir, this house was built in the days of Her majesty's grandfather, King Henry VII.; and on one occasion his majesty was pleased to rest under my grandfather's roof, and to hear mass in that room," he said, pointing to what was now the chapel, "the church being too distant for his majesty's convenience: so priests have been within these walls many times ere I was born."

The sheriff said no more at that time, but went into the room, where there were only a few chairs, for that in the night the altar and all that appertained to it had been removed. He and his men were going out again, when a loud knocking was heard against the wall on one side of the chamber; at the sound of which my father's face, which was white before, became of an ashy paleness.

"Ah!" cried one of the pursuivants, "the lying Papist! The egregious Roman! an oath is in his mouth that he has no priest in his house, and here is one hidden in his cupboard."

"Mr. Sherwood!" the sheriff shouted, greatly moved, "lead the way to the hiding-place wherein a traitor is concealed, or I order the house to be pulled down about your ears."

My father was standing like one stunned by a sudden blow, and I heard him murmur, "'Tis the devil's own doing, or else I am stark, staring mad."

The men ran to the wall, and knocked against it with their sticks, crying out in an outrageous manner to the priest to come out of his hole. "We'll unearth the Jesuit fox," cried one; "we'll give him a better lodging in Lichfield gaol," shouted another; and the sheriff kept threatening to set fire to the house. Still the knocking from within went on, as if answering that outside, and then a voice cried out, "I cannot open: I am shut in."

"'Tis Edmund!" I exclaimed; "'tis Edmund is in the hiding-place." And then the words were distinctly heard, "'Tis I; 'tis Edmund Genings. For God's sake, open; I am shut in." Upon which my father drew a deep breath, and hastening forward, pressed his finger on a place in the wall, the panel slipped, and Edmund came out of the recess, looking scared and confused. The pursuivants seized him; but the sheriff cried out, surprised, "God's death, sirs! but 'tis the son of the worshipful Mr. Genings, whose lady is a mother in Israel, and M. Jean de Luc's first cousin! And how came ye, Mr. Edmund, to be concealed in this Popish den? Have these recusants imprisoned you with some foul intent, or perverted you by their vile cunning?" Edmund was addressing my father in an agitated voice.

"I fear me, sir," he cried, clasping his hands, "I befear me much I have affrighted you, and I have been myself sorely affrighted. I was passing through this room, which I have never before seen, and the door of which was open this morn. By chance I drew my hand along the wall, where there was no apparent mark, when the panel slipped and disclosed this recess, into which I stepped, and straightway the opening closed and I remained in darkness. I was afraid no one might hear me, and I should die of hunger."

My father tried to smile, but could not. "Thank God," he said, "'tis no worse;" and sinking down on a chair he remained silent, whilst the sheriff and the pursuivants examined the recess, which was deep and narrow, and in which they brandished their swords in all directions. Then they went round the room, feeling the walls; but though there was another recess with a similar mode of aperture, they hit not on it, doubtless through God's mercy; for in it were concealed the altar furniture and our books, with many other things besides, which they would have seized on.

Before going away, the sheriff questioned Edmund concerning his faith, and for what reason he abode in a Popish house and consorted with recusants. Edmund answered he was no Papist, but a kinsman of Mrs. Sherwood, unto whose house his father had oftentimes sent him. Upon which he was counselled to take heed unto himself and to eschew evil company, which leads to horrible defections, and into the straight road to perdition. Whereupon they departed; and the officer who had enticed his companion from the library smiled as he passed me, and said:

"And wherefore not at prayers, little mistress, on the Lord's day, as all Christian folks should be?"

I ween he was curious to see how I should answer, albeit not moved thereunto by any malicious intent. But at the time I did not bethink myself that he spoke of Protestant service; and being angered at what passed, I said:

"Because we be kept from prayers by the least welcome visit ever made to Christian folks on a Lord's morning." He laughed and cried:

"Thou hast a ready tongue, young mistress; and when tried for recusancy I warrant thou'lt give the judge a piece of thy mind."

"And if I ever be in such a presence, and for such a cause," I answered, "I pray to God I may say to my lord on the bench what the blessed apostle St. Peter spoke to his judges: 'If it be just in the sight of God to hear you rather than God, judge ye.'" At which he cried:

"Why, here is a marvel indeed – a Papist to quote Scripture!" And laughing again, he went his way; and the house was for that time rid of these troublesome guests.

Then Edmund again sued for pardon to my father, that through his rash conduct he had been the occasion of so great fear and trouble to him.

"I warrant thee, my good boy," quoth my father, "thou didst cause me the most keen anguish, and the most sudden relief from it, which can well be thought of; and so no more need be said thereon. And as thou must needs be going to the public church, 'tis time that thou bestir thyself; for 'tis a long walk there and back, and the sun waxing hot."

When Edmund was gone, and I alone with him, my father clasped me in his arms, and cried:

"God send, my wench, thou mayest justify thy sponsors who gave thee thy name in baptism; for 'tis a rare constancy these times do call for, and such as is not often seen, saving in such as be of a noble and religious spirit; which I pray to God may be the case with thee."

My mother did not speak, but went away with her hand pressed against her heart; which was what of late I had often seen her to do, as if the pain was more than she could bear.

One hour later, as I was crossing the court, a man met me suited as a farmer; who, when I passed him, laid his hand on my shoulder; at the which I started, and turning round saw it was Father Bryan; who, smiling as I caught his hand, cried out:

"Dost know the shepherd in his wolf's clothing, little mistress?" and hastening on to the chapel he said mass, at the which only a few assisted, as my parents durst not send to the Catholics so late in the day. As soon as mass was over, Mr. Bryan said he must leave, for there was a warrant issued for his apprehension; and our house famed for recusancy, so as he might not stay in it but with great peril to himself and to its owners. We stood at the door as he was mounting his horse, and my father said, patting its neck:

"Tis a faithful servant this, reverend father; many a mile he has carried thee to the homes of the sick and dying since our troubles began."

"Ah! good Mr. Sherwood," Mr. Bryan replied, as he gathered up the bridle, "thou hast indeed warrant to style the poor beast faithful. If I were to shut my eyes and let him go, no doubt but he would find his way to the doors of such as cleave to the ancient faith, in city or in hamlet, across moor or through thick wood. If a pursuivant bestrode him, he might discover through his means who be recusants a hundred miles around. But I bethink me he would not budge with such a burthen on his back; and that he who made the prophet's ass to speak, would, give the good beast more sense than to

turn informer, and to carry the wolf to the folds of the lambs. And prithee, Mistress Constance," said the good priest, turning to me, "canst keep a secret and be silent, when men's lives are in jeopardy?"

"Aye," cried my father quickly, "'tis as much as worthy Mr. Bryan's life is worth that none should know he was here to-day."

"More than my poor life is worth," he rejoined; "that were little to think of, my good friends. For five years I have made it my prayer that the day may soon come – and I care not how soon – when I may lay it down for his sake who gave it. But we must e'en have a care for those who are so rash as to harbor priests in these evil times. So Mistress Constance must e'en study the virtue of silence, and con the meaning of the proverb which teacheth discretion to be the best part of valor."

"If Edmund Genings asketh me, reverend father, if I have heard mass to-day, what must I answer?"

"Say the queen's majesty has forbidden mass to be said in this her kingdom; and if he presseth thee more closely thereon, why then tell him the last news from the poultry-yard, and that the hares have eat thy mignonette; which they be doing even now, if my eyes deceive me not," said the good father, pointing with his whip to the flower-garden.

So, smiling, he gave us a last blessing, and rode on toward the Chase, and I went to drive the hares away from the flower-beds, and then to set the chapel in fair order. And ever and anon, that day and the next, I took out of my pocket my sweet Lady Surrey's last letter, and pictured to myself all the scenes therein related; so that I seemed to live one-half of my life with her in thought, so greatly was my fancy set upon her, and my heart concerned in her troubles.

CHAPTER V

Not many days after the sheriff and the pursuivants had been at our house, and Mr. Bryan, by reason of the bloody laws which had been enacted against Papists and such as harbor priests, had left us, – though intending to return at such times as might serve our commodity, and yet not affect our safety, – I was one morning assisting my mother in the store-room, wherein she was setting aside such provisions as were to be distributed to the poor that week, together with salves, medicines, and the like, which she also gave out of charity, when a spasm came over her, so vehement and painful, that for the moment she lost the use of speech, and made signs to me to call for help. I ran affrighted into the library for my father, and brought him to her, upon which, in a little time, she did somewhat recover, but desired he would assist her to her own chamber, whither she went leaning on his arm. When laid on her bed she seemed easier; and smiling, bade me leave them for awhile, for that she desired to have speech with my father alone.

For the space of an hour I walked in the garden, with so oppressive a grief at my heart as I had never before experienced. Methinks the great stillness in the air added thereunto some sort of physical disorder; for the weather was very close and heavy; and if a leaf did but stir, I started as if danger was at hand; and the noise of the chattering pies over my head worked in me an apprehensive melancholy, foreboding, I doubt not, what was to follow. At about eleven o'clock, hearing the sound of a horse's feet in the avenue, I turned round, and saw Edmund riding from the house; upon which I ran across the grass to a turning of the road where he would pass, and called to him to stop, which he did; and told me he was going to Lichfield for his father, whom my mother desired presently to see. "Then thou shouldst not tarry," I said; and he pushed on and left me standing where I was; but the bell then ringing for dinner, I went back to the house, and, in so doing, took notice of a bay-tree on the lawn which was withered and dried-up, though the gardener had been at pains to preserve it by sundry appliances and frequent watering of it. Then it came to my remembrance what my nurse used to say, that the dying of that sort of tree is a sure omen of a death in a family; which thought sorely disturbed me at that time. I sat down with my father to a brief and silent meal; and soon after the physician he had sent for came, whom he conducted to my mother's chamber, whereunto I did follow, and slipped in unperceived. Sitting on one side of the bed, behind the curtains, I heard her say, in a voice which sounded hollow and weak, "Good Master Lawrenson, my dear husband was fain to send for you, and I cared not to withstand him, albeit persuaded that I am hastening to my journey's end, and that naught that you or any other man may prescribe may stay what is God's will. And if this be visible to you as it is to me, I pray you keep it not from me, for it will be to my much comfort to be assured of it."

When she had done speaking, he did feel her pulse; and the while my heart beat so quick and, as it seemed to me, so loud as if it must needs impede my hearing; but in a moment I heard him say: "God defend, good madam, I should deceive you. While there is life, there is hope. Greater comfort I dare not urge. If there be any temporal matter on your mind, 'twere better settled now, and likewise of your soul's health, by such pious exercises as are used by those of your way of thinking."

At the hearing of these his words, my father fetched a deep sigh; but she, as one greatly relieved, clasped her hands together, and cried, "My God, I thank thee!"

Then, stealing from behind the curtain, I laid my head on the pillow nigh unto hers, and whispered, "Sweet mother, prithee do not die, or else take me with thee."

But she, as one not heeding, exclaimed, with her hands uplifted, "O faithless heart! O selfish heart! to be so glad of death!"

The physician was directing the maids what they should do for her relief when the pain came on, and he himself stood compounding some medicine for her to take. My father asked of him when he next would come; and he answered, "On the morrow;" but methinks 'twas even then his belief that

there would be no morrow for her who was dying before her time, like the bay-tree in our garden. She bade him farewell in a kindly fashion; and when we were alone, I lying on the bed by her side, and my father sitting at its head, she said, in a low voice, "How wonderful be God's dealings with us, and how fatherly his care; in that he takes the weak unto himself, and leaves behind the strong to fight the battle now at hand! My dear master, I had a dream yesternight which had somewhat of horror in it, but more methinks of comfort." My father breaking out then in sighs and tears as if his heart would break, she said, "Oh, but thou must hear and acknowledge, my loved master, how gracious is God's providence to thy poor wife. When thou knowest what I have suffered – not in body, though that has been sharp too, but in my soul – it will reconcile thine own to a parting which has in it so much of mercy. Thou dost remember the night when Mr. Mush was here, and what his discourse did run on?"

"Surely do I, sweet wife," he answered; "for it was such as the mind doth not easily lose the memory of; the sufferings and glorious end of the blessed martyr Mrs. Clitherow. I perceived what sorrowful heed thou didst lend to his recital; but has it painfully dwelt in thy mind since?"

"By day and by night it hath not left me; ever recurring to my thoughts, ever haunting my dreams, and working in me a fearful apprehension lest in a like trial I should be found wanting, and prove a traitor to God and his Church, and a disgrace and heartbreak to thee who hast so truly loved me far beyond my deserts. I have bragged of the dangers of the times, even as cowards are wont to speak loud in the dark to still by the sound of their own voices the terrors they do feel. I have had before my eyes the picture of that cruel death, and of the children extremely used for answering as their mother had taught them, till cold drops of sweat have stood on my brow, and I have knelt in my chamber wringing my hands and praying to be spared a like trial. And then, maybe an hour later, sitting at the table, I spake merrily of the gallows, mocking my own fears, as when Mr. Bryan was last here; and I said that priests should be more welcome to me than ever they were, now that virtue and the Catholic cause were made felony; and the same would be in God's sight more meritorious than ever before: upon which, 'Then you must prepare your neck for the rope,' quoth he, in a pleasant but withal serious manner; at the which a cold chill overcame me, and I very well-nigh faulted, though constraining my tongue to say, 'God's will be done; but I am far unworthy of so great an honor.' The cowardly heart belied the confident tongue, and fear of my own weakness affrighted me, by the which I must needs have offended God, who helps such as trust in him. But I hope to be forgiven, inasmuch as it has ever been the wont of my poor thoughts to picture evils beforehand in such a form as to scare the soul, which, when it came to meet with them, was not shaken from its constancy. When Conny was an infant I have stood nigh unto a window with her in my arms, and of a sudden a terror would seize me lest I should let her fall out of my hands, which yet clasped her; and methinks 'twas somewhat of alike feeling which worked in me touching the denying of my faith, which, God is my witness, is dearer to me than aught upon earth."

