

PREFACE

Very nearly the whole of this book is sober historical fact; and by far the greater number of the personages named in it once lived and acted in the manner in which I have presented them. My hero and my heroine are fictitious; so also are the parents of my heroine, the father of my hero, one lawyer, one woman, two servants, a farmer and his wife, the landlord of an inn, and a few other entirely negligible characters. But the family of the FitzHerberts passed precisely through the fortunes which I have described; they had their confessors and their one traitor (as I have said). Mr. Anthony Babington plotted, and fell, in the manner that is related; Mary languished in Chartley under Sir Amyas Paulet; was assisted by Mr. Bourgoign; was betrayed by her secretary and Mr. Gifford, and died at Fotheringay; Mr. Garlick and Mr. Ludlam and Mr. Simpson received their vocations, passed through their adventures; were captured at Padley, and died in Derby. Father Campion (from whose speech after torture the title of the book is taken) suffered on the rack and was executed at Tyburn. Mr. Topcliffe tormented the Catholics that fell into his hands; plotted with Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert, and bargained for Padley (which he subsequently lost again) on the terms here drawn out. My Lord Shrewsbury rode about Derbyshire, directed the search for recusants and presided at their deaths; priests of all kinds came and went in disguise; Mr. Owen went about constructing hiding-holes; Mr. Bassett lived defiantly at Langleys, and dabbled a little (I am afraid) in occultism; Mr. Fenton was often to be found in Hathersage—all these things took place as nearly as I have had the power of relating them. Two localities only, I think, are disguised under their names—Booth's Edge and Matstead. Padley, or rather the chapel in which the last mass was said under the circumstances described in this book, remains, to this day, close to Grindleford Station. A Catholic pilgrimage is made there every year; and I have myself once had the honour of preaching on such

an occasion, leaning against the wall of the old hall that is immediately beneath the chapel where Mr. Garlick and Mr. Ludlam said their last masses, and were captured. If the book is too sensational, it is no more sensational than life itself was to Derbyshire folk between 1579 and 1588.

It remains only, first, to express my extreme indebtedness to Dom Bede Camm's erudite book—"Forgotten Shrines"—from which I have taken immense quantities of information, and to a pile of some twenty to thirty other books that are before me as I write these words; and, secondly, to ask forgiveness from the distinguished family that takes its name from the FitzHerberts and is descended from them directly; and to assure its members that old Sir Thomas, Mr. John, Mr. Anthony, and all the rest, down to the present day, outweigh a thousand times over (to the minds of all decent people) the stigma of Mr. Thomas' name. Even the apostles numbered one Judas!

ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

Feast of the Blessed Thomas More, 1912. Hare Street House, Buntingford.

PART I

CHAPTER I

I

There should be no sight more happy than a young man riding to meet his love. His eyes should shine, his lips should sing; he should slap his mare upon her shoulder and call her his darling. The puddles upon his way should be turned to pure gold, and the stream that runs beside him should chatter her name.

Yet, as Robin rode to Marjorie none of these things were done. It was a still day of frost; the sky was arched above him, across the high hills, like that terrible crystal which is the vault above which sits God—hard blue from horizon to horizon; the fringe of feathery birches stood like filigree-work above him on his left; on his right ran the Derwent, sucking softly among his sedges; on this side and that lay the flat bottom through which he went—meadowland broken by rushes; his mare Cecily stepped along, now cracking the thin ice of the little pools with her dainty feet, now going gently over peaty ground, blowing thin clouds from her red nostrils, yet unencouraged by word or caress from her rider; who sat, heavy and all but slouching, staring with his blue eyes under puckered eyelids, as if he went to an appointment which he would not keep.

Yet he was a very pleasant lad to look upon, smooth-faced and gallant, mounted and dressed in a manner that should give any lad joy. He wore great gauntlets on his hands; he was in his habit of green; he had his steel-buckled leather belt upon him beneath his cloak and a pair of daggers in it, with his long-sword looped up; he had his felt hat on his head, buckled again, and decked with half a

pheasant's tail; he had his long boots of undressed leather, that rose above his knees; and on his left wrist sat his grim falcon Agnes, hooded and belled, not because he rode after game, but from mere custom, and to give her the air.

He was meeting his first man's trouble.

Last year he had said good-bye to Derby Grammar School—of old my lord Bishop Durdant's foundation—situated in St. Peter's churchyard. Here he had done the right and usual things; he had learned his grammar; he had fought; he had been chastised; he had robbed the effigy of his pious founder in a patched doublet with a saucepan on his head (but that had been done before he had learned veneration)—and so had gone home again to Matstead, proficient in Latin, English, history, writing, good manners and chess, to live with his father, to hunt, to hear mass when a priest was within reasonable distance, to indite painful letters now and then on matters of the estate, and to learn how to bear himself generally as should one of Master's rank—the son of a gentleman who bore arms, and his father's father before him. He dined at twelve, he supped at six, he said his prayers, and blessed himself when no strangers were by. He was something of a herbalist, as a sheer hobby of his own; he went to feed his falcons in the morning, he rode with them after dinner (from last August he had found himself riding north more often than south, since Marjorie lived in that quarter); and now all had been crowned last Christmas Eve, when in the enclosed garden at her house he had kissed her two hands suddenly, and made her a little speech he had learned by heart; after which he kissed her on the lips as a man should, in the honest noon sunlight.

All this was as it should be. There were no doubts or disasters anywhere. Marjorie was an only daughter as he an only son. Her father, it is true, was but a Derby lawyer, but he and his wife had a good little estate above the Hathersage valley, and a stone house in it. As for religion, that was all well too. Master Manners was as good a Catholic as Master Audrey himself; and the families met at mass perhaps as much as four or five times in the year, either at Padley, where Sir Thomas' chapel still had priests coming and going; sometimes at Dethick in the Babingtons' barn; sometimes as far north as Harewood.

And now a man's trouble was come upon the boy. The cause of it was as follows.

Robin Audrey was no more religious than a boy of seventeen should be. Yet he had had as few doubts about the matter as if he had been a monk. His mother had taught him well, up to the time of her death ten years ago; and he had learned from her, as well as from his father when that professor spoke of it at all, that there were two kinds of religion in the world, the true and the false—that is to say, the Catholic religion and the other one. Certainly there were shades of differences in the other one; the Turk did not believe precisely as the ancient Roman, nor yet as the modern Protestant—yet these distinctions were subtle and negligible; they were all swallowed up in an unity of falsehood. Next he had learned that the Catholic religion was at present blown upon by many persons in high position; that pains and penalties lay upon all who adhered to it. Sir Thomas FitzHerbert, for instance, lay now in the Fleet in London on that very account. His own father, too, three or four times in the year, was under necessity of paying over heavy sums for the privilege of not attending Protestant worship; and, indeed, had been forced last year to sell a piece of land over on Lees Moor for this very purpose. Priests came and went at their peril.... He himself had fought two or three battles over the affair in St. Peter's churchyard, until he had learned to hold his tongue. But all this was just part of the game. It seemed to him as inevitable and eternal as the changes of the weather. Matstead Church, he knew, had once been Catholic; but how long ago he did not care to inquire. He only knew that for awhile there had been some doubt on the matter; and that before Mr. Barton's time, who was now minister there, there had been a proper priest in the place, who had read English prayers there and a sort of a mass, which he had attended as a little boy. Then this had ceased; the priest had gone and Mr. Barton come, and since that time he had never been to church there, but had heard the real mass wherever he could with a certain secrecy. And there might be further perils in future, as there might be thunderstorms or floods. There was still the memory of the descent of the Commissioners a year or two after his birth; he had been brought up on the stories of riding and counter-riding, and the hiding away of altar-plate and beads and vestments. But all this was in his bones and

blood; it was as natural that professors of the false religion should seek to injure and distress professors of the true, as that the foxes should attack the poultry-yard. One took one's precautions, one hoped for the best; and one was quite sure that one day the happy ancient times his mother had told him of would come back, and Christ's cause be vindicated.

And now the foundations of the earth were moved and heaven reeled above him; for his father, after a month or two of brooding, had announced, on St. Stephen's Day, that he could tolerate it no longer; that God's demands were unreasonable; that, after all, the Protestant religion was the religion of her Grace, that men must learn to move with the times, and that he had paid his last fine. At Easter, he observed, he would take the bread and wine in Matstead Church, and Robin would take them too.

II

The sun stood half-way towards his setting as Robin rode up from the valley, past Padley, over the steep ascent that led towards Booth's Edge. The boy was brighter a little as he came up; he had counted above eighty snipe within the last mile and a half, and he was coming near to Marjorie. About him, rising higher as he rose, stood the great low-backed hills. Cecily stepped out more sharply, snuffing delicately, for she knew her way well enough by now, and looked for a feed; and the boy's perplexities stood off from him a little. Matters must surely be better so soon as Marjorie's clear eyes looked upon them.