"'Tis even so, sweet wife," quoth my father; "the edge of a too keen conscience and a sensitive apprehension of defects visible to thine own eyes and God's – never to mine, who was ever made happy by thy love and virtue – have worn out the frame which enclosed them, and will rob me of the dearest comfort of my life, if I must lose thee."

She looked upon him with so much sweetness, as if the approach of death had brought her greater peace and joy than life had ever done, and she replied: "Death comes to me as a compassionate angel, and I fain would have thee welcome with me the kindly messenger who brings so great relief to the poor heart thou hast so long cherished. Now, thou art called to another task; and when the bruised, broken reed is removed from thy side, thou wilt follow the summons which even now sounds in thine ears."

"Ah," cried my father, clasping her hand, "art thou then already a saint, sweet wife, that thou hast read the vow slowly registered as yet in the depths of a riven heart?" Then his eyes turned on me; and she, who seemed to know his thoughts, that sweet soul who had been so silent in life, but

was now spending her last breath in never-to-be-forgotten words, answered the question contained in that glance as if it had been framed in a set speech.

"Fear not for her," she said, laying her cheek close unto mine. "As her days, so shall her strength be. Methinks Almighty God has given her a spirit meet for the age in which her lot is cast. The early training thou hast had, my wench; the lack of such memories as make the present twofold bitter; the familiar mention round thy cradle of such trials as do beset Catholics in these days, have nurtured thee a stoutness of heart which will stand thee in good stead amidst the rough waves of this troublesome world. The iron will not enter into thy soul as it hath done into mine." Upon which she fell back exhausted and for a while no sound was heard in or about the house save the barking of our great dog.

My father had sent a messenger to a house where we had had notice days before Father Ford was staying but with no certain knowledge he still there, or any other priest in neighborhood, which occasioned him no small disquietude, for my mother's strength seemed to be visibly sinking which was what the doctor's words had led him to expect. The man he sent returned not till the evening; in the afternoon Mr. Genings and son came from Lichfield, which, when my mother heard, she said God was gracious to permit her once more to see John, which was Mr. Genings' name. They had been reared in the same house; and a kindness had always continued betwixt them. For some time past he had conformed to the times; and since his marriage with the daughter of a French Huguenot who lived in London, and who was a lady of very commendable character and manners, and strenuous in her own way of thinking, he had left off practising his own religion in secret, which for a while he used to do. When he came in, and saw death plainly writ in his cousin's face, he was greatly moved, and knelt down by her side with a very sorrowful countenance; upon which she straightly looked at him, and said: "Cousin John, my breath is very short, as my time is also like to be. But one word I would fain say to thee before I die. I was always well pleased with my religion, which was once thine and that of all Christian people one hundred years ago; but I have never been so well pleased with it as now, when I be about to meet my Judge."

Mr. Genings' features worked with a strange passion, in which was more of grief than displeasure, and grasping his son's shoulder, who was likewise kneeling and weeping, he said: "You have wrought with this boy, cousin, to make him a Catholic."

"As heaven is my witness," she answered, "not otherwise but by my prayers."

"Hast thou seen a priest, cousin Constance?" he then asked: upon which my mother not answering, the poor man burst into tears, and cried: "Oh, cousin – cousin Constance, dost count me a spy, and at thy death-bed?"

He seemed cut to the heart; whereupon she gave him her hand, and said she hoped God would send her such ghostly assistance as she stood in need of; and praying God to bless him and his wife and children, and make them his faithful servants, so she might meet them all in perpetual happiness, she spoke with such good cheer, and then bade him and Edmund farewell with so pleasant a smile, as deceived them into thinking her end not so near. And so, after a while, they took their leave; upon which she composed herself for a while in silence, occupying her thoughts in prayer; and toward evening, through God's mercy, albeit the messenger had returned with the heavy news that Father Ford had left the county some days back, it happened that Mr. Watson, a secular priest who had lately arrived in England, and was on his way to Chester, stopped at our house, whereunto Mr. Orton, whom he had seen in prison at London, had directed him for his own convenience on the road, and likewise our commodity, albeit little thinking how great our need would be at that time of so opportune a guest, through whose means that dear departing soul had the benefit of the last sacraments with none to trouble or molest her, and such ghostly aid as served to smooth her passage to what has proved, I doubt not, the beginning of a happy eternity, if we may judge by such tokens as the fervent acts of contrition she made both before and after shrift, such as might have served to wash away ten thousand sins through his blood who cleansed her, and her great and peaceable joy at receiving him into her heart whom she soon trusted to behold. Her last words were expressions of wonder and

gratitude at God's singular mercy shown unto her in the quiet manner of her death in the midst of such troublesome times. And methinks, when the silver cord was loosed, and naught was left of her on earth save the fair corpse which retained in death the semblance it had had in life, that together with the natural grief which found vent in tears, there remained in the hearts of such as loved her a comfortable sense of the Divine goodness manifested in this her peaceable removal.

How great the change which that day wrought in me may be judged of by such who, at the age I had then reached to, have met with a like affliction, coupled with a sense of duties to be fulfilled, such as then fell to my lot, both as touching household cares, and in respect to the cheering of my father in his solitary hours during the time we did yet continue at Sherwood Hall, which was about a year. It waxed very hard then for priests to make their way to the houses of Catholics, as many now found it to their interest to inform against them and such as harbored them; and mostly in our neighborhood, wherein there were at that time no recusants of so great rank and note that the sheriff would not be lief to meddle with them. We had oftentimes had secret advices to beware of such and such of our servants who might betray our hidden conveyances of safety; and my father scarcely durst be sharp with them when they offended by slacking their duties, lest they might bring us into danger if they revealed, upon any displeasure, priests having abided with us. Edmund we saw no more since my mother's death; and after a while the news did reach us that Mr. Genings had died of the small-pox, and left his wife in so distressed a condition, against all expectation, owing to debts he had incurred, that she had been constrained to sell her house and furniture, and was living in a small lodging near unto the school where Edmund continued his studies.

I noticed, as time went by, how heavily it weighed on my father's heart to see so many Catholics die without the sacraments, or fall away from their faith, for lack of priests to instruct them, like so many sheep without a shepherd; and I guessed by words he let fall on divers occasions, that the intent obscurely shadowed forth in his discourse to my mother on her deathbed was ripening to a settled purpose, and tending to a change in his state of life, which only his love and care for me caused him to defer. What I did apprehend must one day needs occur, was hastened about this time by a warning he did receive that on an approaching day he would be apprehended and carried by the sheriff before the council at Lichfield, to be examined touching recusancy and harboring of priests; which was what he had long expected. This message was, as it were, the signal he had been waiting for, and an indication of God's will in his regard. He made instant provision for the placing of his estate in the hands of a friend of such singular honesty and so faithful a friendship toward himself, though a Protestant, that he could wholly trust him. And next he set himself to dispose of her whom he did term his most dear earthly treasure, and his sole tie to this perishable world, which he resolved to do by straightway sending her to London, unto his sister Mistress Congleton, who had oftentimes offered, since his wife's death, to take charge of this daughter, and to whom he now despatched a messenger with a letter, wherein he wrote that the times were now so troublesome, he must needs leave his home, and take advantage of the sisterly favor she had willed to show him in the care of his sole child, whom he now would forthwith send to London, commending her to her good keeping, touching her safety and religious and virtuous training, and that he should be more beholden to her than ever brother was to sister, and, as long as he lived, as he was bound to do, pray for her and her good husband. When this letter was gone, and order had been taken for my journey, which was to be on horseback, and in the charge of a maiden gentlewoman who had been staying some months in our neighborhood, and was now about in two days to travel to London, it seemed to me as if that which I had long expected and pictured unto myself had now come upon me of a sudden, and in such wise as for the first time to taste its bitterness. For I saw, without a doubt, that this parting was but the forerunner of a change in my father's condition as great and weighty as could well be thought of. But of this howbeit our thoughts were full of it, no talk was ministered between us. He said I should hear from him in London; and that he should now travel into Lancashire and Cheshire, changing his name, and often shifting his quarters whilst the present danger lasted. The day which was to be the last to

see us in the house wherein himself and his fathers for many centuries back, and I his unworthy child, had been born, was spent in such fashion as becometh those who suffer for conscience sake, and that is with so much sorrow as must needs be felt by a loving father and a dutiful child in a first and doubtful parting, with so much regret as is natural in the abandonment of a peaceful earthly home, wherein God had been served in a Catholic manner for many generations and up to that time without discontinuance, only of late years as it were by night and stealth, which was linked in their memories with sundry innocent joys and pleasures, and such griefs as do hallow and endear the visible scenes wherewith they be connected, but withal with a stoutness of heart in him, and a youthful steadiness in her whom he had infected with a like courage unto his own, which wrought in them so as to be of good cheer and shed no more tears on so moving an occasion than the debility of her nature and the tenderness of his paternal care extorted from their eyes when he placed her on her horse, and the bridle in the hand of the servant who was to accompany her to London. Their last parting was a brief one, and such as I care not to be minute in describing; for thinking upon it even now 'tis like to make me weep; which I would not do whilst writing this history, in the recital of which there should be more of constancy and thankful rejoicing in God's great mercies, than of womanish softness in looking back to past trials. So I will even break off at this point; and in the next chapter relate the course of the journey which was begun on that day.

CHAPTER VI

I was to travel, as had been ordered for our mutual convenience and protection, with Mistress Ward, a gentlewoman who resided some months in our vicinity, and had heard mass in our chapel on such rare occasions as of late had occurred, when a priest was at our house, and we had commodity to give notice thereof to such as were Catholic in the adjacent villages. We had with us on the journey two serving-men and a waiting-woman, who had been my mother's chambermaid; and so accompanied, we set out on our way, singing as we went, for greater safety, the litanies of our Lady; to whom we did commend ourselves, as my father had willed us to do, with many fervent prayers. The gentlewoman to whose charge I was committed was a lady of singular zeal and discretion, as well as great virtue; albeit, where religion was not concerned, of an exceeding timid disposition; which, to my no small diversion then, and great shame since, I took particular notice of on this journey. Much talk had been ministered in the county touching the number of rogues and vagabonds which infested the public roads, of which sundry had been taken up and whipped during the last months, in Lichfield, Stafford, and other places. I did perceive that good Mistress Ward glanced uneasily as we rode along at every foot-passenger or horseman that came in sight. Albeit my heart was heavy, and may be also that when the affections are inclined to tears they be likewise prone to laughter, I scarce could restrain from smiling at these her fears and the manner of her showing them.

"Mistress Constance," she said at last, as we came to the foot of a steep ascent, "methinks you have a great heart concerning the dangers which may befall us on the road, and that the sight of a robber would move you not one whit more than that of an honest pedler or hawker, such as I take those men to be who are mounting the hill in advance of us. Doth it not seem to you that the box which they do carry betokens them to be such worthy persons as I wish them to prove?"

"Now surely," I answered, "good Mistress Ward, 'tis my opinion that they be not such honest knaves as you do suppose. I perceive somewhat I mislike in the shape of that box. What an if it be framed to entice travellers to their ruin by such displays and shows of rare ribbons and gewgaws as may prove the means of detaining them on the road, and a-robbing of them in the end?"

Mistress Ward laughed, and commended my jesting, but was yet ill at ease; and, as a mischievous and thoughtless creature, I did somewhat excite and maintain her fears, in order to set her on asking questions of our attendants touching the perils of the road, which led them to relate such fearful stories of what they had seen of this sort as served to increase her apprehensions, and greatly to divert me, who had not the like fears; but rather entertained myself with hers, in a manner such as I have been since ashamed to think of, who should have kissed the ground on which she had trodden.

The fairness of the sky, the beauty of the fields and hedges, the motion of the horse, stirred up my spirits; albeit my heart was at moments so brimful of sorrow that I hated my tongue for its wantonness, my eyes for their curious gazing, and my fancy for its eager thoughts anent London and the new scenes I should behold there. What mostly dwelt in them was the hope to see my Lady Surrey, of whom I had had of late but brief and scanty tidings. The last letter I had from her was writ at the time when the Duke of Norfolk was for the second time thrown in the Tower, which she said was the greatest sorrow that had befallen her since the death of my Lady Mounteagle, which had happened at his grace's house a few months back, with all the assistance she desired touching her religion. She had been urged, my Lady Surrey said, by the duke some time before to do something contrary to her faith; but though she much esteemed and respected him, her answer was so round and resolute that he never mentioned the like to her any more. Since then I had no more tidings of her, who was dearer to me than our brief acquaintance and the slender tie of such correspondence as had taken place between us might in most cases warrant; but whether owing to some congeniality of mind, or to a presentiment of future friendship, 'tis most certain my heart was bound to her in an extraordinary manner; so that she was the continual theme of my thoughts and mirror of my fancy.

The first night of our journey we lay at a small inn, which was held by persons Mistress Ward was acquainted with, and by whom we were entertained in a decent chamber, looking on unto a little garden, and with as much comfort as the fashion of the place might afford, and greater cleanliness than is often to be found in larger hostelries. After supper, being somewhat weary with travel, but not yet inclined for bed, and the evening fine, we sat out of doors in a bower of eglantine near to some bee-hives, of which our hostess had a great store; and methinks she took example from them, for we could see her through the window as busy in the kitchen amongst her maids as the queen-bee amidst her subjects. Mistress Ward took occasion to observe, as we watched one of these little commonwealths of nature, that she admired how they do live, laboring and swarming, and gathering honey together so neat and finely, that they abhor nothing so much as uncleanness, drinking pure and clear water, even the dew-drops on the leaves and flowers, and delighting in sweet music, which if they hear but once out of tune they fly out of sight.

"They live," she said, "under a law, and use great reverence to their elders. Every one hath his office; some trimming the honey, another framing hives, another the combs. When they go forth to work, they mark the wind and the clouds, and whatsoever doth threaten their ruin; and having gathered, out of every flower, honey, they return loaded in their mouths and on their wings, whom they that tarried at home receive readily, easing their backs of their great burthens with as great care as can be thought of."

"Methinks," I answered, "that if it be as you say, Mistress Ward, the bees be wiser than men."

At the which she smiled; but withal, sighing, made reply:

"One might have wished of late years rather to be a bee than such as we see men sometimes to be. But, Mistress Constance, if they are indeed so wise and so happy, 'tis that they are fixed in a condition in which they must needs do the will of him who created them; and the like wisdom and happiness in a far higher state we may ourselves enjoy, if we do but choose of our free will to live by the same rule."

Then, after some further discourse on the habits of these little citizens, I inquired of Mistress Ward if she were acquainted with mine aunt, Mistress Congleton; at the which question she seemed surprised, and said,

"Methought, my dear, you had known my condition in your aunt's family, having been governess for many years to her three daughters, and only by reason of my sister's sickness having stayed away from them for some time."

At the which intelligence I greatly rejoiced; for the few hours we had rode together, and our discourse that evening, had wrought in me a liking for this lady as great as could arise in so short a period. But I minded me then of my jests at her fears anent robbers, and also of having been less dutiful in my manners than I should have been toward one who was like to be set over me; and I likewise bethought me this might be the cause that she had spoken of the bees having a reverence for their elders, and doubted if I should crave her pardon for my want of it. But, like many good thoughts which we give not entertainment to by reason that they be irksome, I changed that intent for one which had in it more of pleasantness, though less of virtue. Kissing her, I said it was the best news I had heard for a long time that I should live in the same house with her, and, as I hoped, under her care and good government. And she answered, that she was well pleased with it too, and would be a good friend to me as long as she lived. Then I asked her touching my cousins, and of their sundry looks and qualities. She answered, that the eldest, Kate, was very fair, and said nothing further concerning her. Polly, she told me, was marvellous witty and very pleasant, and could give a quick answer, full of entertaining conceits.

"And is she, then, not fair?" I asked.

"Neither fair nor foul," was her reply; "but well favored enough, and has an excellent head."

"Then," I cried, letting my words exceed good behavior, "I shall like her better than the pretty fool her sister." For the which speech I received the first, but not the last, chiding I ever had from

Mistress Ward for foolish talking and pert behavior, which was what I very well deserved. When she had done speaking, I put my arm round her neck – for it put me in mind of my mother to be so gravely yet so sweetly corrected – and said, "Forgive me, dear Mistress Ward, for my saucy words, and tell me somewhat I beseech you touching my youngest cousin, who must be nearest to mine own age."

"She is no pearl to hang at one's ear," quoth she, "yet so gifted with a well-disposed mind that in her grace seems almost to supersede nature. Muriel is deformed in body, and slow in speech; but in behavior so honest, in prayer so devout, so noble in all her dealings, that I never heard her speak anything that either concerned not good instruction or godly mirth."

"And doth she not care to be ugly?" I asked.

"So little doth she value beauty," quoth Mistress Ward, "save in the admiring of it in others, that I have known her to look into a glass and smiling cry out, 'This face were fair if it were turned and every feature the opposite to what it is;' and so jest pleasantly at her own deformities, and would have others do so too. Oh, she is a rare treasure of goodness and piety, and a true comfort to her friends!"

With suchlike pleasant discourse we whiled away the time until going to rest; and next day were on horseback betimes on our way to Coventry, where we were to lie that night at the house of Mr. Page, a Catholic, albeit not openly, by reason of the times. This gentleman is for his hospitality so much haunted, that no news stirs but comes to his ears, and no gentlefolks pass his door but have a cheerful welcome to his house; and 'tis said no music is so sweet to his ears as deserved thanks. He vouchsafed much favor to us, and by his merry speeches procured us much entertainment, provoking me to laughter thereby more than I desired. He took us to see St. Mary's Hall, which is a building which has not its equal for magnificence in any town I have seen, no, not even in London. As we walked through the streets he showed us a window in which was an inscription, set up in the reign of King Richard the Second, which did run thus:

"I, Luriche, for the love of thee
Do make Coventry toll free."

And further on, the figure of Peeping Tom of Coventry, that false knave I was so angry with when my father (ah, me! how sharp and sudden was the pain which went through my heart as I called to mind the hours I was wont to sit on his knee hearkening to the like tales) told me the story of the Lady Godiva, who won mercy for her townsfolk by a ride which none had dared to take but one so holy as herself. And, as I said before, being then in a humor as prone to tears at one moment as laughter at another, I fell to weeping for the noble lady who had been in so sore a strait that she must needs have chosen between complying with her savage lord's conditions or the misery of her poor clients. When Mr. Page noticed my tears, which flowed partly for myself and partly for one who had been long dead, but yet lived in the hearts of these citizens, he sought to cheer me by the recital of the fair and rare pageant which doth take place every year in Coventry, and is of the most admirable beauty, and such as is not witnessed in any other city in the world. He said I should not weep if I were to see it, which he very much desired I should; and he hoped he might be then alive, and ride by my side in the procession as my esquire; at the which I smiled, for the good gentleman had a face and figure such as would not grace a pageant, and methought I might be ashamed some years hence to have him for my knight; and I said, "Good Mr. Page, be the shutters closed on those days as when the Lady Godiva rode?" at the which he laughed, and answered,

"No; and that for one Tom who then peeped, there were a thousand eyes to gaze on the show as it passed."

"Then if it please you, sir, when the time comes," I said, "I would like to look on and not to ride;" and he replied, it should be as I pleased; and with such merry discourse we spent the time till supper was ready. And afterward that good gentleman slackened not his efforts in entertaining us; but related so many laughable stories, and took so great notice of me, that I was moved to answer

him sometimes in a manner too forward for my years. He told us of the queen's visit to that city, and that the mayor, who had heard her grace's majesty considered poets, and herself wrote verses, thought to commend himself to her favor by such rare rhymes as these, wherewith he did greet her at her entrance into the town:

"We, the men of Coventry,
Be pleased to see your majesty,
Good Lord! how fair you be!"

at the which her highness made but an instant's pause, and then straightway replied,

"It pleaseth well her majesty
To see the men of Coventry.
Good Lord! what fools you be!"

"But," quoth Mr. Page, "the good man was so well pleased that the Queen had answered his compliment, that 'tis said he has had her majesty's speech framed, and hung up in his parlor."

"Pity 'tis not in the town-hall," I cried; and he laughing commended me for sharpness; but Mistress Ward said:

"A sharp tongue in a woman's head was always a stinging weapon; but in a queen's she prayed God it might never prove a murtherous one." Which words somewhat checked our merriment, for that they savored of rebuke to me for forward speech, and I ween awoke in Mr. Page thoughts of a graver sort.

When we rode through the town next day, he went with us for the space of some miles, and then bade us farewell with singular courtesy, and professions of good will and proffered service if we should do him the good at any time to remember his poor house; which we told him he had given us sufficient reason not to forget. Toward evening, when the sun was setting, we did see the towers of Warwick Castle; and I would fain have discerned the one which doth bear the name of the great earl who in a poor pilgrim's garb slew the giant Colbrand, and the cave 'neath Guy's Cliff where he spent his last years in prayer. But the light was declining as we rode into Leamington, where we lay that night, and darkness hid from us that fair country, which methought was a meet abode for such as would lead a hermit's life.

The next day we had the longest ride and the hottest sun we had yet met with; and at noon we halted to rest in a thicket on the roadside, which we made our pavilion, and from which our eyes did feast themselves on a delightful prospect. There were heights on one side garnished with stately oaks, and a meadow betwixt the road and the hill enamelled with all sorts of pleasing flowers, and stored with sheep, which were feeding in sober security. Mistress Ward, who was greatly tired with the journey, fell asleep with her head on her hand, and I pulled from my pocket a volume with which Mr. Page had gifted me at parting, and which contained sundry tales anent Amadis de Gaul, Huon de Bordeaux, Palmerin of England, and suchlike famous knights, which he said, as I knew how to read, for which he greatly commended my parents' care, I should entertain myself with on the road. So, one-half sitting, one-half lying on the grass, I reclined in an easy posture, with my head resting against the trunk of a tree, pleasing my fancy with the writers' conceits; but ever and anon lifting my eyes to the blue sky above my head, seen through the green branches, or fixed them on the quaint patterns the quivering light drew on the grass, or else on the valley refreshed with a silver river, and the fair hills beyond it. And as I read of knights and ladies, and the many perils which befel them, and passages of love betwixt them, which was new to me, and what I had not met with in any of the books I had yet read, I fell into a fit of musing, wondering if in London the folks I should see would discourse in the same fashion, and the gentlemen have so much bravery and the ladies so great beauty

as those my book treated of. And as I noticed it was chiefly on the high-roads they did come into such dangerous adventures, I gazed as far as I could discern on the one I had in view before me with a foolish kind of desire for some robbers to come and assail us, and then a great nobleman or gallant esquire to ride up and fall on them, and to deliver us from a great peril, and may be to be wounded in the encounter, and I to bind up those wounds as from my mother's teaching I knew how to do, and then give thanks to the noble gentleman in such courteous and well-picked words as I could think of. But for all my gazing I could naught perceive save a wain slowly ascending the hill loaden with corn, midst clouds of dust, and some poorer sort of people, who had been gleaning, and were carrying sheaves on their heads. After an hour Mistress Ward awoke from her nap; and methinks I had been dozing also, for when she called to me, and said it was time to eat somewhat, and then get to horse, I cried out, "Good sir, I wait your pleasure;" and rubbed my eyes to see her standing before me in her riding-habit, and not the gentleman whose wounds I had been tending.

That night we slept at Northampton, at Mistress Engerfield's house. She was a cousin of Mr. Congleton's, and a lady whose sweet affability and gravity would have extorted reverence from those that least loved her. She was then very aged, and had been a nun in King Henry's reign; and, since her convent had been despoiled, and the religious driven out of it, having a large fortune of her own, which she inherited about that time, she made her house a secret monastery, wherein God was served in a religious manner by such persons as the circumstances of the time, and not their own desires, had forced back into the world, and who as yet had found no commodity for passing beyond seas into countries where that manner of life is allowed. They dressed in sober black, and kept stated hours of prayer, and went not abroad unless necessity compelled them thereunto. When we went into the dining-room, which I noticed Mistress Engerfield called the refectory, grace was said in Latin; and whilst we did eat one lady read out loud out of a book, which methinks was the life of a saint; but the fatigue of the journey, and the darkness of the room, which was wainscotted with oak-wood, so overpowered my senses with drowsiness, that before the meal was ended I had fallen asleep, which was discovered, to my great confusion, when the company rose from table. But that good lady, in whose face was so great a kindliness that I never saw one to be compared with it in that respect before or since, took me by the hand and said, "Young eyes wax heavy for lack of rest, and travellers should have repose. Come to thy chamber, sweet one, and, after commending thyself by a brief prayer to him who sleepeth not nor slumbereth, and to her who is the Mother of the motherless, get thee to bed and take thy fill of the sleep thou hast so great need of, and good angels will watch near thee."

Oh, how I did weep then, partly from fatigue, and partly from the dear comfort her words did yield me, and, kneeling, asked her blessing, as I had been wont to do of my dear parents. And she, whose countenance was full of majesty, and withal of most attractive gentleness, which made me deem her to be more than an ordinary woman, and a great servant of God, as indeed she was, raised me from the ground, and herself assisted to get me to bed, having first said my prayers by her side, whose inflamed devotion, visible in her face, awakened in me a greater fervor than I had hitherto experienced when performing this duty. After I had slept heavily for the space of two or three hours I awoke, as is the wont of those who be over-fatigued, and could not get to sleep again, so that I heard the clock of a church strike twelve; and as the last stroke fell on my ear, it was followed by a sound of chanting, as if close unto my chamber, which resembled what on rare occasions I had heard performed by two or three persons in our chapel; but here, with so full a concord of voices, and so great melody and sweetness, that methought, being at that time of night and every one abed, it must be the angels that were singing. But the next day, questioning Mrs. Ward thereupon as of a strange thing which had happened to me, she said, the ladies in that house rose always at midnight, as they had been used to do in their several convents, to sing God's praises and give him thanks, which was what they did vow to do when they became religious. Before we departed, Mistress Engerfield took me into her own room, which was small and plainly furnished, with no other furniture in it but a bed, table, and kneeling-stool, and against the wall a large crucifix, and she bestowed upon me a

small book in French, titled "The Spiritual Combat," which she said was a treasury of pious riches, which she counselled me by frequent study to make my own; and with many prayers and blessings she then bade us God-speed, and took leave of us. Our last day's lodging on the road was at Bedford; and there being no Catholics of note in that town wont to entertain travellers, we halted at a quiet hostelry, which was kept by very decent people, who showed us much civility; and the landlady, after we had supped, the evening being rainy (for else she said we might have walked through her means into the fair grounds of the Abbey of Woburn, which she thanked God was not now a hive for drones, as it had once been, but the seat of a worthy nobleman; which did more credit to the town, and drew customers to the inn), brought us for our entertainment a huge book, which she said had as much godliness in each of its pages as might serve to convert as many Papists – God save the mark! – as there were leaves in the volume. My cheeks glowed like fire when she thus spoke, and I looked at Mistress Ward, wondering what she would say. But she only bowed her head, and made pretence to open the book, which, when the good woman was gone,

"Mistress Constance," quoth she, "this is a book writ by Mr. Fox, the Duke of Norfolk's old schoolmaster, touching those he doth call martyrs, who suffered for treason and for heresy in the days of Queen Mary, – God rest her soul! – and if it ever did convert a Papist, I do not say on his deathbed, but at any time of his life, except it was greatly for his own interest, I be ready ..."