Then the roofs of Padley disappeared behind him, and he saw the smoke going up from the little timbered Hall, standing back against its bare wind-blown trees.

A great clatter and din of barking broke out as the mare's hoofs sounded on the half-paved space before the great door; and then, in the pause, a gagging of geese, solemn and earnest, from out of sight. Jacob led the outcry, a great mastiff, chained by the entrance, of the breed of which three are set to meet a bear and four a lion. Then two harriers whipped round the corner, and a terrier's head showed itself over the wall of the herb-garden on the left, as a man,

bareheaded, in his shirt and breeches, ran out suddenly with a thonged whip, in time to meet a pair of spaniels in full career. Robin sat his horse silently till peace was restored, his right leg flung across the pommel, untwisting Agnes' leash from his fist. Then he asked for Mistress Marjorie, and dropped to the ground, leaving his mare and falcon in the man's hands, with an air.

He flicked his fingers to growling Jacob as he went past to the side entrance on the east, stepped in through the little door that was beside the great one, and passed on as he had been bidden into the little court, turned to the left, went up an outside staircase, and so down a little passage to the ladies' parlour, where he knocked upon the door. The voice he knew called to him from within; and he went in, smiling to himself. Then he took the girl who awaited him there in both his arms, and kissed her twice—first her hands and then her lips, for respect should come first and ardour second.

"My love," said Robin, and threw off his hat with the pheasant's tail, for coolness' sake.

It was a sweet room this which he already knew by heart; for it was here that he had sat with Marjorie and her mother, silent and confused, evening after evening, last autumn; it was here, too, that she had led him last Christmas Eve, scarcely ten days ago, after he had kissed her in the enclosed garden. But the low frosty sunlight lay in it now, upon the blue painted wainscot that rose half up the walls, the tall presses where the linen lay, the pieces of stuff, embroidered with pale lutes and wreaths that Mistress Manners had bought in Derby, hanging now over the plaster spaces. There was a chimney, too, newly built, that was thought a great luxury; and in it burned an armful of logs, for the girl was setting out new linen for the household, and the scents of lavender and burning wood disputed the air between them.

"I thought it would be you," she said, "when I heard the dogs."

She piled the last rolls of linen in an ordered heap, and came to sit beside him. Robin took one hand in his and sat silent.

She was of an age with him, perhaps a month the younger; and, as it ought to be, was his very contrary in all respects. Where he was

fair, she was pale and dark; his eyes were blue, hers black; he was lusty and showed promise of broadness, she was slender.

"And what news do you bring with you now?" she said presently.

He evaded this.

"Mistress Manners?" he asked.

"Mother has a megrim," she said; "she is in her chamber." And she smiled at him again. For these two, as is the custom of young persons who love one another, had said not a word on either side—neither he to his father nor she to her parents. They believed, as young persons do, that parents who bring children into the world, hold it as a chief danger that these children should follow their example, and themselves be married. Besides, there is something delicious in secrecy.

"Then I will kiss you again," he said, "while there is opportunity."

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Making love is a very good way to pass the time, above all when that same time presses and other disconcerting things should be spoken of instead; and this device Robin now learned. He spoke of a hundred things that were of no importance: of the dress that she wore—russet, as it should be, for country girls, with the loose sleeves folded back above her elbows that she might handle the linen; her apron of coarse linen, her steel-buckled shoes. He told her that he loved her better in that than in her costume of state—the ruff, the fardingale, the brocaded petticoat, and all the rest—in which he had seen her once last summer at Babington House. He talked then, when she would hear no more of that, of Tuesday seven-night, when they would meet for hawking in the lower chase of the Padley estates; and proceeded then to speak of Agnes, whom he had left on the fist of the man who had taken his mare, of her increasing infirmities and her crimes of crabbing; and all the while he held her left hand in both of his, and fitted her fingers between his, and kissed them again when he had no more to say on any one point; and wondered why he could not speak of the matter on which he had come, and how he should tell her. And then at last she drew it from him.

"And now, my Robin," she said, "tell me what you have in your mind. You have talked of this and that and Agnes and Jock, and Padley chase, and you have not once looked me in the eyes since you first came in."

Now it was not shame that had held him from telling her, but rather a kind of bewilderment. The affair might hold shame, indeed, or anger, or sorrow, or complacency, but he did not know; and he wished, as young men of decent birth should wish, to present the proper emotion on its right occasion. He had pondered on the matter continually since his father had spoken to him on Saint Stephen's night; and at one time it seemed that his father was acting the part of a traitor and at another of a philosopher. If it were indeed true, after all, that all men were turning Protestant, and that there was not so much difference between the two religions, then it would be the act of a wise man to turn Protestant too, if only for a while. And on the other hand his pride of birth and his education by his mother and his practice ever since drew him hard the other way. He was in a strait between the two. He did not know what to think, and he feared what Marjorie might think.