"To be a martyr yourself, Mistress Ward," I cried, with my ever too great proneness to let my tongue loose from restraint. The color rose in her cheek, which was usually pale, and she said:

"Child, I was about to say, that in the case I have named, I be ready to forego the hope of that which I thank God I be wise enough to desire, though unworthy to obtain; but for which I do pray each day that I live."

"Then would you not be afraid to die on a scaffold," I asked, "or to be hanged, Mistress Ward?"

"Not in a good cause," she said.

But before the words were out of her mouth our landlady knocked at the door, and said a gentleman was in the house with his two sons, who asked to pay their compliments to Mistress Ward and the young lady under her care. The name of this gentleman was Rookwood, of Rookwood Hall in Suffolk, and Mistress Ward desired the landlady presently to bring them in, for she had often met them at my aunt's house, as she afterward told me, and had great contentment we should have such good company under the same roof with us; whom when they came in she very pleasantly received, and informed Mr. Rookwood of my name and relationship to Mistress Congleton; which when he heard, he asked if I was Mr. Henry Sherwood's daughter; which being certified of, he saluted me, and said my father was at one time, when both were at college, the closest friend that ever he had, and his esteem for him was so great that he would be better pleased with the news that he should see him but once again, than if any one was to give him a thousand pounds. I told him my father often spake of him with singular affection, and that the letter I should write to him from London would be more welcome than anything else could make it, by the mention of the honor I had had of his notice. Mistress Ward then asked him what was the news in London, from whence he had come that morning. He answered that the news was not so good as he would wish it to be; for that the queen's marriage with monsieur was broke off, and the King of France greatly incensed at the favor M. de Montgomeri had experienced at her hands; and that when he had demanded he should be given up, she had answered that she did not see why she should be the King of France's hangman; which was what his father had replied to her sister, when she had made the like request anent some of her traitors who had fled to France.

"Her majesty," he said, "was greatly incensed against the Bishop of Ross, and had determined to put him to death; but that she was dissuaded from it by her council; and that he prayed God Catholics should not fare worse now that Ridolfi's plot had been discovered to declare her highness illegitimate, and place the Queen of Scots on the throne, which had moved her to greater anger than even the rising in the north.

"And touching the Duke of Norfolk," Mistress Ward did ask, "what is like to befall him?"

Mr. Rookwood said, "His grace had been removed from the Tower to his own house on account of the plague; but it is reported the queen is more urgent against him than ever, and will have his head in the end."

"If her majesty will not marry monsieur," Mistress Ward said, "it will fare worse with recusants."

Upon which one of the young gentlemen cried out, "'Tis not her majesty will not have him; but monsieur will not have her. My Lord of Oxford, who is to marry my Lord Burleigh's daughter, said yesterday at the tennis court, that that matter of monsieur is grievously taken on her grace's part; but that my lord is of opinion that where amity is so needful, her majesty should stomach it; and so she doth pretend to break it off herself by reason of her religious scruples."

At the which both brothers did laugh, but Mr. Rookwood bade them have a care how they did suffer their tongues to wag anent her grace and such matters as her grace's marriage; which although in the present company might be without danger, was an ill habit, which in these times was like to bring divers persons into troubles.

"Hang it!" cried the eldest of his sons, who was of a well-pleasing favor and exceeding goodly figure; "recusants be always in trouble, whatsoever they do; both taxed for silence and checked for speech, as the play hath it. For good Mr. Weston was racked for silence last week till he fainted, for that he would not reveal what he had heard in confession from one concerned in Ridolfi's plot; and as to my Lord Morley, he hath been examined before the council, touching his having said he would go abroad poorly and would return in glory, which he did speak concerning his health; but they would have it meant treason."

"Methinks, Master Basil," said his father, "thou art not like to be taxed for silence; unless indeed on the rack, which the freedom of thy speech may yet bring thee to, an thou hast not more care of thy words. See now, thy brother keeps his lips closed in modest silence."

"Ay, as if butter would not melt in his mouth," cried Basil, laughing.

And I then noticed the countenance of the younger brother, who was fairer and shorter by a head than Basil, and had the most beautiful eyes imaginable, and a high forehead betokening thoughtfulness. Mr. Rookwood drew his chair further from the table, and conversed in a low voice with Mrs. Ward, touching matters which I ween were of too great import to be lightly treated of. I heard the name of Mr. Felton mentioned in their discourse, and somewhat about the Pope's Bull, in the affixing of which at the Bishop of London's gate he had lent a hand; but my ears were not free to listen to them, for the young gentlemen began to entertain me with divers accounts of the shows in London; which, as they were some years older than myself, who was then no better than a child, though tall of mine age, I took as a great favor, and answered them in the best way I could. Basil spoke mostly of the sights he had seen, and a fight between a lion and three dogs, in which the dogs were victorious; and Hubert of books, which he said, for his part, he had always a care to keep handsome and well bound.

"Ay," quoth his brother, "gilding them and stringing them like the prayer-books of girls and gallants, which are carried to church but for their outsides. I do hate a book with clasps, 'tis a trouble to open them."

"A trouble thou dost seldom take," quoth Hubert. "Thou art ready enough to unclasp the book of thy inward soul to whosoever will read in it, and thy purse to whosoever begs or borrows of thee; but with such clasps as shut in the various stores of thought which have issued forth from men's minds thou dost not often meddle."

"Beshrew me if I do! The best prayer-book I take to be a pair of beads; and the most entertaining reading, the 'Rules for the Hunting of Deer;' which, by what I have heard from Sir Roger Ashlon, my Lord Stafford hath grievously transgressed by assaulting Lord Lyttleton's keepers in Teddesley Haye."

"What have you here?" Hubert asked, glancing at Mr. Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and another which the landlady had left on the table; *A profitable New Year's Gift to all England*.

"They are not mine," I answered, "nor such as I do care to read; but this," I said, holding out Mr. Page's gift, which I had in my pocket, "is a rare fund of entertainment and very full of pleasant tales."

"But," quoth he, "you should read the *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Seven Champions of Christendom*."

Which I said I should be glad to do when I had the good chance to meet with them. He said, "My cousin Polly had a store of such pleasant volumes, and would, no doubt, lend them to me. She has such a sharp wit," he added, "that she is ever exercising it on herself or on others; on herself by the bettering of her mind through reading; and on others by such applications, of what she thus acquires as leaves them no chance in discoursing with her but to yield to her superior knowledge."

"Methinks," I said, "if that be her aim in reading, may be she will not lend to others the means of sharpening their wits to encounter hers."

At the which both of them laughed, and Basil said he hoped I might prove a match for Mistress Polly, who carried herself too high, and despised such as were slower of speech and less witty than herself. "For my part," he cried, "I am of opinion that too much reading doth lead to too much thinking, and too much thinking doth consume the spirits; and often it falls out that while one thinks too much of his doing, he leaves to do the effect of his thinking."

At the which Hubert smiled, and I bethought myself that if Basil was no book-worm neither was he a fool. With such like discourse the evening sped away, and Mr. Rookwood and his sons took their leave with many civilities and pleasant speeches, such as gentlemen are wont to address to ladies, and hopes expressed to meet again in London, and good wishes for the safe ending of our journey thither.

Ah, me! 'tis passing strange to sit here and write in this little chamber, after so many years, of that first meeting with those brothers, Basil and Hubert; to call to mind how they did look and speak, and of the pretty kind of natural affection there was betwixt them in their manner to each other. Ah, me! the old trick of sighing is coming over me again, which I had well-nigh corrected myself of, who have more reason to give thanks than to complain. Good Lord, what fools you be! sighing heart and watering eyes! As great fools, I ween, as the Mayor of Coventry, whose foolish rhymes do keep running in my head.

The day following we came to London, which being, as it were, the beginning of a new life to me, I will defer to speak of until I find myself, after a night's rest and special prayers unto that end, less heavy of heart than at present.

CHAPTER VII

Upon a sultry evening which did follow an exceeding hot day, with no clouds in the sky, and a great store of dust on the road, we entered London, that great fair of the whole world, as some have titled it. When for many years we do think of a place we have not seen, a picture forms itself in the mind as distinct as if the eye had taken cognizance thereof, and a singular curiosity attends the actual vision of what the imagination hath so oft portrayed. On this occasion my eyes were slow servants to my desires, which longed to embrace in the compass of one glance the various objects they craved to behold. Albeit the sky was cloudless above our heads, I feared it would rain in London, by reason of a dark vapor which did hang over it; but Mistress Ward informed me that this appearance was owing to the smoke of sea-coal, of which so great a store is used in the houses that the air is filled with it. "And do those in London always live in that smoke?" I inquired, not greatly contented to think it should be so; but she said Mr. Congleton's house was not in the city, but in a very pleasant suburb outside of it, close unto Holborn Hill and Ely Place, the bishop's palace, in whose garden the roses were so plentiful that in June the air is perfumed with their odor. I troubled her not with further questions at that time, being soon wholly taken up with the new sights which then did meet us at every step. So great a number of gay horsemen, and litters carried by footmen with fine liveries, and coaches drawn by horses richly caparisoned and men running alongside of them, and withal so many carts, that I was constrained to give over the guiding of mine own horse by reason of the confusion which the noise of wheels and men's cries and the rapid motion of so many vehicles did cause in me, who had never rode before in so great a crowd.

At about six o'clock of the afternoon we did reach Ely Place, and passing by the bishop's palace stopped at the gate of Mr. Congleton's house, which doth stand somewhat retired from the high-road, and the first sight of which did greatly content me. It is built of fair and strong stone, not affecting fineness, but honorably representing a firm stateliness, for it was handsome without curiosity, and homely without negligence. At the front of it was a well-arranged ground cunningly set with trees, through which we rode to the foot of the stairs, where we were met by a gentleman dressed in a coat of black satin and a quilted waistcoat, with a white beaver in his hand, whom I guessed to be my good uncle. He shook Mistress Ward by the hand, saluted me on both cheeks, and vowed I was the precise counterpart of my mother, who at my age, he said, was the prettiest Lancashire witch that ever he had looked upon. He seemed to me not so old as I did suppose him to be, lean of body and something low of stature, with a long visage and a little sharp beard upon the chin of a brown color; a countenance not very grave, and, for his age, wanting the authority of gray hairs. He conducted me to mine aunt's chamber, who was seated in an easy-chair near unto the window, with a cat upon her knees and a tambour-frame before her. She oped her arms and kissed me with great affection, and I, sliding down, knelt at her feet and prayed her to be a good mother to me, which was what my father had charged me to do when I should come into her presence. She raised me with her hand and made me sit on a stool beside her, and stroking my face gently, gazed upon it, and said it put her in mind of both of my parents, for that I had my father's brow and eyes, and my mother's mouth and dimpling smiles.

"Mr. Congleton," she cried, "you do hear what this wench saith. I pray you to bear it in mind, and how near in blood she is to me, so that you may show her favor when I am gone, which may be sooner than you think for."

I looked up into her face greatly concerned that she was like so soon to die. Methought she had the semblance of one in good health and a reasonable good color in her cheeks, and I perceived Mr. Congleton did smile as he answered:

"I will show favor to thy pretty niece, good Moll, I promise thee, be thou alive or be thou dead; but if the leeches are to be credited, who do affirm thou hast the best strength and stomach of the twain, thou art more like to bury me than I thee."

Upon which the good lady did sigh deeply and cast up her eyes and lifted up her hands as one grievously injured, and he cried:

"Prithee, sweetheart, take it not amiss, for beshrew me if I be not willing to grant thee to be as diseased as will please thee, so that thou wilt continue to eat and sleep as well as thou dost at the present and so keep thyself from dying."

Upon which she said that she did admire how a man could have so much cruelty as to jest and jeer at her ill-health, but that she would spend no more of her breath upon him; and turning toward me she asked a store of questions anent my father, whom for many years she had not seen, and touching the manner of my mother's death, at the mention of which my tears flowed afresh, which caused her also to weep; and calling for her women she bade one of them bring her some hartshorn, for that sorrow, she said, would occasion the vapors to rise in her head, and the other she sent for to fetch her case of trinkets, for that she would wear the ring her brother had presented her with some years back, in which was a stone which doth cure melancholy. When the case was brought she displayed before my eyes its rich contents, and gifted me with a brooch set with turquoises, the wearing of which, she said, doth often keep persons from falling into divers sorts of peril. Then presently kissing me she said she felt fatigued, and would send for her daughters to take charge of me; who, when they came, embraced me with exceeding great affection, and carried me to what had been their schoolroom and was now Mrs. Ward's chamber, who no longer was their governess, they said, but as a friend abode in the house for to go abroad with them, their mother being of so delicate a constitution that she seldom left her room. Next to this chamber was a closet, wherein Kate said I should lie, and as it is one I inhabited for a long space of time, and the remembrance of which doth connect itself with very many events which, as they did take place, I therein mused on, and prayed or wept, or sometimes laughed over in solitude, I will here set down what it was like when first I saw it.

The bed was in an alcove, closed in the day by fair curtains of taffety; and the walls, which were in wood, had carvings above the door and over the chimney of very dainty workmanship. The floor was strewn with dried neatly-cut rushes, and in the projecting space where the window was, a table was set, and two chairs with backs and seats cunningly furnished with tapestry. In another recess betwixt the alcove and the chimney stood a praying stool and a desk with a cushion for a book to lie on. Ah, me! how often has my head rested on that cushion and my knees on that stool when my heart has been too full to utter other prayers than a "God ha' mercy on me!" which at such times broke as a cry from an overcharged breast. But, oh! what a vain pleasure I did take on that first day in the bravery of this little chamber, which Kate said was to be mine own! With what great contentment I viewed each part of it, and looked out of the window on the beds of flowers which did form a mosaical floor in the garden around the house, in the midst of which was a fair pond whose shaking crystal mirrored the shrubs which grew about it, and a thicket beyond, which did appear to me a place for pleasantness and not unfit to flatter solitariness, albeit so close unto the city. Beyond were the bishop's grounds, and I could smell the scent of roses coming thence as the wind blew. I could have stood there many hours gazing on this new scene, but that my cousins brought me down to sup with them in the garden, which was not fairer in natural ornaments than in artificial inventions. The table was set in a small banqueting-house among certain pleasant trees near to a pretty water-work; and now I had leisure to scan my cousins' faces and compare what I did notice in them with what Mistress Ward had said the first night of our journey.

Kate, the eldest of the three, was in sooth a very fair creature, proportioned without any fault, and by nature endowed with the most delightful colors; but there was a made countenance about her mouth, between simpering and smiling, and somewhat in her bowed-down head which seemed to languish with over-much idleness, and an inviting look in her eyes as if they would over-persuade those she spoke to, which betokened a lack of those nobler powers of the mind which are the highest gifts of womanhood. Polly's face fault-finding wits might scoff at as too little for the rest of the body, her features as not so well proportioned as Kate's, and her skin somewhat browner than doth consist

with beauty; but in her eyes there was a cheerfulness as if nature smiled in them, in her mouth so pretty a demureness, and in her countenance such a spark of wit that, if it struck not with admiration, filled with delight. No indifferent soul there was which, if it resisted making her its princess, would not long to have such a playfellow. Muriel, the youngest of these sisters, was deformed in shape, sallow in hue, in speech, as Mistress Ward had said, slow; but withal in her eyes, which were deep-set, there was lacking neither the fire which betokens intelligence, nor the sweetness which commands affection, and somewhat in her plain face which, though it may not be called beauty, had some of its qualities. Methought it savored more of heaven than earth. The ill-shaped body seemed but a case for a soul the fairness of which did shine through the foul lineaments which enclosed it. Albeit her lips opened but seldom that evening, only twice or thrice, and they were common words she uttered and fraught with hesitation, my heart did more incline toward her than to the pretty Kate or the lively Polly.

An hour before we retired to rest, Mr. Congleton came into the garden, and brought with him Mr. Swithin Wells and Mr. Bryan Lacy, two gentlemen who lived also in Holborn; the latter of which, Polly whispered in mine ear, was her sister Kate's suitor. Talk was ministered among them touching the queen's marriage with Monsieur; which, as Mr. Rookwood had said, was broken off; but that day they had heard that M. de la Motte had proposed to her majesty the Due d'Alençon, who would be more complying, he promised, touching religion than his brother. She inquired of the prince's age, and of his height; to the which he did answer, "About your majesty's own height." But her highness would not be so put off, and willed the ambassador to write for the precise measurement of the prince's stature.

"She will never marry," quoth Mr. Wells, "but only amuse the French court and her council with further negotiations touching this new suitor, as heretofore anent the archduke and Monsieur. But I would to God her majesty were well married, and to a Catholic prince; which would do us more good than anything else which can be thought of."

"What news did you hear, sir, of Mr. Felton?" Mistress Ward asked. Upon which their countenances fell; and one of them answered that that gentleman had been racked the day before, but steadily refused, though in the extremity of torture, to name his accomplices; and would give her majesty no title but that of the Pretender; which they said was greatly to be regretted, and what no other Catholic had done. But when his sentence was read to him, for that he was to die on Friday, he drew from his finger a ring, which had diamonds in it, and was worth four hundred pounds, and requested the Earl of Sussex to give it to the queen, in token that he bore her no ill-will or malice, but rather the contrary.

Mr. Wells said he was a gentleman of very great heart and noble disposition, but for his part he would as lief this ring had been sold, and the money bestowed on the poorer sort of prisoners in Newgate, than see it grace her majesty's finger; who would thus play the hangman's part, who inherits the spoils of such as he doth put to death. But the others affirmed it was done in a Christian manner, and so greatly to be commended; and that Mr. Felton, albeit he was somewhat rash in his actions, and by some titled Don Magnifico, by reason of a certain bravery in his style of dress and fashion of speaking, which smacked of Monsieur Traveller, was a right worthy gentleman, and his death a blow to his friends, amongst whom there were some, nevertheless, to be found who did blame him for the act which had brought him into trouble. Mistress Ward cried, that such as fell into trouble, be the cause ever so good, did always find those who would blame them. Mr. Lacy said, one should not cast himself into danger wilfully, but when occasion offered take it with patience. Polly replied, that some were so prudent, occasions never came to them. And then those two fell to disputing, in a merry but withal sharp fashion. As he did pick his words, and used new-fangled terms, and she spoke roundly and to the point, methinks she was the nimblest in this encounter of wit.

Meanwhile Mr. Wells asked Mr. Congleton if he had had news from the north, where much blood was spilt since the rising; and he apprehended that his kinsmen in Richmondshire should suffer under the last orders sent to Sir George Bowes by my Lord Sussex. But Mr. Congleton did minister

to him this comfort, that if they were noted wealthy, and had freeholds, it was the queen's special commandment they should not be executed, but two hundred of the commoner sort to lose their lives in each town; which was about one to each five.

"But none of note?" quoth Mr. Wells.

"None which can pay the worth of their heads," Mr. Congleton replied.

"And who, then, doth price them?" asked Kate, in a languishing voice.

"Nay, sister," quoth Polly, "I warrant thee they do price themselves; for he that will not pay well for his head must needs opine he hath a worthless one."

Upon which Mr. Lacy said to Kate, "One hundred angels would not pay for thine, sweet Kate."

"Then she must needs be an archangel, sir," quoth Polly, "if she be of greater worth than one hundred angels."

"Ah, me!" cried Kate, very earnestly, "I would I had but half one hundred gold-pieces to buy me a gown with!"

"Hast thou not gowns enough, wench?" asked her father. "Methought thou wert indifferently well provided in that respect."

"Ah, but I would have, sir, such a velvet suit as I did see some weeks back at the Italian house in Cheapside, where the ladies of the court do buy their vestures. It had a border the daintiest I ever beheld, all powdered with gold and pearls. Ruffiano said it was the rarest suit he had ever made; and he is the Queen of France's tailor, which Sir Nicholas Throgmorton did secretly entice away, by the queen's desire, from that court to her own."

"And what fair nymph owns this rare suit, sweetest Kate?" Mr. Lacy asked. "I'll warrant none so fair that it should become her, or rather that she should become it, more than her who doth covet it."

"I know not if she be fair or foul," quoth Kate, "but she is the Lady Mary Howard, one of the maids of honor of her majesty, and so may wear what pleaseth her."

"By that token of the gold and pearls," cried Mr. Wells, "I doubt not but 'tis the very suit anent which the court have been wagging their tongues for the last week; and if it be so, indeed, Mistress Kate, you have no need to envy the poor lady that doth own it."

Kate protested she had not envied her, and taxed Mr. Wells with unkindness that he did charge her with it; and for all he could say would not be pacified, but kept casting up her eyes, and the tears streaming down her lovely cheeks. Upon which Mr. Lacy cried:

"Sweet one, thou hast indeed no cause to envy her or any one else, howsoever rare or dainty their suits may be; for thy teeth are more beauteous than pearls, and thine hair more bright than the purest gold, and thine eyes more black and soft than the finest velvet, which nature so made that we might bear their wonderful shining, which else had dazzled us: " and so went on till her weeping was stayed, and then Mr. Wells said:

"The lady who owned that rich suit, which I did falsely and feloniously advance Mistress Kate did envy, had not great or long comfort in its possession; for it is very well known at court, and hence bruited in the city, what passed at Richmond last week concerning this rare vesture. It pleased not the queen, who thought it did exceed her own. And one day her majesty did send privately for it, and put it on herself, and came forth into the chamber among the ladies. The kirtle and border was far too short for her majesty's height, and she asked every one how they liked her new fancied suit. At length she asked the owner herself if it was not made too short and ill-becoming; which the poor lady did presently consent to. Upon which her highness cried: 'Why, then, if it become me not as being too short, I am minded it shall never become thee as being too fine, so it fitteth neither well.' This sharp rebuke so abashed the poor lady that she never adorned her herewith any more."

"Ah," cried Mr. Congleton, laughing, "her majesty's bishops do come by reproofs as well as her maids. Have you heard how one Sunday, last April, my Lord of London preached to the queen's majesty, and seemed to touch on the vanity of decking the body too finely. Her grace told the ladies

after the sermon, that if the bishop held more discourse on such matters she would fit him for heaven, but he should walk thither without a staff and leave his mantle behind him."

"Nay," quoth Mr. Wells, "but if she makes such as be Catholics taste of the sharpness of the rack, and the edge of the axe, she doth then treat those of her own way of thinking with the edge of her wit and the sharpness of her tongue. 'Tis reported, Mr. Congleton, I know not with what truth, that a near neighbor of yours has been served with a letter, by which a new sheep is let into his pastures."

"What," cried Polly, "is Pecora Campi to roam amidst the roses, and go in and out at his pleasure through the bishop's gate? The 'sweet lids' have then danced away a large slice of the Church's acres. But what, I pray you, sir, did her majesty write?"

"Even this," quoth her father, "I had it from Sir Robert Arundell: 'Proud Prelate! you know what you were before I made you, and what you are now. If you do not immediately comply with my request, I will unfrock you, by God! – ELIZABETH R.'"

"Our good neighbor," saith Polly, "must show a like patience with Job, and cry out touching his bishopric, 'The queen did give it; the queen doth take it away; the will of the queen be done.'"

"He is like to be encroached upon yet further by yon cunning Sir Christopher," Mr. Wells said; "I'll warrant Ely Place will soon be Hatton Garden."

"Well, for a neighbor," answered Polly, "I'd as soon have the queen's lids as her hedge-bishop, and her sheep as her shepherd. 'Tis not all for love of her sweet dancer her majesty doth despoil him. She never, 'tis said, hath forgiven him that he did remonstrate with her for keeping a crucifix and lighted tapers in her own chapel, and that her fool, set on by such as were of the same mind with him, did one day put them out."

In suchlike talk the time was spent; and when the gentlemen had taken leave, we retired to rest; and being greatly tired, I slept heavily, and had many quaint dreams, in which past scenes and present objects were curiously blended with the tales I had read on the journey, and the discourse I had heard that evening. When I awoke in the morning, my thoughts first flew to my father, of whom I had a very passionate desire to receive tidings. When my waiting-woman entered, with a letter in her hand, I foolishly did fancy it came from him, which could scarcely be, so soon after our coming to town; but I quickly discerned, by the rose-colored string which it was bounden with, and then the handwriting, that it was not from him, but from her whom, next to him, I most desired to hear from, to wit, the Countess of Surrey. That sweet lady wrote that she had an exceeding great desire to see me, and would be more beholden to my aunt than she could well express, if she would confer on her so great a benefit as to permit me to spend the day with her at the Charter House, and she would send her coach for to convey me there, which should never have done her so much good pleasure before as in that service. And more to that effect, with many kind and gracious words touching our previous meeting and correspondence.

When I was dressed, I took her ladyship's letter to Mrs. Ward, who was pleased to say she would herself ask permission for me to wait upon that noble lady; but that her ladyship might not be at the charge of sending for me, she would herself, if my aunt gave her license, carry me to the Charter House, for that she was to spend some hours that day with friends in the city, and "it would greatly content her," she added, "to further the expressed wish of the young countess, whose grandmother, Lady Mounteagle, and so many of her kinsfolk, were Catholics, or at the least, good friends to such as were so." My aunt did give leave for me to go, as she mostly did to whatsoever Mrs. Ward proposed, whom she trusted entirely, with a singular great affection, only bidding her to pray that she might not die in her absence, for that she feared some peaches she had eaten the day before had disordered her, and that she had heard of one who had died of the plague some weeks before in the Tower. Mrs. Ward exhorted her to be of good cheer, and to comfort herself both ways, for that the air of Holborn was so good, the plague was not likely to come into it, and that the kernels of peaches being medicinal, would rather prove an antidote to pestilence than an occasion to it; and left her better satisfied, insomuch that she sent for another dish of peaches for to secure the benefit. Before I left, Kate bade me note

the fashion of the suit my Lady Surrey did wear, and if she had on her own hair, and if she dyed it, and if she covered her bosom, or wore plaits, and if her stomacher was straight and broad, or formed a long waist, extending downward, and many more points touching her attire, which I cannot now call to mind. As I went through the hall to the steps where Mistress Ward was already standing, Muriel came hurrying toward me, with a faint color coming and going in her sallow cheek, and twice she tried to speak and failed. But when I kissed her she put her lips close to my ear and whispered,

"Sweet little cousin, there be in London prisoners in a very bad plight, in filthy dungeons, because of their religion. The noble young Lady Surrey hath a tender heart toward such if she do but hear of them. Prithee, sweet coz, move her to send them relief in food, money, or clothing."