It was this, then, that had held him silent. He feared what Marjorie might think, for that was the very thing that he thought that he thought too, and he foresaw a hundred inconveniences and troubles if it were so.

"How did you know I had anything in my mind?" he asked. "Is it not enough reason for my coming that you should be here?"

She laughed softly, with a pleasant scornfulness.

"I read you like a printed book," she said. "What else are women's wits given them for?"

He fell to stroking her hand again at that, but she drew it away.

"Not until you have told me," she said.

So then he told her.

It was a long tale, for it began as far ago as last August, when his father had come back from giving evidence before the justices at Derby on a matter of witchcraft, and had been questioned again about his religion. It was then that Robin had seen moodiness suc-

ceed to anger, and long silence to moodiness. He told the tale with a true lover's art, for he watched her face and trained his tone and his manner as he saw her thoughts come and go in her eyes and lips, like gusts of wind across standing corn; and at last he told her outright what his father had said to him on St. Stephen's night, and how he himself had kept silence.

Marjorie's face was as white as a moth's wing when he was finishing, and her eyes like sunset pools; but she flamed up bright and rosy as he finished.

"You kept silence!" she cried.

"I did not wish to anger him, my dear; he is my father," he said gently.

The colour died out of her face again and she nodded once or twice, and a great pensiveness came down on her. He took her hand again softly, and she did not resist.

"The only doubt," she said presently, as if she talked to herself, "is whether you had best be gone at Easter, or stay and face it out."

"Yes," said Robin, with his dismay come fully to the birth.

Then she turned on him, full of a sudden tenderness and compassion.

"Oh! my Robin," she cried, "and I have not said a word about you and your own misery. I was thinking but of Christ's honour. You must forgive me.... What must it be for you!... That it should be your father! You are sure that he means it?"

"My father does not speak until he means it. He is always like that. He asks counsel from no one. He thinks and he thinks, and then he speaks; and it is finished."

She fell then to thinking again, her sweet lips compressed together, and her eyes frightened and wondering, searching round the hanging above the chimney-breast. (It presented Icarus in the chariot of the sun; and it was said in Derby that it had come from my lord Abbot's lodging at Bolton.)

Meantime Robin thought too. He was as wax in the hands of this girl, and knew it, and loved that it should be so. Yet he could not

help his dismay while he waited for her seal to come down on him and stamp him to her model. For he foresaw more clearly than ever now the hundred inconveniences that must follow, now that it was evident that to Marjorie's mind (and therefore to God Almighty's) there must be no tampering with the old religion. He had known that it must be so; yet he had thought, on the way here, of a dozen families he knew who, in his own memory, had changed from allegiance to the Pope of Rome to that of her Grace, without seeming one penny the worse. There were the Martins, down there in Derby; the Squire and his lady of Ashenden Hall; the Conways of Matlock; and the rest – these had all changed; and though he did not respect them for it, yet the truth was that they were not yet stricken by thunderbolts or eaten by the plague. He had wondered whether there were not a way to do as they had done, yet without the disgrace of it.... However, this was plainly not to be so with him. He must put up with the inconveniences as well as he could, and he just waited to hear from Marjorie how this must be done.

She turned to him again at last. Twice her lips opened to speak, and twice she closed them again. Robin continued to stroke her hand and wait for judgment. The third time she spoke.

"I think you must go away," she said, "for Easter. Tell your father that you cannot change your religion simply because he tells you so. I do not see what else is to be done. He will think, perhaps, that if you have a little time to think you will come over to him. Well, that is not so, but it may make it easier for him to believe it for a while.... You must go somewhere where there is a priest.... Where can you go?"

Robin considered.

"I could go to Dethick," he said.

"That is not far enough away, I think."

"I could come here," he suggested artfully.

A smile lit in her eyes, shone in her mouth, and passed again into seriousness.

"That is scarcely a mile further," she said. "We must think.... Will he be very angry, Robin?"

Robin smiled grimly.

"I have never withstood him in a great affair," he said. "He is angry enough over little things."

"Poor Robin!"

"Oh! he is not unjust to me. He is a good father to me."

"That makes it all the sadder," she said.

"And there is no other way?" he asked presently.

She glanced at him.

"Unless you would withstand him to the face. Would you do that, Robin?"