Then Mistress Ward called to me to hasten, and I ran away, but Muriel stood at the window, and as we passed she kissed her hand, in which was a gold angel, which my father had gifted me with at parting.

"Mrs. Ward," I said, as we went along, "my cousin Muriel is not fair, and yet her face doth commend itself to my fancy more than many fair ones I have seen; it is so kindly."

"I have even from her infancy loved her," she answered, "and thus much I will say of her, that many have been titled saints who had not, methinks, more virtue than I have noticed in Muriel."

"Doth she herself visit the prisoners she spoke of?"

"She and I do visit them and carry them relief when we can by any means prevail with the gaolers from compassion or through bribing of them to admit us. But it is not always convenient to let this be known, not even at home, but I ween, Constance, as thou wilt have me to call thee so, that Muriel saw in thee – for she has a wonderful penetrative spirit – that thou dost know when to speak and when to keep silence."

"And may I go with you to the prisons?" I asked with a hot feeling in my heart, which I had not felt since I had left home.

"Thou art far too young," she answered. "But I will tell thee what thou canst do. Thou mayst work and beg for these good men, and not be ashamed of so doing. None may visit them who have not made up their minds to die, if they should be denounced for their charity."

"But Muriel is young," I answered. "Hath she so resolved?"

"Muriel is young," was the reply; "but she is one in whom wisdom and holiness have forestalled age. For two years that she hath been my companion on such occasions, she has each day prepared for martyrdom by such devout exercises as strengthen the soul at the approach of death."

"And Kate and Polly," I asked, "are they privy to the dangers that you do run, and have they no like ambition?"

"Rather the contrary," she answered; "but neither they nor any one else in the house is fully acquainted with these secret errands save Mr. Congleton, and he did for a long time refuse his daughter license to go with me, until at last, by prayers and tears, she won him over to suffer it. But he will never permit thee to do the like, for that thy father hath intrusted thee to his care for greater safety in these troublesome times."

"Pish!" I cried pettishly, "safety has a dull mean sound in it which I mislike. I would I were mine own mistress."

"Wish no such thing, Constance Sherwood," was her grave answer. "Wilfulness was never nurse to virtue, but rather her foe; nor ever did a rebellious spirit prove the herald of true greatness. And now, mark my words. Almighty God hath given thee a friend far above thee in rank, and I doubt not in merit also, but whose faith, if report saith true, doth run great dangers, and with few to advise her in these evil days in which we live. Peradventure he hath appointed thee a work in a palace as weighty as that of others in a dungeon. Set thyself to it with thy whole heart, and such prayers as draw down blessings from above. There be great need in these times to bear in remembrance what the Lord says, that he will be ashamed in heaven before his angels of such as be ashamed of him on earth. And many there are, I greatly fear, who though they be Catholics, do assist the heretics by their

cowardice to suppress the true religion in this land; and I pray to God this may never be our case. Yet I would not have thee to be rash in speech, using harsh words, or needlessly rebuking others, which would not become thy age, or be fitting and modest in one of inferior rank, but only where faith and conscience be in question not to be afraid to speak. And now God bless thee, who should be an Esther in this house, wherein so many true confessors of Christ some years ago surrendered their lives in great misery and torments, rather than yield up their faith."

This she said as we stopped at the gate of the Charter House, where one of the serving-men of the Countess of Surrey was waiting to conduct me to her lodgings, having had orders to that effect. She left me in his charge, and I followed him across the square, and through the cloisters and passages which led to the gallery, where my lady's chamber was situated. My heart fluttered like a frightened caged bird during that walk, for there was a solemnity about the place such as I had not been used to, and which filled me with apprehension lest I should be wanting in due respect where so much state was carried on. But when the door was opened at one end of the gallery, and my sweet lady ran out to meet me with a cry of joy, the silly heart, like a caught bird, nestled in her embrace, and my lips joined themselves to hers in a fond manner, as if not willing to part again, but by fervent kisses supplying the place of words, which were lacking, to express the great mutual joy of that meeting, until at last my lady raised her head, and still holding my hands, cried out as she gazed on my face:

"You are more welcome, sweet one, than my poor words can say. I pray you, doff your hat and mantle, and come and sit by me, for 'tis a weary while since we have met, and those are gone from us who loved us then, and for their sakes we must needs love one another dearly, if our hearts did not of themselves move us unto it, which indeed they do, if I may judge of yours, Mistress Constance, by mine own."

Then we kissed again, and she passed her arm around my neck with so many graceful endearments, in which were blended girlish simplicity and a youthful yet matronly dignity, that I felt that day the love which, methinks, up to that time had had its seat mostly in the fancy, take such root in mine heart, that it never lost its hold on it.

At the first our tongues were somewhat tied by joy and lack of knowledge how to begin to converse on the many subjects whereon both desired to hear the other speak, and the disuse of such intercourse as maketh it easy to discourse on what the heart is full of. Howsoever, Lady Surrey questioned me touching my father, and what had befallen us since my mother's death. I told her that he had left his home, and sent me to London by reason of the present troubles; but without mention of what I did apprehend to be his further intent. And she then said that the concern she was in anent her good father the Duke of Norfolk did cause her to pity those who were also in trouble.

"But his grace," I answered, "is, I hope, in safety at present, and in his own house?"

"In this house, indeed," she did reply, "but a strait prisoner in Sir Henry Neville's custody, and not suffered to see his friends without her majesty's especial permission. He did send for his son and me last evening, having obtained leave for to see us, which he had not done since the day my lord and I were married again, by his order, from the Tower, out of fear lest our first marriage, being made before Phil was quite twelve years old, it should have been annulled by order of the queen, or by some other means. It grieved me much to notice how gray his hair had grown, and that his eyes lacked their wonted fire. When we entered he was sitting in a chair, leaning backward, with his head almost over the back of it, looking at a candle which burnt before him, and a letter in his hand. He smiled when he saw us, and said the greatest comfort he had in the world was that we were now so joined together that nothing could ever part us. You see, Mistress Constance," she said, with a pretty blush and smile, "I now do wear my wedding-ring below the middle joint."

"And do you live alone with my lord now in these grand chambers?" I said, looking round at the walls, which were hung with rare tapestry and fine pictures.

"Bess is with me," she answered, "and so will remain I hope until she is fourteen, when she will be married to my Lord William, my lord's brother. Our Moll is likewise here, and was to have wedded my Lord Thomas when she did grow up; but she is not like to live, the physicians do say."

The sweet lady's eyes filled with tears, but, as if unwilling to entertain me with her griefs, she quickly changed discourse, and spoke of my coming unto London, and inquired if my aunt's house were a pleasant one, and if she was like to prove a good kinswoman to me. I told her how comfortable had been the manner of my reception, and of my cousins' goodness to me; at the which she did express great contentment, and would not be satisfied until I had described each of them in turn, and what good looks or what good qualities they had; which I could the more easily do that the first could be discerned even at first sight, and touching the last, I had warrant from Mrs. Ward's commendations, which had more weight than my own speerings, even if I had been a year and not solely a day in their company. She was vastly taken with what I related to her of Muriel, and that she did visit and relieve poor persons and prisoners, and wished she had liberty to do the like; and with a lovely blush and a modest confusion, as of one who doth not willingly disclose her good deeds, she told me all the time she could spare she did employ in making clothes for such as she could hear of, and also salves and cordials (such as she had learnt to compound from her dear grandmother), and privately sent them by her waiting-maid, who was a young gentlewoman of good family, who had lost her parents, and was most excellently endowed with virtue and piety.

"Come to my closet, Miss Constance," she said, "and I doubt not but we shall find Milicent at work, if so be she has not gone abroad to-day on some such errand of charity." Upon which she led the way through a second chamber, still more richly fitted up than the first, into a smaller one, wherein, when she opened the door, I saw a pretty living picture of two girls at a table, busily engaged with a store of bottles and herbs and ointments, which were strewn upon it in great abundance. One of them was a young maid, who was measuring drops into a phial, with a look so attentive upon it as if that little bottle had been the circle of her thoughts. She was very fair and slim, and had a delicate appearance, which minded me of a snow-drop; and indeed, by what my lady said, she was a floweret which had blossomed amidst the frosts and cold winds of adversity. By her side was the most gleesome wench, of not more than eight years, I ever did set eyes on; of a fatness that at her age was comely, and a face so full of waggy and saucy mirth, that but to look upon it drove away melancholy. She was compounding in a cup a store of various liquids, which she said did cure shrewishness, and said she would pour some into her nurse's night-draught, to mend her of that disorder.

"Ah, Nan," she cried, as we entered, "I'll help thee to a taste of this rare medicine, for methinks thou art somewhat shrewish also and not so conformable to thy husband's will, my lady, as a good wife should be. By that same token that my lord willed to take me behind him on his horse a gay ride round the square, and, forsooth, because I had not learnt my lesson, thou didst shut me up to die of melancholy. Ah, me! My mother had a maid called Barbara —

'Sing willow, willow, willow.'

That is one of Phil's favorite songs. Milicent, methinks I will call thee Barbara, and thou shalt sing with me —

'The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree, —
Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom,' —

There, put thy hand in that fashion —

'her head on her knee,' —

Nay, prithee, thou must bend thy head lower —

'Sing willow, willow, willow.'

"My lady," said the gentlewoman, smiling, "I promise you I dare not take upon me to fulfil my tasks with credit to myself or your ladyship, if Mistress Bess hath the run of this room, and doth prepare cordials after her fashion from your ladyship's stores."

"Ah, Bess!" quoth my lady, shaking her finger at the saucy one; "I'll deliver thee up to Mrs. Fawcett, who will give thee a taste of the place of correction; and Phil is not here to-day to beg thee off. And now, good Milicent, prithee make a bundle of such clothes as we have in hand, and such comforts as be suitable to such as are sick and in prison, for this sweet young lady hath need of them for some who be in that sad plight."

"And, my lady," quoth the gentlewoman, "I would fain learn how to dress wounds when the flesh is galled; for I do sometimes meet with poor men who do suffer in that way, and would relieve them if I could."

"I know," I cried, "of a rare ointment my mother used to make for that sort of hurt; and if my Lady Surrey gives me license, I will remember you, mistress, with the receipt of it."

My lady, with a kindly smile and expressed thanks, assented; and when we left the closet, I greatly commending the young gentlewoman's beauty, she said that beauty in her was the worst half of her merit.

"But, Mistress Constance," she said, when we had returned to the saloon, "I may not send her to such poor men, and above all, priests, who be in prison for their faith, as I hear, to my great sorrow, there be so many at this time, and who suffer great hardships, more than can be easily believed, for she is Protestant, and not through conforming to the times, but so settled in her way of thinking, and earnest therein, having been brought up to it, that she would not so much as open a Catholic book or listen to a word in defence of papists."

"But how, then, doth she serve a Catholic lady?" I asked, with a beating heart; and oh, with what a sad one did hear her answer, for it was as follows:

"Dear Constance, I must needs obey those who have a right to command me, such as his grace my good father and my husband; and they are both very urgent and resolved that by all means I shall conform to the times. So I do go to Protestant service; but I use at home my prayers, as my grandmother did teach me; and Phil says them too, when I can get him to say any."

"Then you do not hear mass," I said, sorrowfully, "or confess your sins to a priest?"

"No," she answered, in a sad manner; "I once asked my Lady Lumley, who is a good Catholic, if she could procure I should see a priest with that intent at Arundel House; but she turned pale as a sheet, and said that to get any one to be reconciled who had once conformed to the Protestant religion, was to run danger of death; and albeit for her own part she would not refuse to die for so good a cause, she dared not bring her father's gray hairs to the block."

As we were holding this discourse — and she so intent in speaking, and I in listening, that we had not heard the door open — Lord Surrey suddenly stood before us. His height made him more than a boy, and his face would not allow him a man; for the rest, he was well-proportioned, and did all things with so notable a grace, that nature had stamped him with the mark of true nobility. He made a slight obeisance to me, and I noticed that his cheek was flushed, and that he grasped the handle of his sword with an anger which took not away the sweetness of his countenance, but gave it an amiable sort of fierceness. Then, as if unable to restrain himself, he burst forth,

"Nan, an order is come for his grace to be forthwith removed to the Tower, and I'll warrant that was the cause he was suffered to see us yesterday. God send it prove not a final parting!"

"Is his grace gone?" cried the countess, starting to her feet, and clasping her hands with a sorrowful gesture.

"He goes even now," answered the earl; and both went to the window, whence they could see the coach in which the duke was for the third time carried from his home to the last lodging he was to have on this earth. Oh, what a sorrowful sight it was for those young eyes which gazed on the sad removal of the sole parent both had left! How her tears did flow silently like a stream from a deep fount, and his with wild bursts of grief, like the gushings of a torrent over rocks! His head fell on her shoulder, and as she threw her arms round him, her tears wetted his hair. Methought then that in the pensive tenderness of her downcast face there was somewhat of motherly as well as of wifely affection. She put her arm in his, and led him from the room; and I remained alone for a short time entertaining myself with sad thoughts anent these two young noble creatures, who at so early an age had become acquainted with so much sorrow, and hoping that the darkness which did beset the morning of their lives might prove but as the clouds which at times deface the sky before a brilliant sunshine doth take possession of it, and dislodge these deceitful harbingers, which do but heighten in the end by contrast the resplendency they did threaten to obscure.

CHAPTER VIII

After I had been musing a little while, Mistress Bess ran into the room, and cried to some one behind her:

"Nan's friend is here, and she is mine too, for we all played in a garden with her when I was little. Prithee, come and see her." Then turning to me, but yet holding the handle of the door, she said: "Will is so unmannerly, I be ashamed of him. He will not so much as show himself."

"Then, prithee, come alone," I answered. Upon which she came and sat on my knee, with her arm round my neck, and whispered in mine ear:

"Moll is very sick to-day; will you not see her, Mistress Sherwood?"

"Yea, if so be I have license," I answered; and she, taking me by the hand, offered to lead me up the stairs to the room where she lay. I, following her, came to the door of the chamber, but would not enter till Bess fetched the nurse, who was the same had been at Sherwood Hall, and who, knowing my name, was glad to see me, and with a curtesy invited me in. White as a lily was the little face resting on a pillow, with its blue eyes half shut, and a store of golden hair about it, which minded me of the glories round angels' heads in my mother's missal.

"Sweet lamb!" quoth the nurse, as I stooped to kiss the pale forehead. "She be too good for this world. Ofttimes she doth babble in her sleep of heaven, and angels, and saints, and a wreath of white roses wherewith a bright lady will crown her."

"Kiss my lips," the sick child softly whispered, as I bent over her bed. Which when I did, she asked, "What is your name? I mind your face." When I answered, "Constance Sherwood," she smiled, as if remembering where we had met. "I heard my grandam calling me last night," she said; "I be going to her soon." Then a fit of pain came on, and I had to leave her. She did go from this world a few days after; and the nurse then told me her last words had been "Jesu! Mary!"

That day I did converse again alone with my Lady Surrey after dinner, and walked in the garden; and when we came in, before I left, she gave me a purse with some gold pieces in it, which the earl her husband willed to bestow on Catholics in prison for their faith. For she said he had so tender and compassionate a spirit, that if he did but hear of one in distress he would never rest until he had relieved him; and out of the affection he had for Mr. Martin, who was one while his tutor, he was favorably inclined toward Catholics, albeit himself resolved to conform to the queen's religion. When Mistress Ward came for me, the countess would have her shown into her chamber, and would not be contented without she ordered her coach to carry us back to Holborn, that we might take with us the clothes and cordials which she did bestow upon us for our poor clients. She begged Mrs. Ward's prayers for his grace, that he might soon be set at liberty; for she said in a pretty manner, "It must needs be that Almighty God takes most heed of the prayers of such as visit him in his affliction in the person of poor prisoners; and she hoped one day to be free to do so herself." Then she questioned of the wants of those Mistress Ward had at that time knowledge of; and when she heard in what sore plight they stood, it did move her to so great compassion, that she declared it would be now one of her chiefest cares and pleasures in life to provide conveniences for them. And she besought Mistress Ward to be a good friend to her with mine aunt, and procure her to permit of my frequent visits to Howard House, as the Charter House is now often called: which would be the greatest good she could do her; and that she would be most glad also if she herself would likewise favor her sometimes with her company; which, "if it be not for mine own sake, Mistress Ward," she sweetly said, "let it be for his sake who, in the person of his afflicted priests, doth need assistance."

When we reached home, we hid what we had brought under our mantles, and then in Mistress Ward's chamber, where Muriel followed us. When the door was shut we displayed these jewelled stores before her pleased eyes, which did beam with joy at the sight.

"Ah, Muriel," cried Mistress Ward, "we have found an Esther in a palace; and I pray to God there may be other such in this town we ken not of, who in secret do yet bear affection to the ancient faith."

Muriel said in her slow way: "We must needs go to the Clink to-morrow; for there is there a priest whose flesh has fallen off his feet by reason of his long stay in a pestered and infected dungeon. Mr. Roper told my father of him, and he says the gaoler will let us in if he be reasonably dealt with."

"We will essay your ointment, Mistress Sherwood," said Mistress Ward, "if so be you can make it in time."

"I care not if I sit up all night," I cried, "if any one will buy me the herbs I have need of for the compounding thereof." Which Muriel said she would prevail on one of the servants to do.

The bell did then ring for supper; and when we were all seated, Kate was urgent with me for to tell her how my Lady Surrey was dressed; which I declared to her as follows: "She had on a brown juste au corps embroidered, with puffed sleeves, and petticoat braided of a deeper nuance; and on her head a lace cap, and a lace handkerchief on her bosom."

"And, prithee, what jewels had she on, sweet coz?"

"A long double chain of gold and a brooch of pearls," I answered.

"And his grace of Norfolk is once more removed to the Tower," said Mr. Congleton sorrowfully. "'Tis like to kill him soon, and so save her majesty's ministers the pains to bring him to the block. His physician, Dr. Rhuenbeck, says he is afflicted with the dropsy."

Polly said she had been to visit the Countess of Northumberland, who was so grievously afflicted at her husband's death, that it was feared she would fall sick of grief if she had not company to divert her from her sad thoughts.

"Which I warrant none could effect so well as thee, wench," her father said; "for, beshrew me, if thou wouldst not make a man laugh on his way to the scaffold with thy mad talk. And was the poor lady of better cheer for thy company?"

"Yea, for mine," Polly answered; "or else for M. de la Motte's, who came in to pay his devoirs to her, for the first time, I take it, since her lord's death. And after his first speech, which caused her to weep a little, he did carry on so brisk a discourse as I never noticed any but a Frenchman able to do. And she was not the worst pleased with it that the cunning gentleman did interweave it with anecdotes of the queen's majesty; which, albeit he related them with gravity, did carry somewhat of ridicule in them. Such as of her grace's dancing on Sunday before last at Lord Northampton's wedding, and calling him to witness her paces, so that he might let monsieur know how high and disposedly she danced; so that he would not have had cause to complain, in case he had married her, that she was a boiteuse, as had been maliciously reported of her by the friends of the Queen of Scots. And also how, some days since, she had flamed out in great choler when he went to visit her at Hampton Court; and told him, so loud that all her ladies and officers could hear her discourse, that Lord North had let her know the queen-mother and the Duke of Guise had dressed up a buffoon in an English fashion, and called him a Milor du Nord; and that two female dwarfs had been likewise dressed up in that queen's chamber, and invited to mimic her, the queen of England, with great derision and mockery. 'I did assure her,' M. de la Motte said, 'with my hand on my heart, and such an aggrieved visage, that she must needs have accepted my words as true, that Milor North had mistaken the whole intent of what he had witnessed, from his great ignorance of the French tongue, which did render him a bad interpreter between princes; for that the queen-mother did never cease to praise her English majesty's beauty to her son, and all her good qualities, which greatly appeased her grace, who desired to be excused if she, likewise out of ignorance of the French language, had said aught unbecoming touching the queen-mother.' 'Tis a rare dish of fun, fit to set before a king, to hear this Monsieur Ambassador speak of the queen when none are present but such as make an idol of her, as some do."

"For my part," said her father, when she paused in her speech, "I mislike men with double visages and double tongues; and methinks this monseer hath both, and withal a rare art for what

courtiers do call diplomacy, and plain men lying. His speeches to her majesty be so fulsome in her praise, as I have heard some say who are at court, and his flattery so palpable, that they have been ashamed to hear it; but behind her back he doth disclose her failings with an admirable slyness."

"If he be sly," answered Polly, "I'll warrant he finds his match in her majesty."

"Yea," cried Kate, "even as poor Madge Arundell experienced to her cost."

"Ay," quoth Polly, "she catcheth many poor fish, who little know what snare is laid for them."

"And how did her highness catch Mistress Arundell?" I asked.

"In this way, coz," quoth Polly: "she doth often ask the ladies round her chamber, 'If they love to think of marriage?' and the wise ones do conceal well their liking thereunto, knowing the queen's judgment in the matter. But pretty, simple Madge Arundell, not knowing so deeply as her fellows, was asked one day hereof, and said, 'She had thought much about marriage, if her father did consent to the man she loved.' 'You seem honest, i' fait said the queen; 'I will sue for you your father.' At which the dam was well pleased; and when father, Sir Robert Arundell, came court, the queen questioned him his daughter's marriage, and pressed him to give consent if the match were discreet. Sir Robert, much astonished, said, 'He never had heard his daughter had liking to any man; but he would give his free consent to what was most pleasing to her highness's will and consent.' Then I will do the rest," saith the queen. Poor Madge was called in, and told by the queen that her father had given his free consent. 'Then,' replied the simple one, 'I shall be happy, an' it please your grace.' 'So thou shalt; but not to be a fool and marry,' said the queen. 'I have his consent given to me, and I vow thou shalt never get it in thy possession. So go-to about thy business. I see thou art a bold one to own thy foolishness so readily."

"Ah me!" cried Kate, "I be glad not to be a maid to her majesty; for I would not know how to answer her grace if she should ask me a like question; for if it be bold to say one hath a reasonable desire to be married, I must needs be bold then, for I would not for two thousand pounds break Mr. Lacy's heart; and he saith he will die if I do not marry him. But, Polly, thou wouldst never be at a loss to answer her majesty."

"No more than Pace her fool," quoth Polly, "who, when she said, as he entered the room, 'Now we shall hear of our faults,' cried out, 'Where is the use of speaking of what all the town doth talk of?'"

"The fool should have been whipped," Mistress Ward said.

"For his wisdom, or for his folly, good Mistress Ward?" asked Polly. "If for wisdom, 'tis hard to beat a man for being wise. If for folly, to whip a fool for that he doth follow his calling, and as I be the licensed fool in this house – which I do take to be the highest exercise of wit in these days, when all is turned upside down – I do wish you all good-night, and to be no wiser than is good for your healths, and no more foolish than suffices to lighten the heart;" and so laughing she ran away, and Kate said in a lamentable voice,

"I would I were foolish, if it lightens the heart."

"Content thee, good Kate," I said; but in so low a voice none did hear. And she went on,

"Mr. Lacy is gone to Yorkshire for three weeks, which doth make me more sad than can be thought of."

I smiled; but Muriel, who had not yet oped her lips whilst the others were talking, rising, kissed her sister, and said, "Thou wilt have, sweet one, so great a contentment in his letters as will give thee patience to bear the loss of his good company."

At the which Kate brightened a little. To live with Muriel was a preachment, as I have often had occasion since to find.

On the first Sunday I was at London, we heard mass at the Portuguese ambassador's house, whither many Catholics of his acquaintance resorted for that purpose from our side of the city. In the afternoon a gentleman, who had travelled day and night from Staffordshire on some urgent business, brought me a letter from my father, writ only four days before it came to hand, and about a week after my departure from home. It was as follows:

"MINE OWN DEAR CHILD, – The bearer of this letter hath promised to do me the good service to deliver it to thee as soon as he shall reach London; which, as he did intend to travel day and night, I compute will be no later than the end of this week, or on Sunday at the furthest. And for this his civility I do stand greatly indebted to him; for in these straitened times 'tis no easy matter to get letters conveyed from one part of the kingdom to another without danger of discovering that which for the present should rather be concealed. I received notice two days ago from Mistress Ward's sister of your good journey and arrival at London; and I thank God, my very good child, that he has had thee in his holy keeping and bestowed thee under the roof of my good sister and brother; so that, with a mind at ease in respect to thee, my dear sole earthly treasure, I may be free to follow whatever course his providence may appoint to me, who, albeit unworthy, do aspire to leave all things to follow him. And indeed he hath already, at the outset of my wanderings, sweetly disposed events in such wise that chance hath proved, as it were, the servant of his providence; and, when I did least look for it, by a divine ordination furnished me, who so short a time back parted from a dear child, with the company of one who doth stand to me in lieu of her who, by reason of her tender sex and age, I am compelled to send from me. For being necessitated, for the preservation of my life, to make seldom any long stay in one place, I had need of a youth to ride with me on those frequent journeys, and keep me company in such places as I may withdraw unto for quietness and study. So being in Stafford some few days back, I inquired of the master of the inn where I did lay for one night, if it were not possible to get in that city a youth to serve me as a page, whom I said I would maintain as a gentleman if he had learning, nurture, and behavior becoming such a person. He said his son, who was a schoolmaster, had a youth for a pupil who carried virtue in his very countenance; but that he was the child of a widow, who, he much feared, would not easily be persuaded to part from him. Thereupon I expressed a great desire to have a sight of this youth and charged him to deal with his master so that he should be sent to my lodgings; which, when he came there, lo and behold, I perceived with no small amazement that he was no other than Edmund Genings, who straightway ran into my arms, and with much ado restrained himself from weeping, so greatly was he moved with conflicting passions of present joy and recollected sorrow at this our unlooked-for meeting; and truly mine own contentment therein was in no wise less than his. He told me that his mother's poverty increasing, she had moved from Lichfield, where it was more bitter to her, by reason of the affluence in which she had before lived in that city, to Stafford, where none did know them; and she dwelt in a mean lodging in a poor sort of manner. And whereas he had desired to accept the offer of a stranger, with a view to relieve his mother from the burden of his support, and maybe yield her some assistance in her straits, he now passionately coveted to throw his fortune with mine, and to be entered as a page in my service. But though she had been willing before, from necessity, albeit averse by inclination, to part with him, when she knew me it seemed awhile impossible to gain her consent. Methinks she was privy to Edmund's secret good opinion of Catholic religion, and feared, if he should live with me, the effect thereof would follow. But her necessities were so sharp, and likewise her regrets that he should lack opportunities for his further advance in learning, which she herself was unable to supply, that at length by long entreaty he prevailed on her to give him license for that which his heart did prompt him to desire for his own sake and hers. And when she had given this consent, but not before, lest it should appear I did seek to bribe her by such offers to so much

condescension as she then evinced, I proposed to assist her in any way she wished to the bettering of her fortunes, and said I would do as much whether she suffered her son to abide with me or no: which did greatly work with her to conceive a more favorable opinion of me than she had heretofore held, and to be contented he should remain in my service, as he himself so greatly desired. After some further discourse, it was resolved that I should furnish her with so much money as would pay her debts and carry her to La Rochelle, where her youngest son was with her brother, who albeit he had met with great losses, would nevertheless, she felt assured, assist her in her need. Thus has Edmund become to me less a page than a pupil, less a servant than a son. I will keep a watchful eye over his actions, whom I already perceive to be tractable, capable, willing to learn, and altogether such as his early years did promise he should be. I thank God, who has given me so great a comfort in the midst of so great trials, and to this youth in me a father rather than a master, who will ever deal with him in an honorable and loving manner, both in respect to his own deserts and to her merits, whose prayers have, I doubt not, procured this admirable result of what was in no wise designed, but by God's providence fell out of the asking a simple question in an inn and of a stranger.