"I will do anything you tell me," he said simply.

"You darling!... Well, Robin, listen to me. It is very plain that sooner or later you will have to withstand him. You cannot go away every time there is communion at Matstead, or, indeed, every Sunday. Your father would have to pay the fines for you, I have no doubt, unless you went away altogether. But I think you had better go away for this time. He will almost expect it, I think. At first he will think that you will yield to him; and then, little by little (unless God's grace brings himself back to the Faith), he will learn to understand that you will not. But it will be easier for him that way; and he will have time to think what to do with you, too.... Robin, what would you do if you went away?"

Robin considered again.

"I can read and write," he said. "I am a Latinist: I can train falcons and hounds and break horses. I do not know if there is anything else that I can do."

"You darling!" she said again.

These two, as will have been seen, were as simple as children, and as serious. Children are not gay and light-hearted, except now and then (just as men and women are not serious except now and then). They are grave and considering: all that they lack is experience. These two, then, were real children; they were grave and serious

because a great thing had disclosed itself to them in which two or three large principles were present, and no more. There was that love of one another, whose consummation seemed imperilled, for how could these two ever wed if Robin were to quarrel with his father? There was the Religion which was in their bones and blood—the Religion for which already they had suffered and their fathers before them. There was the honour and loyalty which this new and more personal suffering demanded now louder than ever; and in Marjorie at least, as will be seen more plainly later, there was a strong love of Jesus Christ and His Mother, whom she knew, from her hidden crucifix and her beads, and her Jesus Psalter—which she used every day—as well as in her own soul—to be wandering together once more among the hills of Derbyshire, sheltering, at peril of Their lives, in stables and barns and little secret chambers, because there was no room for Them in Their own places. It was this last consideration, as Robin had begun to guess, that stood strongest in the girl; it was this, too, as again he had begun to guess, that made her all that she was to him, that gave her that strange serious air of innocency and sweetness, and drew from him a love that was nine-tenths reverence and adoration. (He always kissed her hands first, it will be remembered, before her lips.)

So then they sat and considered and talked. They did not speak much of her Grace, nor of her Grace's religion, nor of her counselors and affairs of state: these things were but toys and vanities compared with matters of love and faith; neither did they speak much of the Commissioners that had been to Derbyshire once and would come again, or of the alarms and the dangers and the priest hunters, since those things did not at present touch them very closely. It was rather of Robin's father, and whether and when the maid should tell her parents, and how this new trouble would conflict with their love. They spoke, that is to say, of their own business and of God's; and of nothing else. The frosty sunshine crept down the painted wainscot and lay at last at their feet, reddening to rosiness....

III

Robin rode away at last with a very clear idea of what he was to do in the immediate present, and with no idea at all of what was to be done later. Marjorie had given him three things—advice; a pair of beads that had been the property of Mr. Cuthbert Maine, seminary priest, recently executed in Cornwall for his religion; and a kiss—the first deliberate, free-will kiss she had ever given him. The first he was to keep, the second he was to return, the third he was to remember; and these three things, or, rather, his consideration of them, worked upon him as he went. Her advice, besides that which has been described, was, principally, to say his Jesus Psalter more punctually, to hear mass whenever that were possible, to trust in God, and to be patient and submissive with his father in all things that did not touch divine love and faith. The pair of beads that were once Mr. Maine's, he was to keep upon him always, day and night, and to use them for his devotions. The kiss—well, he was to remember this, and to return it to her upon their next meeting.

A great star came out as he drew near home. His path took him not through the village, but behind it, near enough for him to hear the barkings of the dogs and to smell upon the frosty air the scent of the wood fires. The house was a great one for these parts. There was a small gate-house before it, built by his father for dignity, with a lodge on either side and an arch in the middle, and beyond this lay the short road, straight and broad, that went up to the court of the house. This court was, on three sides of it, buildings; the hall and the buttery and the living-rooms in the midst, with the stables and falconry on the left, and the servants' lodgings on the right; the fourth side, that which lay opposite to the little gate-house, was a wall, with a great double gate in it, hung on stone posts that had, each of them, a great stone dog that held a blank shield. All this later part, the wall with the gate, the stables and the servants' lodgings, as well as the gatehouse without, had been built by the lad's father twenty years ago, to bring home his wife to; for, until that time, the house had been but a little place, though built of stone, and solid and good enough. The house stood half-way up the rise of the hill, above the village, with woods about it and behind it; and it was above these woods behind that the great star came out like a diamond in enamel-work; and Robin looked at it, and fell to think-