"And now, mine only and very dear child, I commend thee to God's holy keeping; and I beseech thee to be as mindful of thy duty to him as thou hast been (and most especially of late) of thine to me; and imprint in thy heart those words of holy writ, 'Not to fear those that kill the body, but cannot destroy the soul;' but withal, in whatever is just and reasonable, and not clearly against Catholic religion, to observe a most exact obedience to such as stand to thee at present in place of thy unworthy father, and who, moreover, are of such virtue and piety as I doubt not would move them rather to give thee an example how to suffer the loss of all things for Christ his sake than to offend him by a contrary disposition. I do write to my good brother by the same convenience to yield him and my sister humble thanks for their great kindness to me in thee, and send this written in haste; for I fear I shall not often have means hereafter. Therefore I desire Almighty God to protect, bless, and establish thee. So in haste, and *in visceribus Christi*, adieu."

The lively joy I received from this letter was greater than I can rehearse, for I had now no longer before my eyes the sorrowful vision of my dear father with none to tend and comfort him in his wanderings; and no less was my contentment that Edmund, my dearly-loved playmate, was now within reach of his good instructions, and free to follow that which I was persuaded his conscience had been prompting him to seek since he had attained the age of reason.

I note not down in this history the many visits I paid to the Charter House that autumn, except to notice the growing care Lady Surrey did take to supply the needs of prisoners and poor people, and how this brought her into frequent occasions of discourse with Mistress Ward and Muriel, who nevertheless, as I also had care to observe, kept these interviews secret, which might have caused suspicion in those who, albeit Catholic, were ill-disposed to adventure the loss of worldly advantages by the profession of what Protestants do term perverse and open papistry. Kate and Polly were of this way of thinking – prudence was ever the word with them when talk of religion was ministered in their presence; and they would not keep as much as a prayer-book in their chambers for fear of evil results. They were sometimes very urgent with their father for to suffer them to attend Protestant service, which they said would not hinder them from hearing mass at convenient times, and saying such prayers as they listed; and Polly the more so that a young gentleman of good birth and high breeding, who conformed to the times, had become a suitor for her hand, and was very strenuous with her on the necessity of such compliance, which nevertheless her father would not allow of. Much company came to the house, both Protestant and Catholic; for my aunt, who was sick at other times,

did greatly mend toward the evening. When I was first in London for some weeks, she kept me with her at such times in the parlor, and encouraged me to discourse with the visitors; for she said I had a forwardness and vivacity of speech which, if practised in conversation, would in time obtain for me as great a reputation of wit as Polly ever enjoyed. I was nothing loth to study in this new school, and not slow to improve in it. At the same time I gave myself greatly to the reading of such books as I found in my cousins' chambers; amongst which were some M. de la Motte had lent to Polly, marvellous witty and entertaining, such as *Les Nouvelles de la Reine de Navarre* and the *Cents Histoires tragiques*; and others done in English out of French by Mr. Thomas Fortescue; and a poem, writ by one Mr. Edmund Spenser, very beautiful, and which did so much bewitch me, that I was wont to rise in the night to read it by the light of the moon at my casement window; and the *Morte d' Arthur*, which Mr. Hubert Rookwood had willed me to read, whom I met at Bedford, and which so filled my head with fantastic images and imagined scenes, that I did, as it were, fall in love with Sir Launcelot, and would blush if his name were but mentioned, and wax as angry if his fame were questioned as if he had been a living man, and I in a foolish manner fond of him.

This continued for some little time, and methinks, had it proceeded further, I should have received much damage from a mode of life with so little of discipline in it, and so great incitements to faults and follies which my nature was prone to, but which my conscience secretly reproved. And among the many reasons I have to be thankful to Mistress "Ward, that never-to-be-forgotten friend, whose care restrained me in these dangerous courses, partly by compulsion through means of her influence with my aunt and her husband, and partly by such admonitions and counsel as she favored me with, I reckon amongst the greatest that, at an age when the will is weak, albeit the impulses be good, she lent a helping hand to the superior part of my soul to surmount the evil tendencies which bad example on the one hand, and weak indulgence on the other, fostered in me, whose virtuous inclinations had been, up to that time, hedged in by the strong safeguards of parental watchfulness. She procured that I should not tarry, save for brief and scanty spaces of time, in my aunt's parlor when she had visitors, and so contrived that it should be when she herself was present, who, by wholesome checks and studied separation from the rest of the company, reduced my forwardness with just restraints such as became my age. And when she discovered what books I read, oh, with what fervent and strenuous speech she drove into my soul the edge of a salutary remorse; with what tearful eyes and pleading voice she brought before me the memory of my mother's care and my father's love, which had ever kept me from drinking such empoisoned draughts from the well-springs of corruption which in our days books of entertainment too often prove, and if not altogether bad, yet be such as vitiate the palate and destroy the appetite for higher and purer kinds of mental sustenance. Sharp was her correction, but withal so seasoned with tenderness, and a grief the keenness of which I could discern was heightened by the thought that my two elder cousins (one time her pupils) should be so drawn aside by the world and its pleasures as to forget their pious habits, and minister to others the means of such injury as their own souls had sustained, that every word she uttered seemed to sink into my heart as if writ with a pen of fire; and mostly when she thus concluded her discourse:

"There hath been times, Constance, when men, yea and women also, might play the fool for a while, without so great danger as now, and dally with idle folly like children who do sport on a smooth lawn nigh to a running stream, under their parents' eyes, who, if their feet do but slip, are prompt to retrieve them. But such days are gone by for the Catholics of this land. I would have thee to bear in mind that 'tis no common virtue – no convenient religion – faces the rack, the dungeon, and the rope; that wanton tales and light verses are no *viaticum* for a journey beset with such perils. And thou – thou least of all – whose gentle mother, as thou well knowest, died of a broken heart from the fear to betray her faith – thou, whose father doth even now gird himself for a fight, where to win is to die on a scaffold – shouldst scorn to omit such preparation as may befit thee to live, if it so please God, or to die, if such be his will, a true member of his holy Catholic Church. O Constance, it doth grieve me to the heart that thou shouldst so much as once have risen from thy bed at night to feed thy mind

with the vain words of profane writers, in place of nurturing thy soul by such reasonable exercises and means as God, through the teaching of his Church, doth provide for the spiritual growth of his children, and by prayer and penance make ready for coming conflicts. Bethink thee of the many holy priests, yea and laymen also, who be in uneasy dungeons at this time, lying on filthy straw, with chains on their bruised limbs, but lately racked and tormented for their religion, whilst thou didst offend God by such wanton conduct. Count up the times thou hast thus offended; and so many times rise in the night, my good child, and say the psalm 'Miserere,' through which we do especially entreat forgiveness for our sins."

I cast myself in her arms, and with many bitter tears lamented my folly; and did promise her then, and, I thank God, ever after did keep that promise, whilst I abode under the same roof with her, to read no books but such as she should warrant me to peruse. Some days after she procured Mr. Congleton's consent, who also went with us, to carry me to the Marshalsea, whither she had free access at that time by reason of her acquaintanceship with the gaoler's wife, who, when a maid, had been a servant in her family, and who, having been once Catholic, did willingly assist such prisoners as came there for their religion. There we saw Mr. Hart, who hath been this long while confined in a dark cell, with nothing but boards to lie on till Mistress Ward gave him a counterpane, which she concealed under her shawl, and the gaoler was prevailed on by his wife not to take from him. He was cruelly tortured some time since, and condemned to die on the same day as Mr. Luke Kirby and some others on a like charge, that he did deny the queen's supremacy in spiritual matters; but he was taken off the sledge and returned to prison. He did take it very quietly and patiently; and when Mr. Congleton expressed a hope he might soon be released from prison, he smiled and said:

"My good friend, my crosses are light and easy; and the being deprived of all earthly comfort affords a heavenly joy, which maketh my prison happy, my confinement merciful, my solitude full of blessings. To God, therefore, be all praise, honor, and glory, for so unspeakable a benefit bestowed upon his poor, wretched, and unworthy servant."

So did he comfort those who were more grieved for him than he for himself; and each in turn we did confess; and after I had disburdened my conscience in such wise that he perceived the temper of my mind, and where to apply remedies to the dangers the nature of which his clearsightedness did foresee, he thus addressed me:

"The world, my dear daughter, soon begins to seem insipid, and all its pleasures grow bitter as gall; all the fine shows and delights it affords appear empty and good for nothing to such as have tasted the happiness of conversing with Christ, though it be amidst torments and tribulations, yea and in the near approach of death itself. This joy so penetrates the soul, so elevates the spirit, so changes the affections, that a prison seems not a prison but a paradise, death a goal long time desired, and the torments which do accompany it jewels of great price. Take with thee these words, which be the greatest treasure and the rarest lesson for these times: 'He that loveth his life in this world shall lose it, and he that hateth it shall find it;' and remember the devil is always upon the watch. Be you also watchful. Pray you for me. I have a great confidence that we shall see one another in heaven, if you keep inviolable the word you have given to God to be true to his Catholic Church and obedient to its precepts, and he gives me the grace to attain unto that same blessed end."

These words, like the sower's seed, fell into a field where thorns oftentimes threatened to choke their effect; but persecution, when it arose, consumed the thorns as with fire, and the plant, which would have withered in stony ground, bore fruit in a prepared soil.

As we left the prison, it did happen that, passing by the gaoler's lodge, I saw him sitting at a table drinking ale with one whose back was to the door. A suspicion came over me, the most unlikely in the world, for it was against all credibility, and I had not seen so much as that person's face; but in the shape of his head and the manner of his sitting, but for a moment observed, there was a resemblance to Edmund Genings, the thought of which I could not shake off. When we were walking home, Mr. Congleton said Mr. Hart had told him that a short time back a gentleman had

been seized, and committed to close confinement, whom he believed, though he had not attained to the certainty thereof, to be Mr. Willisden; and if it were so, that much trouble might ensue to many recusants, by reason of that gentleman having dealt in matters of great importance to such persons touching lands and other affairs whereby their fortunes and maybe their lives might be compromised. On hearing of this, I straightway conceived a sudden fear lest it should be my father and not Mr. Willisden was confined in that prison; and the impression I had received touching the youth who was at table with the gaoler grew so strong in consequence, that all sorts of fears founded thereon ran through my mind, for I had often heard how persons did deceive recusants by feigning themselves to be their friends, and then did denounce them to the council, and procured their arrest and oftentimes their condemnation by distorting and false swearing touching the speech they held with them. One Eliot in particular, who was a man of great modesty and ingenuity of countenance, so as to defy suspicion (but a very wicked man in more ways than one, as has been since proved), who pretended to be Catholic, and when he did suspect any to be a Jesuit, or a seminary priest, or only a recusant, he would straightway enter into discourse with him, and in an artful manner cause him to betray himself; whereupon he was not slow to throw off the mask, whereby several had been already brought to the rope. And albeit I would not credit that Edmund should be such a one, the evil of the times was so great that my heart did misgive me concerning him, if indeed he was the youth whom I had espied on such familiar terms with that ruffianly gaoler. I had no rest for some days, lacking the means to discover the truth of that suspicion; for Mrs. Ward, to whom I did impart it, dared not adventure again that week to the Marshalsea, by reason of the gaoler's wife having charged her not to come frequently, for that her husband had suddenly suspected her to be a recusant, and would by no means allow of her visits to the prisoners; but that when he was drunk she could sometimes herself get his keys and let her in, but not too often. Mr. Congleton would have it the prisoner must be Mr. Willisden and no other, and took no heed of my fears, which he said had no reasonable grounds, as I had not so much as seen the features of the youth I took to be my father's page. But I could by no means be satisfied, and wept very much; and I mind me how, in the midst of my tears that evening, my eyes fell on the frontispiece of a volume of the *Morte d' Arthur* which had been loosened when the book was in my chamber, and in which was picture of Sir Launcelot, the present mirror of my fancy. I had pinned it to my curtain, and jewelled it as a treasure and fund of foolish musings, even after yielding up, with promise to read no more therein, the book which had once held it. And thus were kept alive the fantastic imaginings wherewith I clothed a creature conceived in a writer's brain, whose nobility was the offspring of his thoughts and the continual entertainment of mine own. But, oh, how just did I now find the words of a virtuous friend, and how childish my folly, when the true sharp edge of present fear dispersed these vapory clouds, even as the keen blast of a north wind doth drive away a noxious mist! The sight of the dismal dungeon that day visited, the pallid features of that true confessor therein immured, his soul-piercing words, and the apprehensions which were wringing my heart – banished of a sudden an idle dream engendered by vain readings and vainer musings, and Sir Launcelot held henceforward no higher, or not so high, a place in my esteem as the good Sir Guy of Warwick, or the brave Hector de Valence.

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